

ETHNOLOGY

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FOLKLORE PARALLELS BETWEEN SIBERIA AND SOUTH ASIA AND THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE EURASIAN STEPPES*

According to the myth about the origin of man recorded among the people of Eastern Europe and Siberia, the creator set a dog to guard the half-made human figures, but the antagonist bribed the guard and spoiled the creation, making humans vulnerable to disease. The creator told the dog to become the servant of man. Texts recorded in India (mostly among the Munda-speaking groups), the Dards of the Hindu Kush and the Abkhassians, though partly similar to the Northern Eurasian ones, do not share some important details: the antagonist is a horse, it tried to destroy man but a dog drove it away. In the Mongolian (more precisely, the Oirat) version, a cow acts instead of a horse, but in other respects this variant is similar to the Abkhassian ones. Negative associations related to the horse are rather widespread in Europe and Central Asia. Stories about the creation of man recorded in northern and southern Eurasia stemmed from the anthropogenic myth that was known to the Indo-Europeans of the Bronze Age. South Asia and the European–Siberian zone also share other tales, in particular the Earth-diver myth. Their analysis opens possibilities for reconstructing the early mythology of the inhabitants of the Eurasian steppe.

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The archaeological materials related to the cultures of the Eurasian steppes of the 3rd–1st millennia BC are rich,

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but our data on the mythology of the creators of these cultures are scarce. The Greek sources are limited and it is difficult to say which motifs included in “Avesta” are related to the mythology of the steppe zone and which to the southern areas of Central Asia (Bryant, 2001: 132–133). The Turkic traditions of the steppe belt of Eurasia contain few narratives about the origin of man and the world. The pre-Turkic mythology was mostly lost after the westward spread of the waves of nomads while the Turkic mythology itself mostly disappeared under the influence of Islam. The analysis of ancient iconography of the steppe cultures does not allow for reconstruction of particular narratives. The only way to make such a

reconstruction is to discover borrowings from the steppe mythologies that could have survived in other traditions through ancestors that were in contact with the Bronze Age steppe people.

Anthropogenic tale about the man, the dog, and the horse

In the folklore of the people of Eastern Europe and Siberia, there are motifs that produce some association with either Christianity or Zoroastrianism, but that do not find parallels in the canonic texts of these religions. In particular, such motifs are incorporated in the story about the creation of man.

The widespread variant is as follows. The creator makes the bodies of people, sets a dog to guard them and goes away for a while. The antagonist bribes the guard with a fur coat, gets to the bodies and spits on them, making people subject to disease and death. Coming back, the creator turns the bodies inside out so that the dirt would be concealed from sight and punishes the dog who from then on became the servant of man and eats garbage.

In such a form, the myth has been recorded among the Russians of the central and northern parts of Russia, the Ukrainians, Udmurt, Mari, Mordvinians, Chuvash, Mansi, Khanty, Nenets, western Evenki, different groups of the Yakuts, the Russian-speaking people of mixed ancestry living in Russkoye Ustye, the Kumandins, Tubalar, Khakas, Tofa, and Buryats*. The same tale was probably known to the Lithuanians, though the publication that I consulted has but a short retelling. Some variants preserve the core of the story but add different details. In particular, the Komi speak about a child who was guarded by a dog and the evil Omöl who spat on the child. The motifs of the creator who went away to get the soul for the man, and of turning human bodies inside out are absent. The latter of these motifs can be used only in those variants according to which the creator himself makes the human figures live. If the figures are given a soul not by the creator but by the antagonist, or if the problem was not to make the figures alive but to make them strong and durable, the motif of turning the bodies inside out is not found. It is absent among the Khanty, most of the groups of the Nenets and Evenki, the Mongols, Altaians, Shor, Negidal, and Lamut.

*Citations for the sources of the European and Siberian texts are given in my paper (Berezkin, 2006b), so I omit them here.

Among the western Evenki several different versions are recorded besides the standard one (Vasilevich, 1959: 175, 178). According to one of them, certain “workers” of Khargi (the creator) let Kheveki (the antagonist) approach the human figures. In another version, the “assistant” of Kheveki is the raven who was punished by the creator the same way as the dog in more typical variants, i.e. since then it has been feeding on garbage.

This story has not been reported in Kazakhstan though it has been recorded among the “Siberian Kirghiz.” The devil made the weather terribly cold, the dog had to hide itself, and the devil spat on man. Coming back, the creator did not punish the guard but recognized that the dog could do nothing having no fur coat, so the creator himself and not the antagonist gave to the dog its fur (Ivanovski, 1891: 250). “The acquittal” of the dog sets this version apart from the usual Siberian versions.

The farthest from the basic scheme is the Oroch version located at the eastern periphery of the tale’s circulation and isolated territorially from the others. In the Oroch text, the dog itself proves to be the antagonist because, despite the creator’s warning, it itself fed the man and made him alive. As a result, people lost the hard covering on their skin that now is preserved only on the fingers and toes (the nails). The text of the southern Selkup leaves the impression of being distorted and partially forgotten: *loz* (a devil) makes the dog change its

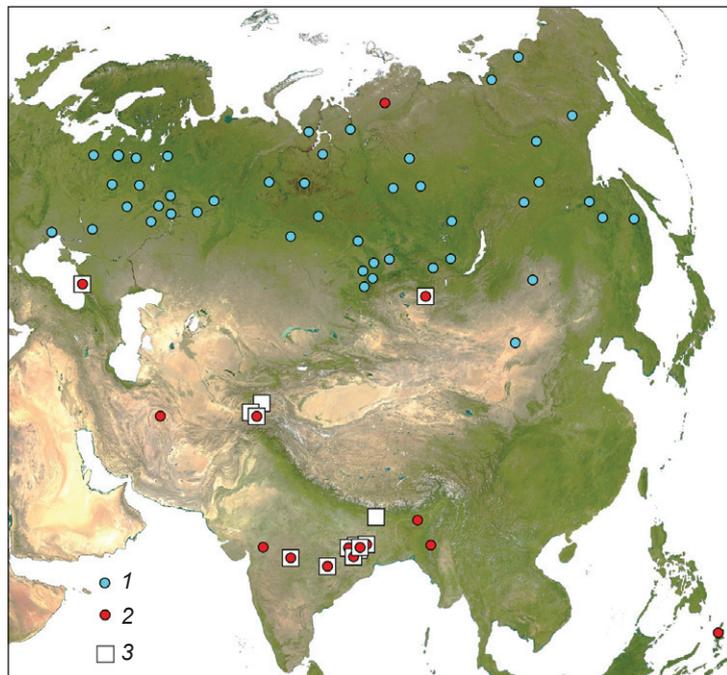


Fig. 1. Distribution area of traditions containing the northern and southern variants of the myth about the creation of man.

1 – the guard (usually a dog) cannot defend the human figures created by God from the antagonist; 2 – the guard (usually a dog) successfully drives away the antagonist who tried to destroy God’s creation; 3 – the antagonist is a horse or a cow (among the Oirats).

skin which originally was as hard as the nails of humans. Nothing is told about the destiny of man himself.

Despite the obvious elements of the Christian Apocryphal tradition in some texts, the ultimate origin of corresponding motifs is far from being clear. The names of protagonists in the Siberian and Volga–Permian versions are not borrowed from the Russians but belong to local mythological personages. And what is most important, the hypothesis of the development of the tale from the “Abrahamic” mythology runs counter to the Southern Eurasian versions. The latter lack any traces of the dualistic cosmivision, the antagonist in them is a personage who is far from being equal with the creator, and the role of the antagonist is usually fulfilled by a horse (Fig. 1).

Such versions are recorded among the people who speak languages of different families (Fig. 2). The Wakhi speak one of the Pamir languages which are part of the Eastern Iranian branch. The Kalashi and Kho of the Eastern Hindu Kush speak the Dardic languages which either stand slightly closer to Indo-Aryan than to the Iranian group or are a special branch of the Indo-Aryan stock. The Oroan (or Kurux) language is Northern Dravidian, spread over the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand and the neighboring areas; the Gondi language is Central Dravidian, spread mostly over Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa. The Limbu, Kachari (their language is close to Bodo) and Mizo (otherwise called Lushei) live in the Himalaya piedmont areas of Nepal,

Northeast India, and in the adjacent part of Myanmar and speak the Tibeto-Burman languages. The Barela-Bhilala in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh speak Bhili, an Indo-Aryan language. The language of the Khasi of the Meghalaya state in eastern India is Austro-Asiatic. All other South Asian groups familiar with the tale in question speak Munda languages which, like the Khasi, belong to the Austro-Asiatic family but form a different branch. The Munda, including the Mundari, Korku, Santali, Birjia, Birhor, Kharia, and others live in eastern and central areas of India.

Almost all variants recorded in India and Nepal were studied by D. Kapp (1977), a German Indologist. Additional materials were found by T. Osada (2010), a Japanese linguist. The only text that remained unnoticed belongs to the Kachari (Soppitt, 1885: 32). The number of the recorded versions is the highest among the Oraons (10), Mundari (6), Santali and Korku (3 in each case).

A typical variant is as follows. God takes mud, makes figures of a man and a woman and lets them dry. A horse or two horses, often winged, come and break the figures. The creator makes a dog or two dogs who drive the horses away. The horse is punished, being deprived of its wings, and is obliged to serve man and be harnessed and beaten. The horse wanted to destroy man just because it was afraid that man would harness it. In one of the Korku stories, trees try to destroy the figures of man, being afraid that man would begin to cut them.

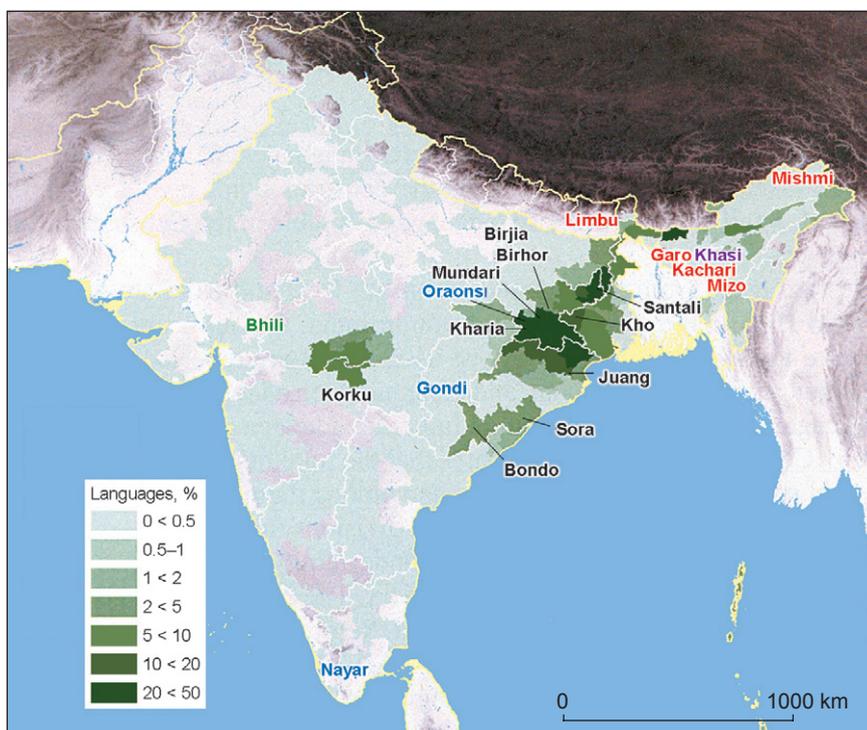


Fig. 2. Present distribution of the Munda languages and the location of some Dravidian groups (blue print), Tibeto-Burman groups (red print), Khasi (purple print), and Bhili (green print).

The Dardic version is similar to the Indian ones. Before the creation of the man, the world was populated by horses. They tried to trample down the figure of Adam that was made of mud but the dog did not let them to do it and till now remains the guard of the man. The navel on the human body is the trace of the horse's hoof (Jettmar, 1986: 444).

To this main group of texts there should be added others that lack some details, e.g. the guard is not mentioned at all or (in some Mundari versions) it is not a dog, but a tiger or spider. Among the Dards (Ibid.: 359) and the Munda-speaking groups such versions with minor alterations exist along with the typical ones. Among the Wakhi and Limbu the complete texts (with the dog as a guard) are not known. The Wakhi said that the man created by God was handsome but the covetous horse kicked the half-ready figure and because of this all the people have some physical imperfection. God punished the horse by making it the servant of man*. In the Limbu myth, Niwa-Buma made the first man out of gold and he was perfect, but an envious horse monster broke the figure. Niwa-Buma created the man anew out of ashes and chicken dung, and punished the horse. Now it has to walk on four legs and not on two as before and is a beast of burden (Hermanns, 1954: 10–11). Among the Mizo, Kachari and Khasi, the antagonists who try to destroy human figures are a snake, an evil spirit, or brothers of the creator (Kapp, 1977: 50; Shakespear, 1909: 399; Soppitt, 1885: 32). The role played by the dog in these texts is the same as in most of the others. In India, the most distant, both geographically and by its content, is the tradition of the Barela-Bhilala. A goddess makes the human figures, “the sky queen of the eagles” tries to destroy them, a male personage kills her, and the high god-creator inserts souls into the human bodies (Kapp, 1977: 46).

We should also mention “a late Zoroastrian legend” (Litvinski, Sedov, 1984: 166). After creating the first man Gaiomard, Ormuzd commissioned seven sages to guard him from Akhriman, but they could not fulfill the task. So Ormuzd put the dog Zarrīngoš (“yellow ears”) as a guard and since then this dog protects from demons the souls who go to the Beyond. There is no such story in “Avesta” though it does not exclude the possibility that it could have existed in the oral tradition from early times.

The cases described above demonstrate that the variants from Northern and Southern Eurasia have important differences. In Siberia and Eastern Europe, the dog failed to fulfill its task while in the southern versions it successfully drove the antagonist away and defended the human figures. The northern traditions explain not only how man was created but also why he is subject to disease and death, but in the southern tradition this last theme

is absent. Nevertheless the northern and the southern versions are similar enough to exclude the possibility of a chance coincidence. Nowhere else similar tales have been recorded. Only one text of the Plains Ojibwa in Canada is slightly reminiscent of the Eurasian ones. Weese-ke-jak makes a human figure of stone and steps back to admire it. A bear rubs itself against the figure, it falls down and is broken. Weese-ke-jak makes a new figure of mud, and that's why human beings are weak (Simms, 1906: 338–339). The similarity with the Eurasian texts is chance because among the Ojibwa the essential detail is not the interference of a particular antagonist but the opposition between durable and fragile materials to make man. Such an opposition is typical for stories that explain the origin of death in North America's Northwest (Berezkin, 2010: 17–21)*.

There is but one historical scenario capable of explaining parallels between the South Asian and European–Siberian variants of the tale. Since both regions are separated by the steppe belt, these steppe territories could have been the area of the initial spread of the story. The *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of the tale is defined by the time of contacts between the people of the steppe origin and the inhabitants of South Asia.

Variants recorded among the different groups of the Munda are of special interest for us. At the present time most of the “tribal” people of India are dispersed over vast territories, some groups have changed their linguistic affiliation over the last few centuries. However, the areas where the number of speakers of the corresponding languages is now the highest are mostly the same as in the past (Osada, Onishi, 2010). The principal area of the spread of the Munda languages is the Chota Nagpur plateau (state of Jharkhand with adjacent territories). The Santali, Ho, Mundari, Birhor, Asur (including Birjia), and other groups that speak languages of the northern branch of the Munda live there. To the south, mostly in the Koraput district of Orissa state, Bondo, Sora and other languages of the southern branch of the Munda are located. Much to the west, in Maharashtra state, the Korku language is localized, which belongs to the northern branch. The position of Kharia and Juang is

*Myths about the creator (or his messenger) who took some mud, made the figures of human beings and left them for a while to bring them souls are recorded among the Loda and Galela of Halmahera Island (Indonesia, the Northern Maluku). When the evil spirit broke the figures, the creator made two dogs from his (i.e. the evil spirit's) excrements and they drove him away after which the humans were given life (Baarda, 1904, No. 13: 442–444; Kruijt, 1906: 471). Though this Indonesian variant is similar to some Indian ones (especially to the Khasi text), it can be left aside just as the myth of the Ojibwas. The name of the antagonist is O Ibilisi (from Arabic “Iblis”, the Devil) and it means that the story reached the Maluku after the advent of Islam. When and how it occurred is not essential for our topic.

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not certain. Formerly these languages were classified as belonging to the southern Munda but according to the recent classification, they belong to the Northern division (Diffloth, 2005)*. The Juang speakers live in northern Orissa, and Kharia is spoken practically across the same area as Mundari (Peterson, 2009, VI–VIII).

Initially, the Munda family broke into the southern and northern branches, then Kharia and Juang split from the northern branch, after this Bondo and Sora separated from each other, and at last Korku lost contacts with the other languages. The lexicostatistics give only approximate assessments of age but still help to create a rough chronology and to establish the successive steps of the splitting of language branches. The disintegration of the Munda family began in the early 2nd millennium BC (the separation of the northern and southern branches), while the isolation of the Korku took place in the mid-1st millennium BC.

The myth about the creation of the human figures and an attempt to destroy them is recorded among the northern Munda including the Korku. It should be noted, that the Korku mythology is poorly known while the materials on the Bondo and Sora are rather rich. The fact that five versions have been found among the Korku indicates that the tale is very popular there. At the same time we can be sure that the Bondo and Sora were not familiar with it. It means that the Munda could have adopted the tale between ca 1700 (after separation of the southern Munda) and 900 BC (before separation of the Korku). The age estimations, as I have already mentioned, are approximate but both the 3rd millennium BC and the middle of the 1st millennium BC are practically excluded. The tale is not recorded among the Juang and the only Kharia version is similar to the versions of the Mundari (Pinnow, 1965, No. 26: 142–143). Because the Kharia were in contact with the Mundari, the existence of the version of the tale in their case is not significant. However, the absence of the tale among the southern Munda is significant just because these groups were not in contact with the northern Munda for a long time.

The Dravidian languages of India are mostly localized to the south of the Munda languages. The Oraon language (which is Northern Dravidian) and the Northern Munda languages are spoken in the nearby villages, and the Oraons have the largest number of recorded versions of the tale. However, the Gondi who speak Central Dravidian languages and have few contacts with the Mundari have only one version while no cases at all are reported from other Dravidian groups. The Oraon texts are identical to the Mundari variants and could have either been borrowed

from the Mundari or from the original possessors of the tale whose language was not the Austroasiatic.

The Tibeto-Burman people of South Asia live on the Himalaya piedmont. Though both motifs, the horse as the antagonist and the dog as the guard, are found in their tales, the first motif is recorded only among the Limbu of Nepal while the second is found among the Kachari and Mizo who live in the more eastern areas, already on the Indian territory. The mythologies of Northwest India and of the Lepcha of Sikkim are quite well investigated and there remains no doubt that the tale in question was not known to most of the Tibeto-Burman people. The same can be said about the Khasi. In the Khasi text the dog as a guard is present but the antagonist is not a horse but some unspecified evil spirit. The Munda and Khasi languages are both Austroasiatic but belong to different branches of this family. The Austroasiatic people outside of India are not familiar with this tale.

When it comes to the Bhili (the Barela-Bhilala are a subgroup of them), only scarce data on their mythology exists, but the tales that are recorded show links with the “tribal” people of Eastern India and not with the Indo-Aryans (Kapp, 1986: 266–269; Koppers, Jungblut, 1976: 167, 199–201). What language the Bhili spoke before they adopted an Indo-Aryan language is unknown but it could well have belonged to the Munda family. The absence of both the horse and the dog in the Barela-Bhilala myth is understandable because their traditional mythology gradually lost its elements under the influence of the dominant non-Bhili culture.

Though the Munda can definitely be considered the main South Asian possessors of the story in question, they must also have borrowed it. Firstly, this tale is absent among the southern Munda and among other Austrasian people besides the Khasi. Secondly, the horse, whose role in this story is very important, was brought to South Asia by the Indo-Europeans. Bones of the Equidae from Harappa sites do not belong to the domestic horse (Bryant, 2001: 170–175; Parpola, Janhunen, 2010: 435). The cultural change on the western periphery of the Indian subcontinent becomes visible starting ca 1400 BC and was probably related to the coming of the Eastern Iranians (Kuzmina, 2008: 300–305; 2010: 34). The first Indo-Aryans remain invisible archaeologically, just as the traces of most other migrations known from written sources or linguistic data. However, the linguists and archaeologists almost unanimously put the time of the Indo-Aryan arrival in India within the interval between 1900 and 1200 BC (Bryant, 2001: 218, 224, 229–230).

There are no stories about an attempt to destroy human figures made by the deity either in Sanskrit texts or in the folklore of modern people who speak the Indo-Aryan languages, besides the Barela-Bhilala. But, as mentioned above, such stories have been recorded among the speakers of Dardic languages of the Eastern Hindu Kush. Therefore

*I.I. Peiros also classifies Kharia and Juang as the Northern Munda. His conclusions are based on the 100 word list of M. Swadesh according to the glottochronological formula of S.A. Starostin.

it is probable that the tale in question was brought to India by the Dards or some group closely related to them. The traces of these people were wiped out by the Indo-Aryans who spoke a related language and came later. The time of the first Indo-European arrival in India fits well the suggested time of the borrowing of the tale in question by the native people of the sub-continent, i.e. between the disintegration of the Proto-Munda and the split of Korku. According to the areal pattern of the spread of the story in South Asia (mainly between the Himalaya and the eastern parts of Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand), it was brought by the groups which moved along the Ganges Valley.

As it was mentioned, the Wakhi are the bearers of the story in the Pamir area. They could have borrowed it from the Dards or from their Saka ancestors. It is difficult to say if the Eastern Iranians of Turkestan were familiar with the story, but it is very probable that this myth was formerly quite widespread in the Eurasian steppes. The Abkhasian and Mongolian materials bear witness to such a reconstruction.

Among the Abkhasians the story was discovered in the 1990s. One text was recorded by the ethnologist M. Bartsyts from her mother, another by the folklorist V. Kogonia*. The version recorded by Bartsyts is as follows. At the time of the creation of the world, man was made of mud, but the devil sent horses to trample him because otherwise man would torment them all the time. The man managed to take a handful of mud from his abdomen and threw it at the attackers. The lumps of mud turned into dogs and drove the horses away. According to V. Kogonia's version, the dog also defends man by its own initiative and not upon the order of the creator. God made man of mud. The devil warned horses, "If the man becomes alive, you are doomed, kill him!" The horses rushed at the man but the dogs drove them away. That's why the man and the dog are considered to be close to each other.

These texts have no parallels in the Caucasus. The tale could have become known there due to the contacts between the local people and the steppe Indo-Europeans who did not leave any direct descendents in the area (the coming of the Alans–Ossetians is dated to a later time)**.

*I thank M. Bartsyts and Z. Japua for this information.

**When this paper was already in print, I acquired other Caucasian versions. The Armenian one, known to me thanks to the invaluable help of Lilith Simonian, was recorded in 1941 in Lori near the Georgian border. God sent angels to bring mud, made the figure of Adam and set it to dry. Devils told horses to destroy the figure, otherwise man would put them to work. God sent the angels again to bring mud, this time the devils spat on it, but God wringed it out and the saliva turned into a dog which drove the horses away. The place on the human body from which the devil's saliva ran out is the navel. A Svan variant similar to the Abkhasian ones was recorded by the archaeologist A. Turkin in Svanetia in 2004 from an old man (R. Shamprioni was the interpreter).

The publisher of the Russian translation of the Mongolian or more precisely the Oirat (Derbet) version kindly let me know that the text had been recorded in 1983 in Ubsunur Aimak. This tale shares some traits with the Caucasian stories. God modeled of mud two human figures. A cow came and caught one figure with a horn; it fell down and broke. The fragments turned into a dog, and since then the dog barks at the cow. The dog and the man have a common origin; that's because their bones are similar (Skorodumova, 2003: 51–52). Both in the Oirat and in the Abkhasian variant the dog was not set by the creator to guard the figure of the man but emerged at the very moment when the antagonist attacked the creation. Also only in these variants the affinity of the dog and the man is specially emphasized. It is appropriate to recall the extremely high status of the dog in the Zoroastrian tradition (Boyce, 1989: 145–146; Chunakova, 2004: 203; Kryukova, 2005: 202–205).

Because this tale has a narrowly localized distribution in Mongolia, the probability of it having been brought to the Caucasus with the Genghiz Khan army is small. Both at the western and eastern peripheries of the Great Steppe, the tale must have had a single ultimate source – the steppe Indo-Europeans. They alone could have maintained ties with Caucasian natives, the South Asian Munda, and some people in Mongolia, from whom the story was eventually inherited by the Oirats.

It is significant that in the Oirat version the role of the antagonist is played not by the horse but by the cow. Among the Mongolian and Turkic people of Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia the horse has almost a sacred status while the bull or the cow can have negative associations. In some of the Kazakh, Altai, Tuvian, Mongol (the Oirat included), Yakut as well as Nenets etiological legends the cow or bull is the embodiment of severe frost or they are considered responsible for the existence of winter. In the Tuvian and Yakut myths, the mean bull is directly opposed to the good horse who desired warmth (Benningsen, 1912: 55–57; Ergis, 1974: 149; Katash, 1978: 18–19; Kulakovski, 1979: 73, 77–78; Lehtisalo, 1998: 16; Potanin, 1883, No. 37: 203; 1972: 54–55; Taube, 2004, No. 5: 19). On the contrary, among the peoples of Europe and more rarely of the Caucasus and Central Asia (Ancient Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Norwegians, Danes, Lithuanians, Latvians, Veps, Finns, Komi, Ossetians, Tajik) as well as in the Middle Persian Avestan tradition, the horse is considered to be the adversary of God (Aarne, 1912, No. 58: 11; Belova, 2004, No. 374, 375: 176; Bulashev, 1909: 401; Bulgakovski, 1890: 189; Chubinski, 1872: 49; Chunakova, 2004: 110, 216; Dähnhardt, 1907: 341–342; Limerov, 2005, No. 70, 73, 74: 68–70, 74–76; Moshkov, 2004: 204–205, 261; Petrovich, 2004: 183–184; Pogodin, 1895: 439; Shevchenko, 1936: 92; Stoinev, 2006: 163; Sukhareva, 1975: 39–40; Vélius, 1981: 263;

Vukichevich, 1915: 109–111; Zaglada, 1929: 12) and demonic cannibal horses are described in narratives (Apollod., 1972, II, 5, 8: 36, 149; Biazzyrov, 1971, No. 15: 156–173). In Ancient Greece, just as among the Siberian Turks, the bull was contrasted with the horse but the signs in this opposition were different, the bull was considered good (bees emerged from its corpse) and the horse bad (wasps or drones emerged) (Gunda, 1979: 398–399).

One of the Norwegian tales is directly associated with the South Asian and Caucasian myths. The devil decided to create a beast that would run across the whole earth and destroy human beings. He tried to make this monster alive by spitting on it, but in vain. God made it live, told it to become a horse and to serve man. Horny swellings on horses' hooves are traces of the devil's spit (Dähnhardt, 1907: 342).

The last version of the tale that should be mentioned is recorded in the far North among the Nganasans. The primeval mother gave birth to a child, a small branch of willow. Her husband planted it, but "disease came and spoiled it." The man asked his wife to give him another child so that the latter would defend the former. The second child proved to be a reindeer without horns. He asked his father to give him horns to fight worms and evil beasts, received one horn of ivory and another of stone, and destroyed the beasts (Popov, 1984: 42–43).

The Nganasan myth is more similar to the southern and not to the northern variants because here the guard successfully drives away the antagonist. Nganasan origins were a complex process, where different components mixed together, including the Tungus, the Samoyed proper (whose language was adopted), and a local substratum of unknown linguistic affiliation (Dolgikh, 1952). No available evidence supports the idea of language contacts between the ancestral Samoyed and Indo-Europeans of the steppes*, but the archaeological materials evidence a movement of the descendents of the Pazyryk culture of the Altai far to the north (Molodin, 2003: 148–178). In any case, the people of the taiga and tundra zones had to borrow the variant of the myth that survived in Taimyr from the inhabitants of the steppe. Later this variant was almost completely superseded by the European–Siberian version.

The *Earth-diver* tale

The time of the spread of this northern version of the creation myth is defined by the age of the Manichean motifs that exist in it and that are related to the spread of the *Earth-diver* myth. The latter has a great age in Asia (Berezkin, 2007; Napolskikh, 1991), but to the southern areas of Eastern Europe it was probably brought

*Possibly such contacts could have been with the (proto)-Toharians (Napolskikh, 1997: 82).

only during the Great Migration of Peoples (AD 400–800) when it was modified under the influence of the Bogomilism (Napolskikh, 2008). The Manichaenism must have reached Siberia during the time of the Sogdian colonization along the Silk Road (Kyzlasov 2001) and from Southern Siberia it was brought (possibly by the Avars as V. Napolskih suggested) to Europe. The Manichaenism reached Europe also from other sources. The territory in Northern Eurasia where the myth about the spoiled creation and the dog as a failed guard is recorded almost overlaps with the territory where the *Earth-diver* is recorded (Fig. 3). At the same time neither the *Earth-diver* nor the *Spoiled creation* are known in the Siberian Northeast and among most of the people of the Amur–Sakhalin region. In many Northern Eurasian traditions, in particular among the Mari, Mordvinians, Chuvash, Nenets, Evenki of the upper Nizhnaya Tunguska, the Altaians, Khakas, Shor, Buryats and Mongolians, the story about the creator, his antagonist and a guard is a direct continuation of the story about the emergence of the dry land brought from the bottom of the ocean (Gomboev, 1890, No. 1v: 67–69; Katanov, 1963: 155–156; Labanauskas, 1995: 13–15; Lar, 2001: 188–205; Nenyang, 1997: 21–23; Pinegina, Konenkin, 1952: 49–50; Potanin, 1883, N 46: 218–223; Sedova, 1982: 13–15; Shtygashev, 1894: 1–8; Skorodumova, 2003: 35–37; Vereschagin, 1996: 134; Yegorov, 1995: 117–118).

Possibly, the Northern Eurasian narratives in which two myths (the *Earth-diver* and the *Spoiled creation*) were linked together are late, i.e. they acquired their final form during the Great Migration of Peoples. However, both plots may have also mixed earlier, since both combine in the same texts in India as well.

In South Asia, the *Earth-diver* myth is recorded among the Northern and Southern Munda (Agaria, Birhor, Mundari, Santali, Bondo, Sora), Oraons, Central Dravidians (Gondi, Koya and Maria), and the Tibeto-Burmans (Garo, Kachari, Mishmi, Kachin). It has also been recorded among the Baiga and Chero whose language affiliation is not clear and possibly has changed, and among some Indo-Aryan people including the Tharu of Nepal and the Sinhalese who moved to Ceylon from Eastern India almost three thousand years ago. This plot is found in early Sanskrit texts, though their compilers apparently did not understand it properly (Vasilkov, 2006). To the east of India, the tale has been recorded among the Shan of Myanmar and the Semang of Malaysia, but such cases in Southeast Asia are exceptional and the *Earth-diver* is not typical for this region. Among the Mundari, Santali, Birhor, Oraons, and Kachari, narratives with the *Earth-diver* and the *Spoiled creation* (with the horse as the antagonist and the dog as a guard) directly follow the episodes related to getting the earth from the sea bottom.

The plot of the *Earth-diver* is too complex to assume its independent emergence in Northern and Southern

Eurasia. There is no doubt that its American versions go back to the Asian ones but the mutual relation between the Indian and the Siberian variants has not been investigated.

In the Northern Eurasian variants of the *Earth-diver*, the water birds go to the sea bottom but in the Southern Eurasian myths the association of the divers with living creatures is much more varied. According to the Mundari and Santali, a crayfish (or a crab, a shrimp) and after it a turtle go to the bottom but cannot bring the earth to the surface, and a worm does it at last (Bodding, 1942: 3–5; Roy, 1912: v–vi; Osada, 2010). In texts of the Tharu, Agaria, Sora, Birhor, Baiga, and Gondi, the divers are of the same or similar species (e.g., a leech instead of an earthworm) (Elwin, 1939: 308–316; 1949, No. 1: 27–28; 1954, No. 14: 433–434; Fuchs, 1952: 608–617; Krauskopff, 1987: 14–16; Prasad, 1989: 3). A variant according to which insects descend to the underworld to get the earth is recorded among the Mishmi of Northeast India (white ants), Shan (also ants) and Semang (a manure bug) (Elwin, 1958, No. 18: 23–24; Evans, 1937: 159; Walk, 1933: 74). Among the Kachari who are close relatives of the Garo, two species of crabs fail to get the earth and a bug brings it, among the Oraons the earth is brought by a kingfisher and among the Kachin and Sinhalese the earth-bringers are anthropomorphic (Elwin, 1958, N 27: 137; Playfair, 1909: 82–83; Volkhonski, Solntseva, 1985, No. 1: 28–29). Among the Bodo, Koya, Maria and in the Hinduistic tradition, the earth is obtained by a wild boar (Elwin, 1949, No. 4: 30–31; 1950: 135–136; 1954, No. 5: 426; Vasilkov, 2006).

Because the composition of tales and the sets of personages in South Asian *Earth-diver* myths are more diverse than in Europe or Siberia, it is more plausible that the northern variants split from the southern ones and not vice versa. Whatever the reason, the distribution areas of the southern and northern variants must have adjoined at some time in the past.

Over the last 1500 years, the contacts between India and Siberia were across Tibet and Mongolia. Only scarce fragments of the Tibetan myth have survived, but it is clear from them that the animal which got the particles of earth from under the water was a turtle (Hermanns, 1949: 289–290, 833). The same episode is found in one of the Mongolian versions (Skorodumova, 2003: 35–37). In another Mongolian version, a frog acts instead of the turtle (Potanin, 1883, No. 46b: 220–223). The Evenki who live in the Trans-Baikal area and near the Sea of

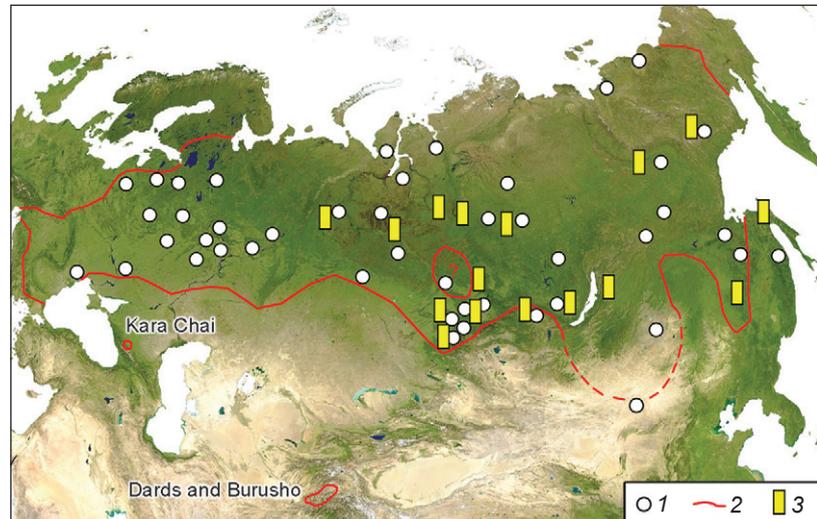


Fig. 3. Distribution of certain mythological motifs in Eurasia.

1 – Spoiled creation: the dog lets the antagonist pass to the figures of people who were created by God; 2 – *Earth-diver* (approximate limits of the maximal distribution area of the motif); 3 – Striped chipmunk.

Okhotsk also narrate about the frog as the animal which got the earth from under the water (Mazin, 1984: 19–20; Vasilevich, 1969: 214–215). Versions with the turtle as a diver are well known in India, so a late Indian influence on the Mongolian variant of the *Earth-diver* should not be excluded. However, according to most cosmogonic texts recorded among the Mongolian-speaking people, the turtle or the frog began to support the earth that had been created, but the original particles of earth were brought not from under the water but from somewhere aside or above (Benningesen, 1912: 13–14; Nassen-Bayer, Stuart, 1992: 327–329; Stuart, Limusishiden, 1994: 41). It seems that the Mongolians borrowed the motif of diving to the sea bottom late in time and it has never become prevalent in their mythology. Across most of Siberia where the *Earth-diver* was the main cosmogonic myth, the situation is different because there this story had to be known since the Paleolithic. Otherwise it wouldn't have been brought to those areas of North America that were to the south of the Laurentide ice sheet (Berezkin, 2007). It is unrealistic to suggest direct contacts between India and Siberia for such an early time because during cold epochs the high mountainous areas that separate India from the territories to the north of it, could hardly be inhabited.

There is no *Earth-diver* in East Asia. Along the Pacific Rim of Asia, another cosmogonic motif is prevalent, i.e. the descent of primeval earth from the sky to the waters or to some uncertain space or chasm. Among the Austronesian people (besides the Taiwanese) this variant is dominant. It is also typical for the Viets, inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands, Japanese, Udihe, Nanai, the easternmost Evenki, Kamchadal, Chukchi, and the Eskimo, especially the

Yupic groups*. Both in India and in continental Siberia, the motif of the earth that descends from the upper world is very rare (Kond, Chero, Mansi).

Could the territorial connection between the northern and the southern versions of the *Earth-diver* go across the areas to the west of Tibet? In favor of such a suggestion is the existence of two isolated versions in the intermediate territory. One is found among the Dards and their Burusho neighbors (Hermanns, 1949: 839; Jettmar, 1986: 223–224), another among the Kara Chai of the Caucasus (Karaketov, 1995: 64–67). The Dardic–Burushaski variant is not similar either to the European–Siberian and North American or to the South Asian ones and produces an impression of the last fragment of a peculiar tradition. According to this story, the world was covered with water, partly frozen. Giants asked the wolf to put the earth above the water. The wolf first called for a bird which lived in the snow-covered mountains, and then he told the king of the giants to stand in the water, the bird sat on the king, a mouse made a hole in the ice, got the earth from under the water and spilled it on the outstretched wings of the bird.

According to the Kara Chai text, a pair of geese built a nest on the head of a dragon which was lying in the sea. Being afraid that the dragon would throw them into the water, the female goose dived twice but could not reach the bottom. She descended into the underworld in order to find out how the dragon could be killed. When the dragon was in agony, the geese dived again and came up covered with mud. An old man K'art-Choppa scraped the mud from their feathers and smeared it on the dragon's back, which led to the creation of our world.

Such a myth could hardly have been brought by the Turks from Southern Siberia in recent times. In the east the motif of the cosmic dragon is known to the Uigur of Gansu (Stuart, Jhang Juan, 1996: 13), but there it is not related to the *Earth-diver* myth. As for the Dardic–Burushaski version, it looks even more isolated. Both versions could be interpreted as evidence in favor of the spread of the *Earth-diver* across the steppe zone in the pre-Turkic time. If both the steppe Indo-Europeans and the ancient inhabitants of South Asia were familiar with the *Earth-diver*, it becomes understandable why the natives of the Ganges Valley borrowed from the Indo-Europeans the story about the man, the dog and the horse. They had already structurally similar narratives in which the *Earth-diver* episode preceded the story about the creation of man.

As has been already mentioned, no dualistic motifs were found in the Indian anthropogenic myths about the man, the dog and the horse while such motifs are typical for the European and Siberian versions of the *Spoiled creation*. However, dualistic motifs do exist in other Southern Eurasian myths. Just like in the Northern Eurasian ones, there are

two main characters: one creates the body of man and goes away to bring the soul, and the other, while giving the man life, makes him mortal. Such myths are recorded among the Munda-speaking Santali and are especially typical for Southeast Asia, mostly the island part of it. In particular they are found on Borneo (Ngaju), Sulawesi (Toradja), the Philippines (Tboli, Bukidnon, Manuvu), and among the Semang of Malaysia*. Parallels for this motif are also present in Madagascar (Abrahamsson, 1951: 115–118). Since the Malagasy variants are similar to the Indonesian ones, it is practically certain that the story was known in Indonesia before the Austronesian ancestors of the Malagasy migrated to Madagascar in the 7th century AD or so (Adelaar, 2009).

In Eurasia, the age of the dualistic myth about the creation of man must be comparable with the age of the *Earth-diver*. The existence of North American parallels for both motifs supports such a hypothesis (Berezkin, 2006a). The Zoroastrian dualistic tradition that influenced the emergence of Manicheism and Gnostic philosophy in general has no correspondences in other Indo-European mythologies. It is logical to think that the Iranian tradition borrowed it from some source. As in the case of the *Earth-diver*, the initial distribution area of the Eurasian dualistic myth must have been uninterrupted. All these myths are but elements of a vast complex of beliefs that explain the mortal nature of human beings. Among other elements of this complex are the motif of the nail-like skin that had to cover human bodies (the motif is known across Northern Eurasia, in Indonesia and in the British Columbia**), and the motif of the elixir of life spilled on plants (in Northern and Central Eurasia it is recorded among the Greeks, Talysh, Azerbaijanis, Persians, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Volga Tatars, Bashkirs, Kazakhs, Altaians, Tofa, Buryats, Mongols and Udihe, and in southern Eurasia among the Ngaju of Borneo and on Palau Island in Micronesia***).

In the light of the hypothesis about the trans-Eurasian cultural links other folklore and mythological parallels between Europe, Siberia and India become understandable. For example, stories that explain how the chipmunk's skin became striped are popular in Siberia****. To thank the small animal or to punish it, some personage passes his or its hand or paw along the chipmunk's back and the traces remain (the Altaians, Telengit, Tofa, Khakas, Buryats, Mansi, Khanty, Nanai, Nivkh). From Siberia this motif in a similar context was brought to North America (the Thompson River Salish, Sanpoile, Wasco, Yakima, Kutenai, Blackfoot, Seneca and other Iroquois,

* See source at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>, motif H43.

** See sources at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>, motif E36.

*** See sources at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>, motif H6B.

**** See sources at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>, motif B69.

* See sources at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>, motif B3E.

Yuchi, Cherokee, Creek, Miwok, Hopi), and the same story, applied to a local squirrel-like rodent, was recorded among the Santali and Nayar of South India. The overall zone of the spread of this motif almost coincides with the area of the *Earth-diver*, especially if we extract from the latter the territories in Europe where the *Earth-diver* penetrated later (Fig. 3). Both motifs are known in India and in the continental areas of Siberia and North America, but they are absent in areas adjacent to the Bering Sea.

Conclusions

In the Bronze Age groups of steppe cattle breeders who were familiar with the domestic horse penetrated South Asia where they came into contact with the speakers of the Munda languages. The totality of evidence including the texts recorded in the Caucasus, Hindu Kush, and Mongolia, allows us to conclude that the tale about the creation of man typical for the Munda people was borrowed by the South Asian natives from the early Indo-European migrants and was previously spread across the Eurasian steppes. Some groups of speakers of the Tibeto-Burman and Dravidian languages also borrowed it, either directly from the Indo-Europeans (more precisely, from the Dards?) or already from the Munda. Later a new, the Northern Eurasian, variety of this tale split from the steppe one. The dog who originally was a successful guard of the man, was transformed into its betrayer and acquired all the negative associations that were initially associated with the horse. This variant spread across the forest zone of Eurasia from the Baltic to the Pacific. In the steppes, however, the pre-Turkic and pre-Islamic anthropogenic tales disappeared.

The second level of the reconstruction is directed to more remote epochs. Some motifs and tales exist that are shared by people of Northern and Southern Eurasia, but unknown in its central part. The *Earth-diver* myth is among them. Parallels between the Indian and Siberian variants suggest that the southern and northern areas of its spread were connected somewhere in the past. If this tale was known across the Eurasian steppe zone, the Hindu Kush (the Dards and Burusho) and the Northern Caucasus (the Kara Chai) versions are the survivals of this tradition.

Other distribution patterns of folklore and mythological motifs also support the idea of early trans-Eurasian links. Previously I tended to relate such parallels to the trans-Eurasian communication network that emerged about 2000 BP (Berezkin, 2006b). It remained unclear, however, why chains of such analogies follow neither the Silk Road trajectory nor the routes of the sea trade between Europe and Asia. It now appears that the connections were much earlier. The later “mimicry” of certain tales, making them resemble the mythology of world religions, prevents us from tracing these early links. In the past, the steppe zone between the Caucasus and Southern Siberia must

have been the distribution area of many tales that in the 20th century survived only in more northern or southern regions of Eurasia.

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