

THE BIRTH OF ORDER

Creation myths tell a special kind of story called a *cosmogony*, a word deriving from Greek that means, literally, “the birth of order.” Order, in this case, refers to the organizing principles of the physical universe and the basic sociopolitical, cultural, and spiritual facts of existence that affect human beings. Many have observed that creation myths are, more or less, birth narratives. Frequently, cosmogonic myths pick up the action at a point just before the divine touch creates time and space. Before this critical moment, though there are often gods or a god preceding the world or the physical universe, the only *thing* that exists is the infinite potential of chaos. (Or should we say the chaos of infinite potential?) Not unlike the Genesis account of creation, most of the world’s creation myths begin with an eternal being sleeping within or hovering in contemplation above the infinite abyss of a primeval sea. These waters represent the “chaos” of a world without physical form, where no height, no depth, no breadth, no time, and no created beings exist. All is quiet; everything rests in a state of infinite potential. At the decisive moment, potential universes give way to the one in which we actually live.

CLASSIFYING COSMOGONIC MYTHS

In Chapter 1 we noted that Mircea Eliade saw all myths as “creation stories” in the sense that people, through recitation of such stories on designated occasions, could reconnect to “primordial time, the fabled time of beginnings” (1975, 5), a notion very like that of the Australian aboriginal concept of “dreaming” and its relationship to the primordial yet ongoing “Dreamtime” (see Chapter 6, 390–91). As Eliade says, “myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of ‘creation’; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*” (5–6). Still, Eliade does distinguish cosmogonic stories from other types of myth, and, in *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Source Book of the History of*

Religions, he classifies these specialized myths into four basic types: (1) creation *ex nihilo*, in which a divinity creates the cosmos by thought, word, dream, or from bodily effluents; (2) earth-diver creation, in which a divinity sends waterfowl or amphibious animals or itself dives to the bottom of a primordial ocean to bring up mud or sand from which the world grows; (3) creation by dividing a primordial unity like earth and sky, form from Chaos, or the cracking open of a “Cosmic Egg”; and (4) creation by dismemberment of a primordial Being, like the sea monsters Yam or Tiamat in ancient Near Eastern texts, the Giant, Ymir, in the Eddas, or the various Corn mothers of the Americas. Charles H. Long, one of Eliade’s students, in *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*, introduced a fifth classification, emergence myths, in which a people travels through a series of chambers or worlds until it emerges into this one.

Others have provided alternative classification schemes. Van Over, for example, suggests, rather than a typology of myth, six “basic themes”:

- (1) The idea of a primeval abyss (which is sometimes simply space, but often is an infinite watery deep) . . .
- (2) The originating god (or gods) is frequently awakened or eternally existing in this abyss . . .
- (3) . . . the originating god broods over the water;
- (4) Another common theme is the cosmic egg or embryo . . .
- (5) Life [is] also created through sound, or a sacred word spoken by the original god . . . [and]
- (6) A peculiar theme, but quite common, is the creation of life from the corpse or parts of the primeval god’s body. (1984, 10)

Maclagan suggests, in *Creation Myths: Man’s Introduction to the World*, that cosmogonic narratives are patterned after the following themes: (1) inner and outer; (2) horizontal and vertical; (3) something from nothing; (4) the conjugation of opposites; (5) world order and the order of worlds; (6) descent and ascent; (7) earth body and sacrifice; and (8) death, time, and the elements. In these various schemes, we see areas of overlap, which suggests that a finite number of motifs are at work in creation myths.

Weigle’s *Creation and Procreation: Feminist Reflections on Mythologies of Cosmogony and Parturition* presents the most nuanced typology of creation myths. Building upon Eliade and Long, as well as von Franz’s *Patterns of Creativity Mirrored in Creation Myths* and Rooth’s journal article “Creation Myths of the North American Indians,” Weigle constructs a nine-part typology: (1) accretion or conjunction; (2) secretion; (3) sacrifice; (4) division or conjugation; (5) earth-diver; (6) emergence; (7) two creators; (8) *deus faber*; and (9) *ex nihilo*. We will discuss these classifications in detail shortly, but first we wish to emphasize Weigle’s point that “ethnocentrism and androcentrism bias” our understanding of such classifications. Readers from Western cultures tend to rank “metaphysical or spiritual” cosmogonies like the account of Elohim-God speaking the world into existence in Genesis higher than “physical, natural, or elemental accounts of creation by accretion, excretion, copulation, division, dismemberment, or parturition” (1989, 6–7). If, however, we are self-conscious about our culture’s assumptions about what is “normal,” we see that at least as many cosmogonic myths have presented creation as part of a natural—even accidental—process as have conceived it as an exercise of divine and creative will. That is, many creation myths depict the birth of the cosmic order as an organic, natural, and/or evolutionary process rather than as an engineering project or the act of a master magician. Ranking one kind of myth as lower

or more primitive and our own myths as higher or more cultured—as indeed all major mythologists of the past two centuries have done—derives from, as we showed in the first chapter, a racial or cultural bias. And, as Weigle would add, a pervasive sexist bias against the feminine and its associations with Nature and the body only compounds the problem we have in reading (or hearing) cosmogonic stories on their own terms. To study myth effectively, we need to free ourselves *as much as possible* from the prejudices we inherit from our cultural surroundings.

TYPES OF CREATION MYTH

Accretion or Conjunction Stories

Stories of this first type depict the birth of order as resulting from the mingling or layering of the primal elements (e.g., earth, wind, fire, and water). As Weigle describes it, myths of accretion or conjunction feature the “mingling of waters or fire and frost, the cosmic mountain rising from the sea, [and/or] random or accidental joining of elements” (1989, 6). Thus, when the warm breath of equatorial Muspell, mentioned at the beginning of the Edda, meets the hoarfrost of arctic Nieflheim, ice melts and the resulting water drops come to life, creating the evil giant Ymir. As the giant sleeps, sweat from his armpits creates the first man and woman. A Tibetan creation myth, for another example, announces that “In the beginning was voidness, a vast emptiness without cause, without end.” Over time and also without cause, a gentle wind began to stir; after uncountable years, the wind grew thick and heavy, forming the mighty double thunderbolt scepter, Dorje Gyatram. The double thunderbolt, in turn, created clouds, which in their turn created a rain which fell for eons until the primeval ocean, Gyatso, was formed. Then, after everything became as still and peaceful as a mirror’s reflection, the winds stirred again, roiling Gyatso until the earth-mountain heaved forth, like so much butter in a vast churn. Thus the mingling of air and water and then air, water, and the fire of the thunderbolt led to the creation of the cosmos. In a similarly “causeless” fashion, human beings arise and history begins at Sumeru, the central peak of the earth-mountain.

Into this category we add accounts of such “accidents” as that recounted by various Eskimo tribes of the trickster Father Raven—Tulungersaq—who, according to an Apatac “telling,” is a “holy life power” crouching in the primordial darkness who suddenly awakens and begins to move about. Eventually, Father Raven plants the world’s first vegetation. One day, to his great surprise, the first man pushes his way out of a pea pod and human history begins. Indeed, trickster gods like Raven frequently lay their hands upon primeval matter intending one thing and producing another. “There is a telling,” begins a Coyote tale from America’s desert Southwest, of how Coyote accidentally put the stars in heaven when he shook open a sacred pouch in search of treasure. This theme may also be found among a number of tales from peoples ranging from Central Asia to Central Europe, including the ancient Siberians, Voguls, and Rumanians. In Vogul and Rumanian tradition, for example, Satan unwittingly speeds God’s creation of Earth when he lays his claws upon it in an effort to destroy it. Accretion and conjunction stories, then, demonstrate the creative potency of primal matter. Any action, whether that of wind or wave, or the ear-

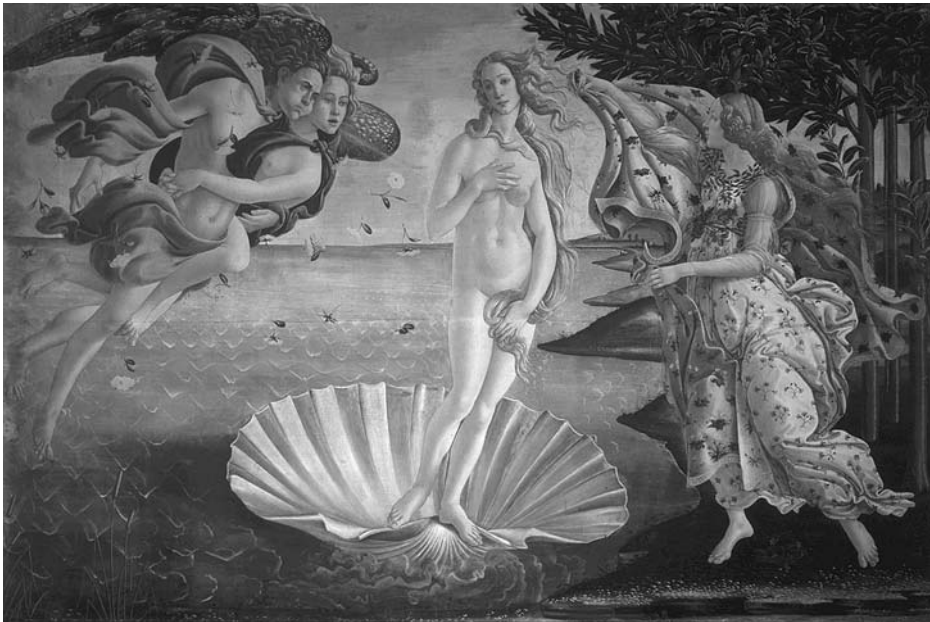
liest stirrings of a god or devil, unleashes the productive power sleeping in the primordial deep.

Secretion Stories

Cosmogonic myths following this narrative pattern will depict the cosmos as resulting from such divine emissions as “vomit, sweat, urination, defecation, masturbation, web-spinning, [and] parthenogenesis” (Weigle 1989, 6). It is interesting to note that secretion myths usually account for the creation of human or divine beings rather than for the propagation of the material cosmos. This is not to say that the four elements, landforms, heavenly bodies, and oceans that arise are *never* formed from these bodily emissions. They are, for example, when Ku’urkil, the Chuckchee’s “self-formed” Father Raven, defecates and urinates, thus creating the earth and various bodies of water. But these instances are less common. Rather, divine secretions tend to create living, conscious beings who resemble the primeval creator intellectually and spiritually. For example, the Pyramid Texts of ancient Heliopolis tell of how Aten (elsewhere Atem) emerges from the primordial waters of Nun and begins to masturbate, ejaculating Shu and Tefnut. (Other versions of this myth have Aten spitting, and thus expectorating Shu and Tefnut.) The latter deities beget Geb

Sandro Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus.” Tempura on canvas. Differing cultures have differing mores. Botticelli’s Christianized audience would have found shocking the violent origins and frank sexuality of the classical period’s Aphrodite/Venus. Thus his painting makes no reference to the violent act that gave her birth, and not only is Venus depicted as serene and modest, but a nymph waits to cover her nakedness as soon as she steps to shore.

Source: © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



(earth-father) and Nut (sky-mother) from whom all other life—and many of the most important Egyptian gods—emanate. Those familiar with classical myths will remember that Aphrodite is born when Zeus emasculates his father, Kronos, and several drops of blood from the severed genitals fall upon Ocean. Since she is the goddess of sexual attraction, Aphrodite's emergence from the blood-tinged foam metaphorically signifies the beginning of generative life on earth. Like Egyptian creation stories, the Greek *Theogony* places very little emphasis on human creation. People and the earth's flora and fauna seem to appear as a natural result of the creation of heaven and earth.

Mesopotamian traditions, on the other hand, do emphasize human creation. Typically, after due attention is paid to the creation of the heavens and the earth, the gods take counsel and determine that this great work isn't quite complete without human beings to care for it. In the poem *Attrahasis*, the story begins with the gods completing the work of creation, working together in a fashion that resembles Sumerian and Babylonian human societies in many respects. The great gods Anu, Enlil, and Enki oversee a vast "public works" project that includes digging the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. For 40 years, the lesser gods toil like day-laborers in the desert heat until they become so fed up that they form the equivalent of a labor union and demand that Enlil relieve them of their heavy "labor basket." The ever-crafty Ea/Enki has a plan: have the birth goddess Nintu create *lullu*, the first human being, who can then take over the gods' heavy labor. To accomplish this task, one of the gods, We-ila, is killed and Nintu mixes his blood, body, and "rationality" with clay and directs the Annunaki and Igigi (the great gods) to spit upon the mixture. This they do, and, through a process analogous to human gestation, Nintu waits nine months for this first man, *Attrahasis*, to awaken. He and his descendants flourish and assume their roles as the gods' temple servants and field hands.

Sacrifice Stories

The story of *Attrahasis* also contains elements of Weigle's third category because a god is sacrificed in order for the creative work to succeed. In some cosmogonies, the creator god sacrifices himself or herself or someone else to complete the work of creation. Thus, in one Chinese myth, when the cosmic egg shatters and the creator-giant Pan-Ku emerges, he grows continually for 18,000 years. During these years, by stretching his ever-growing body, he separates the lighter and brighter yin elements from the heavier and darker yang elements (i.e., he separates heaven from earth). When the universe is sufficiently expanded, Pan-Ku dies, his skull becoming the dome of the sky, his flesh becoming the soil, his bones becoming rocks and mountains, and his hair becoming vegetation. Thus his sacrifice makes life on earth possible; but, the story concludes, because the creator dies in his act of creation, people know unhappiness during their lives.

In parallel Aztec and Mayan tales, the sun and moon are created when both gods and men pay the ultimate price. In a Nahuatl version of the story, the gods, who are aware that the time of the sun's dawning and the moon's rising is near, take counsel among themselves and determine that the creation of these heavenly bodies can be accomplished only by two of their number throwing themselves on the great flam-

ing hearth, Teotexcalli. Among the company of the gods, only Tecuciztecatl is willing to cast himself into the flames. The other gods are too afraid; but, as they look around, they spy a man, Nanauatzin, and command him to cast himself in the fire. Nanauatzin bravely answers, “It is well, O gods; you have been good to me.” Interestingly, at the moment of truth, the god Tecuciztecatl is too afraid to cast himself into the searing heat of Teotexcalli. After three abortive attempts, the assembled gods tell the mortal, Nanauatzin, to try. He does not hesitate, throwing himself onto the blaze, hissing and popping as the flames consume him. More from shame than courage, Tecuciztecatl then gathers himself and finally pitches himself into the sacred hearth, but by now the flames have died down somewhat. The difference in temperature, we are told, has consequences. Nanauatzin, who cast himself on the hottest flames, becomes the sun—the more honored of the celestial lights—while the god Tecuciztecatl, who received less of Teotexcalli’s vital energy, arises as the moon. From these examples, we can perhaps surmise that cosmogonies celebrating the theme of sacrifice recognize that creative effort is costly: you can’t create a universe without breaking a few cosmic eggs.

Division or Consummation Stories

Creation myths that fall into this fourth category are, says Weigle, “usually associated with discriminating primal matter or a cosmogonic egg [or] with the consummated marriage of earth and sky” (1989, 7). The cosmogonic egg motif is very widespread, occurring in traditions on all six of the inhabited continents. The Hindu Rig Veda and Upanishads contain cosmic egg myths in which there was nothing in the beginning but the great primeval sea. Mysteriously, an egg appeared on the waters, eventually cracking to reveal Atman (the archetypal man-god), who then sets in motion the continually unfolding cosmos. As we saw above, the creator-giant, Pan-Ku, also emerges from a great egg before beginning his great work. In the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, the virgin daughter of Air, whose life of virgin solitude becomes so burdensome to her that she eventually sinks into the sea, becomes pregnant thereby, and rolls with the enormous billows of the primordial ocean for 700 years. Finally she calls out to Ukko, the highest of the gods, for help. In answer, a beautiful teal appears, flying low over the water, searching for a place to land. Alighting upon Water-Mother’s knee (Air-Daughter’s new name), the duck lays six golden eggs and another of iron. As she broods over them, the heat becomes so fierce that Water-Mother moves her knee, causing the eggs to fall and split open, creating the earth, sky, sun, moon, and clouds.

The consummation motif shares with cosmogonic egg myths the knowledge that tiny germs contain within them astonishing potential for organized growth. In most mythic traditions, the sky-father casts his seeds into the earth-mother in the form of rain. Thus, in the *Theogony*, Gaia, the earth-mother, emerges first from Chaos and gives birth to starry Ouranos, who immediately “covers” her and begets upon her numerous divine children, whom he does not let emerge from the womb. Eventually, with Gaia’s help, Ouranos’s son Kronos overcomes him, separating earth from sky through castration. Kronos himself proves no less tyrannical than his father, eating his children as they emerge from the womb. Eventually, with his

mother Rhea's help, Zeus borrows his father's sharp sickle and repeats cosmic history by emasculating Kronos. But not all consummation myths are as bloody as this one. The Krachi people of African Togo, for example, tell us that, in the beginning, God Wul-bar-i was spread out not five feet above Mother earth. But he got tired of being poked by old womens' stirring poles as they pounded food in front of their huts and of having people constantly wiping their dirty hands on his white clouds and taking bits of clean blue to put in their soup pots. In disgust, Wul-bar-i eventually pulls farther and farther back from the earth, finally coming to rest in his current heavenly abode. Whether stories organized by the separation motif are filled with violent struggle or fanciful whimsy, the action emanates from a central problem: how to separate and activate the primordial elements in order for life to thrive.

Earth-Diver Stories

Most cosmogonies begin with a vast primeval sea from which creative agents emerge to organize this watery chaos. In Weigle's fifth type of creation myth, a god or his agent dives to the bottom of this primordial deep and returns with a few grains of sand or a bit of mud from which the earth and the rest of the cosmos eventually arise. Several of the stories we mentioned have earth-divers in them. For example, the Rumanian story of how Satan, despite his intentions, ultimately fulfilled God's design for earth has it that Satan is forced by God Himself to dive to the bottoms of the deep and bring back some mud. After two false starts, the devil manages to bring back a few grains under his claws, but it is enough for God to make and grow an Earth-seed. As in many Native American stories, there are beings and potential forms waiting for their appointed moment in the darkness before creation. Earth-divers and their companions wake first and notice that there is no place upon which to live or build a home. This problem usually leads to an extensive search during which the earth-diver is discovered or after which the earth-diver hits upon the solution of diving below the waves in search of a bit of land. Sometimes it is Beaver who dives to the bottom and brings back a few grains of sand on his flat tail. Sometimes it's Duck, Turtle, or Frog who brings a little mud up from the bottom.

The Maidu of California say that Turtle and Pe-i-hipe (Father-of-the-Secret-Society) were the first beings. For ages, these two floated on a raft upon the original ocean until Earth-Starter came from the sky on a feathered rope. Turtle asked him when he would make earth and if there would be people on it. When Earth-Starter asked how it would be possible for him to create earth without anything to work with, Turtle volunteered to dive to the bottom of the ocean and bring back some mud. It took six years for Turtle to make it back to the surface, and even then he managed to bring back only a few grains from the bottom. But it was enough. Earth-Starter rolled the grains around in his hands, forming a ball the size of a tiny pebble. He placed this pebble at the end of the raft and checking once, twice, three times found that it had grown as big as the earth and that instead of ocean beneath their raft, there were mountains everywhere.

Some say earth-diver myths signify a return to primal Nature—or, others say, a return to the womb—for the raw materials of life. The recurrent fact that the earth-

diver manages to bring back only a few grains of sand or a tiny dab of mud from the bottom of the primeval deep—just enough to make an Earth-seed from which the world eventually grows—suggests an analogy to human birth and growth. Nothing natural in our experience begins fully formed; things begin small and grow to full stature over time, and this fact seems decisive in earth-diver myths.

Emergence Stories

Another variation on the theme of creation as an evolutionary process can be found in Weigle's sixth type of cosmogony. Emergence myths typically depict the first people or first person as journeying from an original, cramped world or womb into this world. The natives of the American Southwest tell a number of stories which depict the gradual movement of the first people up and out of the dark, cramped worlds beneath this one. A Hopi myth tells us that in the first world things were unsatisfactory because it was so dark that people kept stepping on one another and one couldn't "cast the slime from one's nose without hitting somebody else with it." So two brothers hit upon the idea of climbing a couple of canes and digging their way out of these cramped quarters. This they did, and, making a ladder, they eventually succeeded in leading their people out of the first world into a second, slightly larger one. This world and a third world, too, eventually proved too small for the growing Hopi tribe. Finally, on the fourth try, the Hopi emerged into our world where the sun and other celestial bodies had not yet been made. Then, following Death's footprints in the sand, the Hopi and several animal spirit companions eventually complete creation and have sustained it through ritual ever since.

A Navajo tale places the gods Coyote, First Man, and First Woman in the cramped and dark first world. They decide to make the journey to the second world, where they discover Sun Man and Moon Man. They soon find this second world to be too crowded and decide that they should climb the sky ladder to the third world. The third world, as it turns out, is very spacious, containing mountains, rivers, canyons, trees, lakes, and the Mountain People who welcome the strangers but also warn them not to disturb Tieholtsoṭi, the water monster. Coyote, the trickster, finds it impossible to leave Tieholtsoṭi alone and eventually kidnaps the monster's two children, wrapping them in his blanket. As a result, Tieholtsoṭi begins to cover the entire third world with water. Quickly, the Mountain People pile all the mountains together and make the arduous climb up into the fourth world. In this world, they find human and animal people and, despite a lengthy dispute between the men and women living there about whose role was most important to the survival of the tribe, they live in peace and security for some time. Coyote, however, still has Tieholtsoṭi's children wrapped in his blanket, and eventually people begin to notice that water has begun to seep up from below. Again, mountains are moved and the people climb out of danger, with Badger leading the way because his claws are sharp enough to dig through the sky. When the people arrive in the fifth world, they discover nothing but a vast sea of mud, so Locust flies around the new world until he discovers four swans, occupying each of the four directions. The swans say that the people must pass a test in order to stay in the fifth world. Locust passes this test on behalf of

the people, and, just as the swans are about to give the people permission to enter the muddy fifth world, Tieholtsoi rises from the mud on a roaring torrent, demanding that he be allowed to inspect everyone's bundles. Coyote's misdeed is finally discovered, and he is forced to return the water monster's children. Tieholtsoi, in great delight, takes his children and returns to his place without further trouble. But the world is still too muddy for comfortable habitation. To remedy this, the people pray until a great wind comes and blows for four days, causing the mud to dry and form mountains and valleys, plains and swamps. As a finishing touch, the people throw Sun Man and Moon Man into the sky and the fifth world, our world, becomes a home.

From these two examples we can see that emergence myths emphasize evolutionary progress from the cramped darkness of early society to the airy brightness of civilization. In the two preceding stories, the people learn important truths before they finally arrive in our world—and even then, the world they find is not quite complete without their efforts. Tests must be successfully met, religious ritual must be learned and performed, and the people must create that which the world does not already provide.

Two Creators

This seventh category of cosmogonic myths, in which two gods create the world through cooperation or competition, occurs frequently in African and Native American mythic traditions. The Acoma Pueblo tell of two creator sisters, who were born underground, growing slowly like seedlings in the dark. When they are old enough, a spirit, Tsitctinako or Thought-Woman, tells them to be patient and that, when everything is ripe, they will emerge from the earth and complete the creation their father, Uchtisiti, began when he threw a clot of his blood into space and exerted his power to make it become the earth. After some time, the sisters discover that Tsitctinako has given them each a basket filled with seeds and carved figures of animals. Thought-Woman then instructs the sisters to give life to the figurines of Badger and Locust, who, once they come to life, dig and smooth a path for the sisters to follow up out of the earth. After emerging, the sisters set about the work of invoking the Sun and giving life to the seeds and animals in their baskets. In this version of the myth, the sisters work cooperatively. Other Southwestern Indian tribes suggest that a jealous rivalry existed between the sisters over the contents of their baskets, causing them to split up and work separately.

The African Basonge tribe tells of the rivalry of two creator gods, Kolombo mui fangi and Mwile. The latter god was the highest of the divine tribe and became angry that people kept talking of Kolombo, who claimed to have made himself. Mwile sends for this upstart and challenges him to prove his claims through a series of tests. In the first test, Mwile takes dust and spits into it, creating clay from which he fashions a living human being. "Do *that*," the high god taunts. But Kolombo is up to the challenge, duplicating Mwile's effort. "Make yours speak," demands Mwile. Kolombo at first refuses and the two quarrel. Finally, after Mwile makes his clay-man speak, Kolombo also makes the attempt, but his man can only move his lips, lacking the power of articulate speech. But humiliating his rival is not enough for Mwile.

Rather he challenges Kolombo to go into a hut and allow Mwile to burn it down around him. “If you survive this trial,” Mwile says, “I will acknowledge that you, Kolombo, have made yourself.” Kolombo entered the hut with his animals (for Kolombo seems more closely associated with animal than human life); once he is hidden from view, he directs two of the animals to dig a tunnel back to their village and he tells a bird to lay some eggs on the floor of the hut. Meanwhile, Mwile sets fire to the hut, hearing the eggs exploding in the inferno and congratulating himself at the thought of putting an end to the pretender, Kolombo. But by the time Mwile discovers the charred eggshells among the ashes, Kolombo is safely back in his own village. And there the story ends.

Frequently cosmogonies employing the dual-creator motif depict one god as more active or more human than the other. The Maidu earth-diver story, for example, has three characters: Turtle, Pe-i-hipe, and Earth-Starter. It is unclear from this telling what Pe-i-hipe’s role in creation is. In some versions of this myth, he shouts and cries at various stages of the earth’s creation, but the cries seem unconnected to the story’s action. Turtle, on the other hand, has the crucial role of retrieving the mud at the bottom of the primeval ocean, but the more human Earth-Starter takes the most active role in the creation of the earth, rolling the mud into a ball and repeatedly checking on its progress. The sisters in the Acoma Pueblo story seem equally matched, but Kolombo is clearly inferior to and more closely associated with animals than Mwile. Frequently, cosmogonies featuring two creators account for a perceived hierarchy or distinction among the planet’s creatures; the greater, more gifted creator makes the “noble animals” such as horse, deer, and predator cats while the lesser creator makes the dangerous and noisome creatures such as crocodile, mosquito, and fly.

Deus Faber

This eighth category of creation myths presents the creator as the *Deus Faber*, the Maker God—the quintessential architect, artisan, or craftsman (Weigle 1989, 7). Thus the *Popul Vuh*, the story of the “Fourfold Unfolding” told by the Quiché Maya, describes the creator as “the Maker, Modeler, Mother-Father of life, of humankind, giver of breath, giver of heart, bearer, up-bringer in the light that lasts of those born in the light, begotten in the light; worrier, knower of everything, whatever there is: sky-earth, lake-sea” (Markman and Markman 1992, 105). In this tale, the dual creator makes three attempts to create men properly. As each attempt is made, the craft and technical skill of the “modeling” is emphasized. The first men were fashioned out of clay, but when the rains came these clay men melted and so another attempt was made. This time, the Bearer-Begetter carves men out of wood; these men don’t melt in the rain, but they possess no mind, no heart, no memory, no power of speech and therefore cannot properly serve their creator(s). Eventually they too are destroyed, the few survivors becoming the monkeys of the forest. Finally, the Maker-Modeler grinds corn—the staple crop of the Maya—and gives it a human shape and brings it to life. Thus the first men are born. But this time, they are too perfect. They can see into heaven and everywhere in the world without moving and, like their creator(s), they understand all mysteries. Not unlike the God of



William Blake's "Elohim Creating Adam." Color print finished in ink on paper. This image suggests an intimate connection between the maker and his creation. Notice, too, that Blake depicts the awakening body of Adam as already entwined in the coils of the serpent as if to suggest that the very act of creation sets up the conditions for error and alienation from the divine presence. Source: © Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

Genesis who decides to cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden because "the man has become like one of Us," the Bearer-Begetter does not want man as a rival or colleague and therefore "unmakes" the first men a little, reducing their eyesight and understanding.

The Basonge myth of Kolombo mui fangi and Mwile also contains elements of *deus faber* and secretion myths in that the competing gods fashion clay models of human beings out of dust and spittle before commanding them to come to life. The Eskimos of the Bering Straits say a man and woman came down out of the sky and lived on Diomed Island for a long time, but they had no children. At last, the man painstakingly carved five dolls out of ivory and five more out of wood. He set them on his table and the next morning they were people. The dolls of ivory had become men and the dolls of wood had become women—a fact which explained to this people why men are physically stronger than women. *Deus faber* stories celebrate the astonishing intricacy and cleverness of creation. Those who watch in awe as the spider weaves its web or who have reflected in wonder upon the many delicate

motions of their fingers when they pick up a coin have already experienced the motivating force behind this type of myth. In this spirit, the Psalmist of the Hebrew scriptures extolled God because in his own eyes he was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

Ex Nihilo

The story often considered the *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) myth par excellence is the account in Genesis of God speaking into existence light and darkness, sun and moon, stars and earth, plants and animals, and birds and fish. God then fashions Adam from the dust and breathes life into him, thus combining *deus faber* with *ex nihilo* motifs. *Ex nihilo*, a Latin term, literally means “from nothingness” or “from spirit” and is used to describe cosmogonies in which the creator brings the world into being through speech, breath, dream, thought, or laughter (Weigle 1989, 7). When the God of Genesis uses breath to speak the universe into existence or to make Adam “a living soul,” he creates “out of nothing.” The Egyptian priests of Memphis, competing with their counterparts in Heliopolis, elevated not Aten but Ptah to the rank of supreme creator. In contrast with Aten’s spitting or ejaculating Shu and Tefnut, Ptah, who was later associated with Greek Hephaestus and Latin Vulcan, artisan gods of great technological skill, forms all things within his heart (the seat of rationality in Egyptian belief) and then names them—a speech act that gives them being.

The Yuki of northern California tell how Solitude Walker, Taikó-mol, emerged from the foam on the primeval sea. Creating a rope, he walked along its length, revolving it in his hands and causing the rope behind him to drag up earth. He did this four times, but each time the waters overwhelmed the land. So Taikó-mol formed a new plan; he fashioned four crooks and planted them in the four directions (which formed the swastika shape that had sacred meaning for the Yuki). Then he spoke a word and the earth appeared which he lined with whale hide so it wouldn’t wash away this time. But the earth was barren, so Taikó-mol created all the animals and plants from the eagle feathers in his headdress. Even then he felt that his work was incomplete. So, fashioning a house from mahogany, Solitude Walker said “tomorrow there will be laughter and singing in this house.” When the sun arose the next morning, the house was full of people.

Modern Perceptions

The story of Taikó-mol has much in common with the Genesis myth. As the story begins, the Yuki creator is upon the face of the deep and, *ex nihilo*, the world appears when he utters the divine word. In addition, Taikó-mol, like the God of Genesis, first creates the earth’s plants and animals, deciding to create human beings when he discovers the natural world is incomplete without them. These similarities—and those that exist between the Judeo-Christian creation story and the many other stories from so-called primitive cultures—bring us back to the caution with which we began this section: we should not let our culturally derived sense of what is normal and right distort our view of other cultures and their ways of describing

what it was like “in the beginning.” While our mythologist forebears were inclined to dismiss such stories as that of Ku’urkil creating the world from his own feces as crude barbarism, we should be more thoughtful. Did the Chuckchee of Siberia really believe that rivers were streams of Father Raven’s urine and lakes were the leftover drops? For that matter, did the Greeks literally believe, say, that Athena was born from the head of Zeus? Those who view seminomadic and hunter-gatherer people as “savages” and “primitives” have been too willing to assume that non-Western cultures, generally, and peoples living close to nature, particularly, were capable only of childlike and literal belief. Anthropological interviews reveal a more complex picture. Yes, many people within “archaic” societies believe literally in their gods and would defend accounts of events that, to our foreign ears, sound preposterous. But within those same cultures some people take a more skeptical—or at least less literal—view. In short, levels of literalness range from fairly disinterested nominal belief to nonliteral belief to very literal belief—just as exists in “modern” Western culture. Many in so-called primitive cultures are quite capable of viewing their myths as fictions that ultimately signify the unknowability of the universe’s origins.

Unwilling to credit the world’s “uncivilized” societies with fully human intelligence, mythologists of previous eras assumed that post-Enlightenment rationalism could “figure out” what those stories of strange gods and barbaric events *really* meant. Some figured that those outlandish stories must have meant that the sun or the weather was completely fascinating to the unsophisticated mind of the “primitives.” Some figured that the primitives couldn’t distinguish clearly between the subconscious chatter of dreams and waking reality. And some figured that the primitives possessed the imaginations of the fully human but not their critical powers. But there is another, more generous, way of looking at myth. We can see that, whether taken completely literally or not, creation myths—whatever their specific features—answer some of humanity’s most fundamental questions. Where did the physical universe come from? What is God like? What explains such natural phenomena as earthquakes and comets? Why does the only world we’ve ever known feel imperfect to us? What’s the meaning of our existence? How and why did sickness, death, and other evils enter the world? When and why did human beings become alienated from the Divine and/or from nature? What explains the existence of the different nations? When and where did the world’s various cultures come by their characteristic practices, beliefs, and life-giving substances?

Many people assume that cosmogonic myths have been disproved and therefore displaced by modern science. But is such an assumption reasonable? When considering questions of ultimate origin, do we find scientific answers any more satisfying than mythic ones? For all the trappings of white lab coats, powerful telescopes and microscopes, and centuries of laboratory science, do we feel any more closely connected to modern science’s creation story of vast, impersonal astrophysical, geological, and biological evolutionary forces resulting in the cosmos, the earth, and those of us living on it than we do to mythic accounts? Is such a story really, for most of us, any more believable and convincing or any less mind-boggling and awe-inspiring than the Genesis story or, for that matter, the story of Earth-Starter and

Turtle dredging up a little mud and sand from the fathomless depths of the primordial ocean?

We want to be careful here. We're not saying that myth is right and science is wrong. It would be absurd to reject what modern science has discovered about the history of the cosmos. Nevertheless, we would do well to remember that cosmogonic myths are expressive forms and not—despite all the euhemerists have said—bad science. Origin myths tell literary rather than literal truths about the origin of the cosmos. Science, on the other hand, attempts to be strictly literal as it describes and measures the universe and all that it contains. We learn from scientific observation that the Earth is laughably insignificant, being only one tiny planet among countless galaxies in an unimaginably large universe that is composed almost entirely of space—that is, of nothing. We learn from cosmogonic myths that despite the unimaginable vastness of the cosmos, despite the very inconceivability of our universe's size and age, people have a purpose and a role to play in cosmic destiny. Confusion arises, however, when one takes literary truth literally—or when one assumes that people unlike oneself *must* do so.

READING CREATION MYTHS

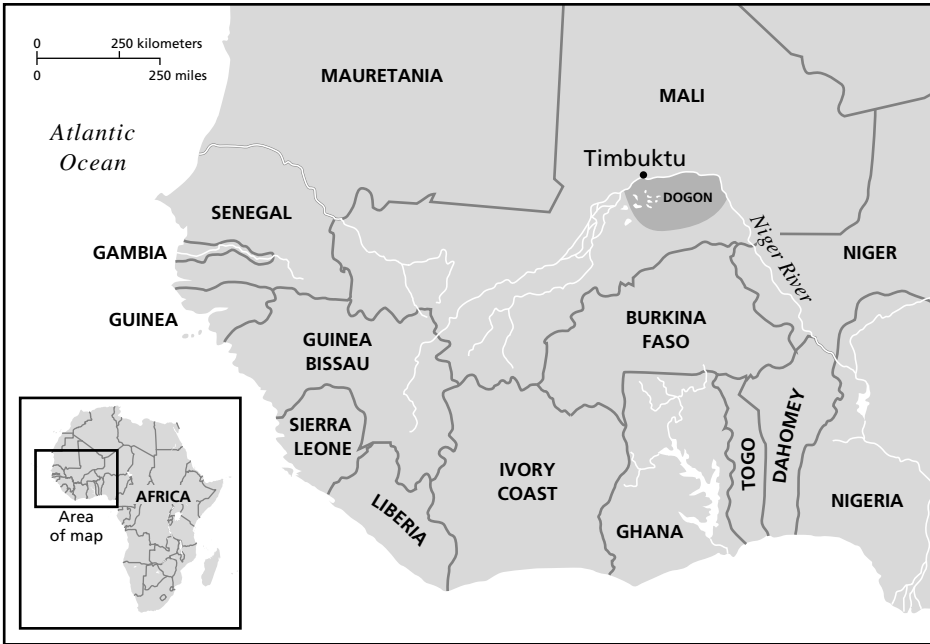
The categories by which we distinguish the motifs operating in the world's cosmogonic myths should not be used too rigidly. As should be apparent, a great many creation myths employ more than one motif. The Yuki and Genesis cosmogonies just discussed employ both the *deus faber* and *ex nihilo* motifs. The Nordic creation myths featuring the evil giant Ymir tend to combine accretion/conjunction, secretion, and sacrifice motifs—the latter evident, for example, in the Edda in which Odin and his brothers kill Ymir and make the world from his body. Thus the nine categories just discussed shouldn't be seen as a way of pigeonholing a myth—"this is an accretion/conjunction myth; this is a sacrifice myth." Rather, these categories should lead to speculation about why certain cultures depict the creation through certain motifs. What does it signify, for example, that, in the Tibetan story, the cosmos emerges through an incredibly gradual process that was not guided by an all-powerful creator? Developing a sufficient answer to this question would require some research on your part; but to demonstrate the kind of reward that asking questions about significance can bring, we could point out that Buddhism is a nontheistic religion. That is, Buddhism sees the manifold activities of the constantly unfolding universe as "the way it is." Gods may be—or may *not* be—a part of the universe's activity, but Buddhism would say that the universe happens the way it does because that is its nature. Noting further the importance to Buddhists of meditation practice and its emphasis on breathing techniques, one might gain an understanding of how the four basic elements are thought to interact in Buddhist metaphysics. With this knowledge, the Tibetan cosmogony discussed above would show a close affinity with the Buddhist worldview. The universe begins with the gentle and rhythmic stirrings of wind—a cosmic analogy to breathing—and it takes the patience of countless "lifetimes" for the nature of the cosmos to fully reveal itself as the world we know.

Read the following myths closely. Note the motifs at work in them. Note also the objects and their uses, the various beings and the interrelationships among them, and the behaviors and apparent attitudes present in the myths, framing questions that you might want to explore through further research. As you read, keep track of the details by asking questions that will help you compare and contrast each of the narratives. What kind of tone does the narrative set (e.g., peaceful, contentious, joyful, serious, humorous, sad)? What kind of relationship is depicted between creator and the human creature? Does the narrative describe a world in which people face hard work and scarcity or light work and plenty? What kinds of religious practices are mentioned or would seem to fit in the world described by the myth? What things and activities are depicted as sacred? What symbols are used? These and many other kinds of questions can lead to a deeper understanding of the myths we present here and of myths generally.

Amma and Nummo Prepare the World

Dogon (Nigeria)

The Dogon occupy a rugged and arid territory that straddles Mali and Nigeria in West Africa. Strict taboos forbidding utterance of the Dogon cosmogony in front of women, children, and the uninitiated prevented anyone outside the tribe's elders from knowing the full account of how Amma, the creator, made mother earth and how a series of "Words" finished creation thereafter. Western observers had spent years among the Dogon recording and seeking explanations for the numerous rituals conditioning every aspect of life from how and where to dig fields for planting to how to build houses to how men and women should properly arrange their bodies for sleep each night. Yet, in all that time, they had no clear idea whether there existed a master narrative that linked and explained these rituals. Even the Dogon's neighbors considered them somewhat backward and uncultured. One day, after anthropologist Marcel Griaule had been with the Dogon for more than 15 years, a messenger came to him, requesting that he come to the home of Ogotemmêli, a blind elder. The reason for this visit, as it turned out, was that the Dogon's spiritual leaders had decided that Griaule was ready to hear the sacred creation story from the man who knew it best—Ogotemmêli. Over the course of 33 interviews, Griaule heard not only the myth but careful explanations of



MAP 2.1 The Territory of the Dogon

how Dogon architecture, textiles, iron work, agriculture, burial and marriage rituals, and a host of other practices commemorate the sacred events narrated in Dogon cosmogony.

Griaule’s book *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* records, in circular and anecdotal fashion, the myth and explanations he heard from the Dogon elder. In this story we see the familiar pattern of an original creator god who begins the work of creation but leaves its completion to others. We have adapted Griaule’s material to the linear story form with which most Westerners are familiar. The result, we hope, captures the unique symbols and fabulous complexity of the Dogon myth, a story which contains elements of secretion, conjugation, two creator, *deus faber*, and *ex nihilo* motifs.

Before anything was, Amma, the one God, rolled pellets of clay in his palms and flung them out into the darkness of space, thus creating the stars. Pleased with the result, Amma rolled out two larger clay balls, shaping them as a potter does, thus forming the sun and moon to further illuminate the darkness. The sun, they say, is a large pot—perhaps even larger than a village—which Amma heated white hot and surrounded with a red-copper spiral of eight turns. The moon’s copper is white and Amma heated it only a quarter at a time.

Having made the celestial lights, the one God Amma squeezed another lump of clay between his palms and flung it out from him, as he had done with the stars. The

clay spread out horizontally, beginning in the north and working to the south, thus forming the earth. Even though the world is a plate lying flat, it is also a fetus in the womb with limbs to the east and west. Lying there, head to the north, feet to the south, the earth was female. Her vagina was an anthill, her clitoris a termite hill. And she was beautiful.

Whisper now! Speak softly of the primordial error! Do not tickle even invisible eardrums when telling of Amma's great mistake! O, but the one God was lonely. O, how he ached for intimacy. He saw the earth's feminine form and was filled with desire. He approached her, ready for intercourse. But, at Amma's approach, the termite hill rose up, refusing farther passage. The termite hill exerted a masculine strength equal to God's organ. No intercourse could take place. But all-powerful God cannot be resisted. Amma cut down the termite hill and plunged himself into the excised earth.

This circumcision was without ritual, this intercourse a breach of order. Amma's act affected the course of things forever. For from this defective union was born a single being—not the twins that are natural. From this defective union was born Jackal, the deluded and deceitful son of God. Jackal was alone from birth and, because of this, he did more things than can be told.

God again had intercourse with his earth-wife; but, with the offending member gone, there was no further disorder. Water, the divine seed, entered the womb of the earth and this time twins were conceived, as is natural and right. The beings thus formed are called Nummo. They were both male and female and exist as an inseparable Pair. Their bodies were green and sleek all over like the surface of water. From head to loins they were human; below that they were serpents. Their red eyes were wide open like people, their tongues were forked like serpents. Their arms were flexible and without joints and their bodies covered with the short, green hairs of vegetation and germination. These spirits were formed of God's divine essence, made of his seed, which is simultaneously the ground, the form, and the substance of the world's life-force. They are the motion and persistence of all things. The Pair is present in all water; they *are* water—the water of seas, of coasts, of torrents, of storms, and of the spoonfuls we drink. Without Nummo, it would not have been possible to create the earth. For the earth was molded clay and water as in all things that have life. Even stones have this life-force, for there is moisture in everything.

The Nummo also produce copper. When the glorious sunburst pierces the cloud-bank, the sun's rays may be seen materializing on the misty horizon. These rays, excreted by the spirits, are of copper and are light. They are water too, because they uphold the earth's moisture as it rises. The Pair excrete light, because they are also light. They were born perfect and complete with eight members. Their number is eight, which is the symbol of speech.

The Nummo, looking down from Heaven, saw their earth-mother naked and speechless from her first disastrous relations with Amma. They descended, bearing ten bunches of fibers pulled from plants already created in Heaven. The ten bunches corresponded to their ten fingers and they formed two strands of them—one for the front, one for the back. This garment was not for modesty. It symbolized the first ordering of the universe and it revealed the sacred helicoid sign in the form of an undulating broken line. For the fibers fell in coils, symbol of tornadoes, of winding tor-

rents, of eddies and whirlwinds, and the writhing motion of serpents. The coils also symbolized the eightfold copper spiral of the sun, which sucks up moisture. The fibers of the coiled strands were still moist with the freshness of the celestial plants and thus were the essence of Nummo. They were Nummo in motion, a wavy line that can be infinitely prolonged.

When Nummo speaks, what comes from their mouth is a warm vapor which conveys and is, in its very essence, speech. The coiled fringes of earth-mother's skirt were the chosen vehicle for the words with which the Spirit desired to reveal to the earth. They endued their webbed hands with magic power by raising them to their lips while they plaited the skirt, so that moisture of Nummo-speech was imparted to the fibers and the spiritual revelation was embodied in the technical instruction.

Thus clothed, the earth acquired its own primitive language. Its syntax was elementary, its verbs few. Its vocabulary was without ornament. One hears its words in breathing and the wind—in sounds of field and jungle scarcely distinguishable from one another. Nevertheless, this simple speech was a vehicle sufficient for the great work of beginning all things.

Now Jackal desired speech more than anything. He craved it so urgently that he laid his hands on the fibers of his mother's skirt—on the fibers that embodied Nummo-speech. His mother, earth, recoiled from this incestuous assault. She withdrew into her own womb; she fled into the anthill. Indeed, she became an ant, hoping to elude her son. But Jackal plunged in after her. The anthill hole was not deep enough to hide in forever. Though she struggled, the earth-mother was eventually subdued by Jackal.

This incestuous act was not without consequence. Jackal acquired the gift of speech and has ever afterward been able to reveal to diviners the plans of God. Moreover, his assault was the cause of the flow of menstrual blood, which stained earth-mother's fiber skirt. This defilement was more than Amma could bear. He rejected his earth-spouse and decided to create living beings without her. Modeling a womb in damp clay, he placed it on the ground and covered it with a pellet flung out into space from heaven. He made a male organ in the same way and, putting it on the ground also, flung out a sphere which stuck to it. The two lumps assumed organic form; they began to quicken. Members separated from the central core and bodies appeared. A human pair arose from the lumps of earth.

The Nummo Pair arrived on the scene, ready to further the action. They foresaw that the original rule of twin births was soon to disappear and that errors might result comparable to those of Jackal, whose birth was single and whose solitary state caused him to act as he did. Therefore Nummo drew two outlines on the ground, one on top of the other, one male and the other female. The man stretched himself out on these two shadows of himself and took both of them for his own. The same was done for the woman.

Thus it came about that each human being from the first was endowed with two souls of different sex—or rather with two principles corresponding to two distinct persons. In the man, the female soul is located in his foreskin; in the woman, the male soul resides in the clitoris. But man's life was not capable of supporting both beings; each person would have to merge himself in the sex for which he or she appeared to be best fitted. The Nummo Pair circumcised the man, removing the femininity

of his foreskin. The excised skin, in turn, became an animal, a *nay*, which is neither serpent nor insect, even though it is classed with serpents. The *nay* was black and white, like the covering for the dead, and its name also means “four,” the female number, and “sun,” a female celestial being. The *nay* symbolized the pain of circumcision and the need for men to suffer in their sexual organs as women do.

The first man had intercourse with the first woman, who later bore the first two children of a series of eight. These eight were the Dogon ancestors. At the moment of birth, the pain of parturition was concentrated in the woman’s clitoris, which was excised by an invisible hand and which then assumed the form of a scorpion. The scorpion’s pouch and sting symbolized the female organ: the venom was the water and the blood of the pain.

Eight ancestors were born of the couple created by God. The four eldest were male, the four youngest, female. By a special dispensation, permitted only this once, the eight ancestors were able to fertilize themselves, being dual and bisexual. From them descended the eight Dogon families. Humanity was organizing itself, if only in a makeshift way. The eventual calamity of single births was mitigated by Nummo tracing the dual soul on the ground. Do not babies, even today, receive their dual souls as they are held by the hips above the drawings on the ground? Is not the superfluous soul later removed through circumcision?

But the divine thirst for perfection could not be satisfied with things in this condition and the Nummo Pair started planning works of redemption. Nummo were aware of the terrifying effect of contact between creatures of flesh and blood and purely spiritual beings. They needed to impart reforms and instructions through human agency, within the human environment, and in forms that human beings could understand and duplicate. And so Nummo returned to earth and entered the anthill, entered the sexual part from which they were themselves the issue. Once there, they would be able to defend their mother from further incestuous attacks by Jackal and would, by their moist, luminous, articulate presence, be able to purge the earth-body that Amma had forever rejected and thus purify it for the activities of life. In the anthill, the male Nummo occupied the place of the termite-hill clitoris which Amma had cut away, while the female Nummo occupied the place of the female element, her womb becoming part of the earth-womb. The Pair thus began the work of regeneration in Amma’s stead.

In those early days, men knew nothing of death and the eight ancestors lived on indefinitely. They had eight separate lines of descendants, each of them being self-propagating since each was both male and female. The four males and the four females were couples in consequence of their sexual parts. The four males were man and woman and the four females were woman and man. Each coupled and conceived within him- or herself and thus produced offspring.

When the time was fully ripe, the eldest of the eight ancestors was led by some latent knowledge to the anthill which Nummo now occupied. On his head, he wore a wooden food bowl for a head-dress, as protection from the sun. He put his two feet into the opening of the anthill and sank slowly into the earth’s womb. Birth in reverse! All that remained above-ground was the round wooden bowl, still bearing traces of the food and the fingerprints of its vanished owner. The food bowl symbolized the eldest ancestors’ body and human nature even as the snake’s sloughed



The Dogon's primordial couple. Carved wood. The first man and first woman gave birth to the eight ancestors from whom the Dogon trace their ancestry. As in the myth, this carving depicts the primordial pair as androgynous. While they are not identical, both figures have beards and breasts and are approximately the same size and build.
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977 (1977.394.15).

skin symbolizes its body and ability to renew itself. Liberated from this earthly condition, the eldest ancestor was led by the male Nummo into the depths of the earth where, in the waters of the womb of the female Nummo, he curled himself up like a fetus and shrank to germinal form. The first ancestor became water, the seed of God and the essence of Nummo.

This process was the work of the Word. The male Nummo's voice accompanied the female Nummo who was speaking to herself and to her own sex. The spoken Word entered into her and wound itself round her womb in a spiral of eight turns. Just as the helical band of copper round the sun gives to it its daily movement, so the spiral of the Word gave to the womb its regenerative movement. Thus perfected by water and words, the spirit of the eldest ancestor was expelled and went up to heaven. All eight ancestors in succession had to undergo this transformation; but, when the turn of the seventh ancestor came, something powerful was revealed.

The seventh in a series, it must be remembered, represents perfection. Though equal in quality to the others, he is the sum of the feminine element, which is four, and the masculine element, which is three. Thus, he is the symbol of the total union of male and female. He is unity. And to this complete unity belongs the mastery of words, the command of language. The disappearance of the seventh into the anthill set in motion many good things.

In the earth-womb, the seventh became, like the others, water and spirit and his development, like theirs, followed the rhythm of the words uttered by the two transforming Nummo. The words which the female Nummo spoke to herself turned into a spiral and entered her vagina. The seventh ancestor learned these words inside the earth-womb. While the other ancestors had heard these words also, only the seventh mastered them and could put them to use. The seventh ancestor, therefore, received the perfect knowledge of a Word—the second Word to be heard on earth, clearer than the first and not, like the first, reserved for particular recipients, but destined for all humanity. And the second Word would give people an advantage over God's wicked son, Jackal, who knew only the primitive first Word.

The potent second Word increased the powers of the seventh ancestor, who gradually came to regard his regeneration in the earth-womb as equivalent to his capturing and possessing that fertile space. Little by little, he took possession of the whole organism, using it for his own purposes. Eventually his lips began to merge with the edges of the anthill, which widened and became a mouth. Pointed teeth emerged, eighty in all, ten for each ancestor. The earth-womb had become a mouth and the time for new instruction was at hand. But, fearing that normal men would not be able to bear direct contact with purely spiritual beings, the seventh ancestor imparted sacred instruction to the ant. From this earth-being men would receive the vital teachings.

At sunrise on the appointed day, the seventh ancestor spat out eighty threads of cotton; these he laced among his upper teeth even as a weaver prepares the loom. He did the same with his lower teeth and began to work his jaws back and forth. His whole face took part in the work. His nose studs served as the block; the stud in his lower lip functioned as a shuttle. The seventh ancestor's movements were a great teaching; he was speaking even as he wove the threads into cloth. With his forked

tongue pushing the thread of the weft to and fro, the seventh Spirit wove the threads, breathing the second revealed Word into the material. By imparting the Word through a technical process, the seventh ancestor showed that material actions and spiritual forces are identical, that they must always be in cooperation.

The words that the Spirit breathed through the thread filled the interstices of warp and weft. They were one with the cloth, which is why woven material is called *soy* or “the spoken word.” *Soy* also means seven to honor the Spirit who spoke as he wove. While the work progressed, the ant came and went along the edge of the anthill-mouth, hearing and remembering the words of the seventh ancestor. Having received this instruction, she passed it along to the humans living in those regions. Up to the time that the ancestors descended into the anthill, men had been living in lairs dug in the level soil. But when they discovered the food bowls of the ancestors around the opening of the anthill they noticed the ant’s home as if for the first time. They realized that the anthill’s design surpassed their own dwellings in comfort and safety. This revelation set the people to work constructing “anthills” of their own, complete with store-chambers for grain and numerous passageways to baffle predators and enemies. Through the second Word, human beings slowly emerged from their primitive condition. By observing the ant, human beings learned to build villages and received from her the knowledge of weaving.

On earth, order was gradually spreading; the Nummo’s work of regeneration was taking hold. But there was trouble in Heaven. No one is quite sure what happened, but Spirits do not fall from Heaven except in anger or because they are expelled. It happened like this. After their transformation, the Nummo Pair had received the eight ancestors in Heaven; but, because they were the eldest, they had the rights of the elder generation. So they imposed order; they imposed a network of rules upon the eight ancestors, separating them from one another and forbidding them to visit one another. God had given the eight an assortment of grains for their food and for each of these the eight ancestors were to be responsible. But, after a while, the eight ancestors broke the rule forbidding them to meet and further transgressed by consuming each other’s grain. This made them unclean in Amma’s sight and the ancestors felt that their essence was incompatible with the heavenly regions. The eight ancestors therefore resolved to return to earth and bring with them anything they could find in Heaven that might prove useful to men.

The first ancestor took a woven basket with a circular opening and a square base in which to carry the earth and puddled clay required for the construction of a world-system, of which he was to be one of the counselors. This basket served as a model for a structure of considerable size which he built upside down, as it were, with the round opening, 20 cubits (60 feet) in diameter, on the ground and the square base, with sides eight cubits (24 feet) long, forming a flat roof. The entire structure was 10 cubits (30 feet) tall. This framework he covered with clay made of the earth from Heaven and in the thickness of the clay, starting from the center of each side of the square, he made stairways of ten steps each facing each of the cardinal directions. At the sixth step of the north staircase he put a door giving access to the interior in which were eight chambers arranged on two floors. The symbols embedded in the design were as follows:

The circular base represented the sun.

The square roof represented the sky.

A circle in the center of the square roof represented the moon.

The tread of each step was female and the rise of each step male and thus the four stairways of ten steps together represented the eighty original Dogon families, offspring of the eight ancestors.

Each stairway held one kind of creature, and was associated with a constellation:

The north stairway, associated with the Pleiades, was for men and fishes.

The south stairway, associated with Orion's Belt, was for domestic animals.

The east stairway, associated with Venus, was for birds.

The west stairway, associated with the so-called Long-Tailed Star, was for wild animals, vegetables, and insects.

Each step of each stairway had the representatives of various species. And each animal on each step was a line-leader behind whom were other animals of similar kind. On the first step of the west stairway, for example, stood the *walbanu*, the red antelope. Behind him stood the white, the black, and the *kâ* antelopes. All this must be described in words and it sounds impossible that so many large creatures stood on steps only a cubit wide, but everything on the steps was a symbol—symbolic antelopes, symbolic vultures, symbolic hyenas. Any number of symbols could find room on a three-foot step.

This sacred building was the Granary of the Master of the Pure Earth. Upon its roof the first ancestor had assembled the tools and implements of a forge, for his future task was to teach men the use of iron so that they might cultivate the land. The bellows was made of white sheepskin, its two halves joined together like twins. The hammer was a large iron block with a cone-shaped handle and a square striking surface. The anvil, similarly shaped, was fixed in a wooden beam. The ancestral smith had an iron bow and a spindle for an arrow. Aiming at the center of the moon-circle in the Granary roof and having attached a long thread of gossamer round the shaft to form a bobbin, he sunk the spindle-arrow deep within the circle. To a second arrow, the great Constructor attached the other end of the thread and shot it into the vault of the sky to give it purchase. The entire edifice became like a spindle whorl.

The Granary, then, was both a building and a dense constellation of symbols; it was the material embodiment of the third Word that would soon be revealed on earth and granaries on earth would be patterned after it. It was a picture of the new order about to be revealed as the third Word. The Granary showed in a form that could be comprehended by flesh and blood the world-system that would soon complete the redemptive work of Nummo. It was the plaited basket which had provided the ancestral Constructor with his model and which would serve in the future as the basic unit of volume. The one-cubit (three-foot) rise of the stairs on the four stairways would serve as the basic unit of length. The basic unit of area was provided by the

flat roof, whose sides were eight cubits each. The Granary was also the head of the smith's hammer (which is male) and the four-sided anvil (which is female).

The Granary was the ideal realization of the anthill. It was also the sun, moon, sky, earth, and the four directions. It was the source of all seed, both animal and vegetable. It was the body of the Spirit of Water—the Nummo—and the female human body combined. Its exterior walls and inner partitions were the skeleton; the four pillars supporting the square roof were the legs and arms; the door on the north stair was the mouth; the eight inner compartments containing each of the eight types of seed given to the ancestors symbolized the stomach, gizzard, heart, small liver, spleen, intestines, great liver, and gall bladder. The round jar in the center symbolized the womb; a second, smaller jar enclosed within the first contained *Lannea acida* and represented the fetus.

Having thus completed the Granary of the Master of the Pure Earth, the first ancestor crept into the workshop of the Nummo, who are the smiths of Heaven. With a forked crook or “robber's stick,” the ancestral smith stole a piece of the sun in the form of live embers and white-hot iron. In his haste, he dropped some of the embers and had to return to pick them up and was so anxious that, at first, he could not find the entrance to the Granary and had to circle it several times. Finally, he climbed the steps to the roof and stashed the stolen fire in one of the skins of the bellows, exclaiming “*Gouyo!*” “Stolen!”

Without wasting another moment, the first smith hurled the Granary along the arc of a rainbow toward the earth. The gossamer thread spun out from the top of the granary in serpentine coils, suggesting the everlasting movement of the Nummo's helicoid sign. As the Granary glided toward earth, the first smith stood ready with bellows, hammer, and bow to defend against attack from Heaven. It came in the form of a firebrand hurtled by the female Nummo, which arrived with a great thunderclap. The first ancestor deflected its force with the bellows. But, because he had stored embers from the sun within the bellows, the device had acquired some of the sun's essence and so the firebrand could not prevail against it. The ancestral smith doused the flames of the firebrand, whose name was *bazu*. *Bazu* was the origin of the worship of the female fire. No sooner were the flames extinguished than the male Nummo hurled a second firebrand. But it was no more effective than the first. The second flame was named *anakyé* and was to become the origin of the worship of the male fire.

The thunder increased the velocity of the Granary and now it hurtled at top speed along the rainbow's arc. Seeing that impact was only moment's away, the first ancestor assumed a defensive posture. Then, WHACK! The Granary was on the ground. Because he was of one essence with the Nummo, the first ancestor still retained the flexible bones of their arms and legs; but, when the Granary collided with the earth, his arms and legs were broken at the level of elbows and knees. The first ancestor retained these joints ever afterwards, thus properly equipping him to perform the work of a smith. Moreover, when the Granary crashed into the earth, the symbolic humans, animals, and vegetation arrayed upon the Granary steps scattered in a great cloud of dust.

The first ancestor descended the north stairway and established a square field, 80 cubits to a side, orienting it to the Granary. This field he further divided into 80

times 80 squares and distributed these among the other ancestors whose destiny it was to remain on earth. Along the median line of the square from north to south, he built eight dwelling-houses, mixing the defiled soil with the pure mud of the Granary's walls, thus further purifying the earth. Later, as the land was gradually cleared, the impurity receded. And so it was that wherever cultivation spread, impurity receded.

To the north of the median line, the Great Constructor erected the first smithy on earth. But he could not completely impart the third Word on his own. Immediately after his arrival, the other ancestors descended along the rainbow: the ancestor of the leather workers, and the ancestor of the minstrels, each with his tools and instruments. Each of the ancestors descended in order—until the eighth ancestor broke rank and descended ahead of the seventh, the master of Speech.

What happened next determined the way the reorganization of the world would take place. Angry that the order of precedence had been broken, the seventh ancestor assumed the form of a great serpent and lunged toward the Granary to take the seeds from it. Some say the master of Speech bit the skin of the bellows. Others say that he came down at the same time as the smith in the form of the Granary itself and then became a great serpent and quarreled with the first ancestor. Still others say that upon the arrival of the Granary, the smith found the men of the eight families, and set up his smithy in their midst. When he put down the skins of the bellows, the great serpent suddenly appeared and fell upon them, scattering the millet all around. However it was, the men killed the great serpent. The smith gave them the body to eat and kept the head, taking it to the smith and burying it under his seat. That is why the seventh Nummo ancestor is present in every smithy.

From the time of the smith's coming, men had joints. Up till then, they had the flexible arm and leg bones of the Nummo which would not bend enough to do work. But arms alone—even arms with elbows—and bare hands are limited in what they can do. But in the first months after the Granary came down from Heaven, the first ancestor forged hoes of iron, thus giving man a longer arm and thus signaling that the work of agriculture was about to begin. Before this time, there were few plants and animals on earth—and nothing was cultivated for use. But, even with tools and the granary, there was no rain and thus the new agricultural order could not begin.

Lébé was the eldest man living and belonged to the eighth ancestor's family. Seven is the rank of the Master of Speech, but eight is Speech itself. Thus, Lébé was of all living beings on earth the most truly representative of the Word. It was time for the older, second Word—the word learnt from weaving—to give way to the third Word—the word of iron-making and agriculture. This new Word should have been imparted by the seventh ancestor, but he had been killed and eaten, his head buried under the seat in the first smithy. Thus, Lébé would have to pass into the same world as the seventh ancestor in order for the purposes of God to be fulfilled. So, Lébé died.

But his death was only in appearance. Just as the seventh ancestor was not really dead, Lébé could not really die. Nevertheless, they dug a grave, oriented north-south in the field not far from the first smithy. They laid him flat on his back with his head to the north, aligned exactly with the body of Earth-Mother. Nowadays, the

dead are buried with proper ceremony, wrapped in the black-and-white checked cloth of the dead, males on their right sides, females on their left. They did not bend Lébé's limbs for a few moments so as to form the fetus and thus prefigure the regeneration. But, this was before people had become acquainted with death and before instructions in funerary ritual had been given.

The first sounds of the smithy were then heard. The vibrations penetrated into the depths of the earth, reaching the seventh ancestor, whom men had killed. As the rhythmic sounds of the bellows blowing up the fire and the hammer striking the anvil came down to him, the seventh ancestor Nummo took his spirit form. He rose up, human above the waist and reptile below, jerking and swaying to the rhythm of the smithy. This dance brought him to the tomb of Lébé and, working his way to the north of the grave, where the skull was, the seventh ancestor took the old man's body into his womb and gave new life to it. Then, always in time to the smithy's sounds, he expelled into the tomb a torrent of water and Lébé's transformed being. Where his body had been, water, symbol of rushing torrents and of stagnant pools, lay in a great sheet. From this underground lake five rivers flowed, one from each arm, each leg, and the head. The waters also symbolized the waters that issue forth at birth. In the Nummo's womb, Lébé's bones had been transformed into colored stones and ejected into the bottom of the tomb, forming the outline of his skeleton. Today, all priests wear round their necks the transformed bones of Lébé.

But men did not know of the old man's subterranean transformation, nor did they know it was the reason for the rains that now fell in abundance. Indeed, the first rains were for purification. The seventh Nummo, a pure spirit, in swallowing the old man, had assimilated defiled human nature and the lapsed second Word. When he released water to the rhythm of the hammer striking the anvil, he ejected a liquid which carried away impurity as well as the pure covenant stones. The rain washed this impure liquid away and thus the earth became ready for planting. The smith, who had been waiting for the rains, emerged from the smithy and taught men the art of sowing. Each family tended its plot and the eight grains, given by the one God, Amma were planted. And so the third Word was fully revealed and order was established.

As for Lébé, he was "eaten" because he was the eldest descendant of the eighth ancestor, the family of the Word. In eating Lébé, the seventh Nummo, the Master of Speech, took all that there was of good in the earlier Word and incorporated it in the stones. In eating Lébé, that which was human was permanently intermingled with the divine through the sacred stones. All that was impure was cast out with the water and carried away by the rains and spiritual truth was revealed in a technical process.

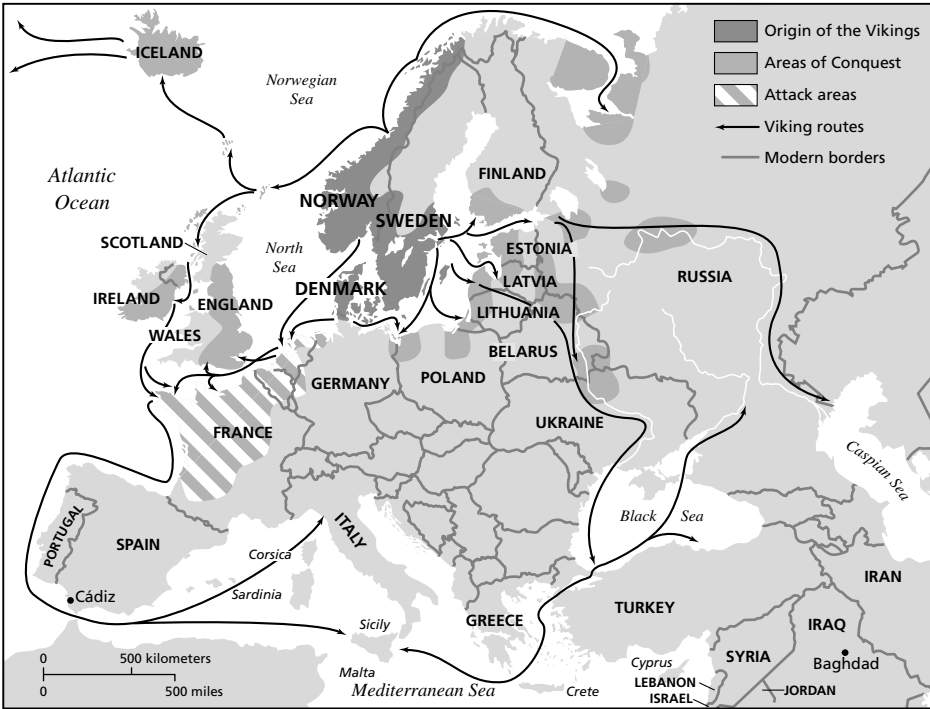
May Nummo and Lébé never cease to be the same good thing they now are!
May they never lose this identity!

The Creation, from *The Eddas*

Norse (Iceland)

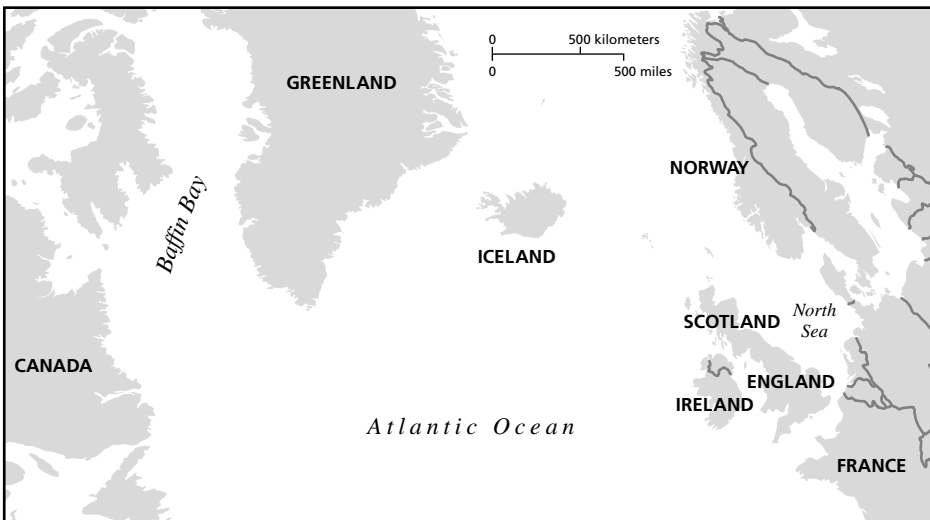
Between the years 780 and 1070 CE, bands of Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes (collectively known as the Vikings) were arguably the most influential power in Europe. At the height of their power, they controlled Scotland, Ireland, half of England, Iceland, Greenland, most of France, Lisbon, Cadiz, Pisa, Sicily, Novgorod, and Kiev, and they maintained trading colonies as far west as Newfoundland and New England (500 years before Columbus) and as far south and east as Baghdad. They had a pantheon of 14 major gods and conceived the cosmos as divided into three levels: Asgard (where the major gods, fertility gods, and light elves lived), Midgard (where men, giants, dwarves, and dark elves lived), and Niflheim (the underworld, where the evil dead died a second time in the fortress city of Hel). Running through and ultimately reaching above heaven is Yggdrasil, the enormous ash tree that apparently existed before the beginning and will survive after even the gods and the universe fade into the twilight of time.

Norse myths, including the creation story that follows, come to us from only a handful of sources. Thirty-four stories, written at different times by different authors, come to us from the *Codex Regius* (ca. 1270 CE) and a few others have been gleaned from the *Arnarnagnaean Codex*. These poems are collectively known as the *Elder* or *Poetic Edda* (the term Edda probably derives from an Old Norse word for poem or poetry). Students of myth can be forever grateful to Snorri Sturluson, a man of letters, historian, politician, critic, and poet, whose literary efforts culminated in the *Prose Edda* (ca. 1220), a book which includes rules for Norse epic poetry and which retells a number of myths that would otherwise have been lost to us. As a Christian, Sturluson did not value the myths he was retelling as sacred truth; rather his was a scholar's and storyteller's interest and students of myth should be aware when reading the *Prose Edda* that he made artistic embellishments and devout adjustments to the original text. Nevertheless, his gifts as a storyteller were such that the retellings usually greatly exceeded the imaginative power and artistic skill of other versions.



MAP 2.2a Norse (Viking) Territory and Areas of Trade and Influence

MAP 2.2b North Atlantic Regions of Norse Exploration and Settlement



Burning ice, biting flame; that is how life began. In the south is a realm called Muspell. That region flickers with dancing flames: It seethes and it shines. No one can endure it except those born into it. Black Surt is there; he sits on the furthest reach of that land, brandishing a flaming sword; he is already waiting for the end when he will rise and savage the gods and whelm the whole world with fire.

In the north is a realm called Niflheim. It is packed with ice and covered with vast sweeps of snow. In the heart of that region lies the spring Hvergelmir and that is the source of eleven rivers named the Elivagar: they are cool Svól and Gunathra the defiant, Fjorm and bubbling Fimbulthul, fearsome Slid and storming Hrid, Sylg, Ylg, broad Vid and Leipt which streaks like lightning, and freezing Gjoll.

Between these realms there once stretched a huge and seeming emptiness; this was Ginnungagap. The rivers that sprang from Hvergelmir streamed into the void. The yeasty venom in them thickened and congealed like slag, and the rivers turned into ice. That venom also spat out drizzle—an unending dismal hagger that, as soon as it settled, turned into rime. So it went on until all the northern part of Ginnungagap was heavy with layers of ice and hoar frost, a desolate place haunted by gusts and skuthers of wind.

Just as the northern part was frozen, the southern was molten and glowing, but the middle of Ginnungagap was as mild as hanging air on a summer evening. There, the warm breath drifting north from Muspell met the rime from Niflheim; it touched it and played over it, and the ice began to thaw and drip. Life quickened in those drops, and they took the form of a giant. He was called Ymir. Ymir was a frost giant; he was evil from the first. While he slept, he began to sweat. A man and woman grew out of the ooze under his left armpit, and one of his legs fathered a son on the other leg. Ymir was the forefather of all the frost giants, and they called him Aurgelmir.

As more of the ice in Ginnungagap melted, the fluid took the form of a cow. She was called Audumla. Ymir fed off the four rivers of milk that coursed from her teats, and Audumla fed off the ice itself. She licked the salty blocks and by the evening of the first day a man's hair had come out of the ice. Audumla licked more and by the evening of the second day a man's head had come. Audumla licked again and by the evening of the third day the whole man had come. His name was Buri. Buri was tall and strong and good-looking. In time he had a son called Bor and Bor married a daughter of Bolthor, one of the frost giants. Her name was Bestla and she mothered three children, all of them sons. The first was Odin, the second was Vili, and the third was Ve.

All this was in the beginning, before there were waves of sand, the sea's cool waves, waving grass. There was no earth and no heaven above; only Muspell and Niflheim and, between them, Ginnungagap.

The three sons of Bor had no liking for Ymir and the growing gang of unruly, brutal frost giants; as time went on, they grew to hate them. At last they attacked Ymir and killed him. His wounds were like springs; so much blood streamed from them, and so fast, that the flood drowned all the frost giants except Bergelmir and his wife. They embarked in their boat—it was made out of a hollowed tree trunk—and rode on a tide of gore.

Odin and Vili and Ve hoisted the body of the dead frost giant on to their shoulders and carted it to the middle of Ginnungagap. That is where they made the world from his body. They shaped the earth from Ymir's flesh and the mountains from his unbroken bones; from his teeth and jaws and the fragments of his shattered bones they made rocks and boulders and stones.

Odin and Vili and Ve used the welter of blood to make landlocked lakes and to make the sea. After they had formed the earth, they laid the rocking ocean in a ring right round it. And it is so wide that most men would dismiss the very idea of crossing it. Then the three brothers raised Ymir's skull and made the sky from it and placed it so that its four corners reached to the ends of the earth. They set a dwarf under each corner, and their names are East and West and North and South. Then Odin and Vili and Ve seized on the sparks and glowing embers from Muspell and called them sun and moon and stars; they put them high in Ginnungagap to light heaven above and earth below. In this way the brothers gave each star its proper place; some were fixed in the sky, others were free to follow the paths appointed for them.

The earth was round and lay within the ring of the deep sea. Along the strand the sons of Bor marked out tracts of land and gave them to the frost giants and the rock giants; and there, in Jotunheim, the giants settled and remained. They were so hostile that the three brothers built an enclosure further inland around a vast area of the earth. They shaped it out of Ymir's eyebrows, and called it Midgard. The sun warmed the stones in the earth there, and the ground was green with sprouting leeks. The sons of Bor used Ymir's brains as well; they flung them up into the air and turned them into every kind of cloud.

One day, Odin and Vili and Ve were striding along the frayed edge of the land, where the earth meets the sea. They came across two fallen trees with their roots ripped out of the ground; one was an ash, the other an elm. Then the sons of Bor raised them and made from them the first man and woman. Odin breathed into them the spirit of life; Vili offered them sharp wits and feeling hearts; and Ve gave them the gifts of hearing and sight. The man was called Ask and the woman Embla and they were given Midgard to live in. All the families and nations and races of men are descended from them.

One of the giants living in Jotunheim, Narvi, had a daughter called Night who was as dark eyed, dark haired and swarthy as the rest of her family. She married three times. Her first husband was a man called Naglfari and their son was Aud; her second husband was Annar and their daughter was Earth; and her third husband was shining Delling who was related to the sons of Bor. Their son was Day and, like all his father's side of the family, Day was radiant and fair of face.

Then Odin took Night and her son Day, sat them in horse-drawn chariots, and set them in the sky to ride round the world every two half-days. Night leads the way and her horse is frosty-maned Hrimfaxi. Day's horse is Skinfaxi; he has a gleaming mane that lights up sky and earth alike.

A man called Mundilfari living in Midgard had two children and they were so beautiful that he called his son Moon and his daughter Sun; Sun married a man called Glen. Odin and his brothers and their offspring, the Aesir, were angered at

such daring. They snatched away both children and placed them in the sky to guide the chariots of the sun and moon—the constellations made by the sons of Bor to light the world out of the sparks from Muspell.

Moon leads the way. He guides the moon on its path and decides when he will wax and wane. He does not travel alone, as you can see if you look into the sky; for Moon in turn plucked two children from Midgard, Bil and Hjuki, whose father is Vidfinn. They were just walking away from the well Byrgir, carrying between them the water cask Soeg on the pole Simul, when Moon swooped down and carried them off.

Sun follows behind. One of her horses is called Arvak because he rises so early, and the other Alsvið because he is immensely strong. The Aesir inserted iron-cold bellows under their shoulder-blades to keep them cool. Sun always seems to be in a great hurry, and that is because she is chased by Skoll, the wolf who is always snapping and growling close behind her. In the end he will catch her. And the wolf that races in front of Sun is called Hati; he is after Moon and will run him down in the end. Both wolves are the sons of an aged giantess who lived in Iron Wood, east of Midgard.

After the sons of Bor had made the first man and woman, and set Night and Day, Moon and Sun in the sky, they remembered the maggots that had squirmed and swarmed in Ymir's flesh and crawled out over the earth. Then they gave them wits and the shape of men, but they live under the hills and mountains in rocky chambers and grottoes and caverns. These man-like maggots are called dwarfs. Modsognir is their leader and his deputy is Durin.

So the earth was fashioned and filled with men and giants and dwarfs, surrounded by the sea and covered by the sky. Then the sons of Bor built their own realm of Asgard—a mighty stronghold, a place of green plains and shining palaces high over Midgard. The two regions were linked by Bifrost, a flaming rainbow bridge; it was made of three colours with magic and great skill, and it is wonderfully strong. All the Aesir, the guardians of men, crossed over and settled in Asgard. Odin, Allfather, is the oldest and greatest of them all; there are twelve divine gods and twelve divine goddesses, and a great assembly of other Aesir. And this was the beginning of all that has happened, remembered or forgotten, in the regions of the world. And all that has happened, and all the regions of the world, lie under the branches of the ash Yggdrasill, greatest and best of trees. It soars over all that is; its three roots delve into Asgard and Jotunheim and Niflheim, and there is a spring under each. A hawk and eagle sit in it, a squirrel scurries up and down it, deer leap within it and nibble at it, a dragon devours it, and it is sprinkled with dew. It gives life to itself, it gives life to the unborn. The winds whirl round it and Yggdrasill croons or groans. Yggdrasill always was and is and will be.

From Chaos to King Zeus, from Hesiod's *Theogony*

Greek

The story that follows here comes from an ancient Greek poem called the *Theogonia*, which means “the birth of the gods.” It was written by Hesiod, the second earliest of the Greek poets we know about, Homer being the earliest. Hesiod lived and wrote around 700 BCE.

The *Theogony*, as we call it, has a genuine mythic consciousness: it is more spiritual and not as thought-out as much later Greek and Latin poetry about myths tends to be. Hesiod is closer to a time when there was less distinction between the world of myth and that of daily life. The primal bond between Gaia (Earth) and Ouranos (Sky) suggests this closeness for they are, on the one hand, gods as we traditionally conceive them and, on the other, elements of nature itself. This undifferentiated mixture of the mundane and the celestial and its violent overthrow parallels human evolution. Through struggle and craft, human beings have gradually separated themselves from the merely natural and have, like Zeus, imposed a rational order on the a-rationality of the phenomenal world in order to gain the advantages of civilization.

The *Theogony* is myth at its best. The more we read this story the more we begin to see ourselves, our relationships with our parents and family, and the functions of society.

The Beginning

The very first to exist was Chaos,
and then Gaia, whose expansive lap
is the ever-safe foundation of the immortal gods
who live on the snowy peak of Olympos;
and then dark Tartaros, deep in the earth with its expansive paths;
and then Eros, the most beautiful of the gods,
whose power loosens our bones—
who controls the thoughts and decisions
of every god and every man.

From Chaos came Erebos and black Night.
From Night came Air and Day,
whom she conceived and gave birth to
from her love with Erebos.



MAP 2.3 Ancient Greek World

Then Gaia gave birth to someone her equal,
the starry sky Ouranos, so that he
would cover her whole
and be the ever-safe foundation of the blessed gods.

She gave birth to the high Mountains
where heavenly Nymphs enjoy life
in mountain valleys.
But without the pleasure of love
she bore Pontos, whose stormy waves
are a barren sea. But then she
slept with Ouranos and bore Ocean
with his deep currents; then Koios and Krios;
Hyperion and Iapetos; and Theia and Rhea;
and Themis and Mnemosyne; and Phoebe
with her crown of gold;
and lovely Tethys; and after these
the youngest, most dreadful of her children, Kronos,

whose plans are crafty
and who hated his powerful father.

116–38

Kronos Overcomes His Father Ouranos

All the children that Gaia and Ouranos had
were dreadful and from the moment they were born
their father hated them.

So as soon as they were born
he hid them, not letting them see light,
deep down in Gaia, and Ouranos
enjoyed his evil. But huge Gaia,
confined and groaning from within,
thought of something cunning and evil:
Quickly making a kind of gray steel,
she forged a great sickle and showed it
to her children. She spoke to them
to give them courage though her heart was sad:

“My children, your father is wicked. But if you’re willing
to listen to me, we can get revenge
for this evil and outrageous thing your father’s done,
as he was the first to plan these shameful things.”

This is what she said, and her children were immensely scared.
Not one of them uttered a word, but great Kronos,
whose plans are crafty, stood up and spoke these words [*mythoi*]
to his dear mother:

“Mother, I promise I’ll finish this
since I don’t give a damn about my father,
as he was the first to plan these shameful things.”

This is what he said, and huge Gaia’s heart
was very happy. So she hid him
by putting him in a bush.
And in his hands she put the sickle,
its blade like jagged teeth,
and told him the whole plan
with all its deceit.

Bringing on the night, great Ouranos came,
and eager for love, he caught hold of
Gaia on all sides
and she was stretched in every direction.
But from the bush his son stretched out
his left hand and with his right,
holding the huge sickle, long and jagged,

quickly cut his own father's penis off
 and threw it back so that it went behind him:
 it didn't leave his hand without purpose
 as Gaia received all the drops of blood that hemorrhaged,
 and when a year had passed
 she produced the powerful Furies
 and the great Giants, shining in their armor,
 long spears in their hands,
 and the Nymphs who are called Melian
 throughout the expanse of the earth
 and the penis he'd first cut off with the steel sickle
 he threw out into the wild sea from the mainland
 and it drifted in the ocean for a long time.

But then from this immortal flesh
 a white foam [*aphros*] grew all around
 and from within a girl was born

. . .

Both gods and men call her Aphrodite
 as she was born in *aphros* . . .

154-97

Zeus Overcomes His Father Kronos

Kronos subdued Rhea who gave birth
 to famous children: Hestia, Demeter, and Hera
 with her sandals of gold; and powerful Hades
 who with his merciless heart lives under the ground;
 and earth-pounding Poseidon Ennosigaios;
 and Zeus with all his wise plans,
 the father of both gods and men,
 whose thunder shakes the expansive earth.

But great Kronos swallowed them down as each came out
 of Rhea's holy womb and fell on their knees.
 He did this so that no other royal descendant of Ouranos would
 have the right to his throne.
 For he'd learned before from Gaia and starry Ouranos that,
 even though he was strong, it was his destiny to be
 overcome by his son through the intentions of great Zeus.

So Kronos keep careful watch and swallowed down
 his children while Rhea felt a pain
 she couldn't forget. But when she was
 to give birth to Zeus, father of both gods and men,
 she asked her parents for a plan:
 how she might give birth to her child

without Kronos knowing; and how one of the
Furies of her father might get revenge.

They listened to their daughter and agreed,
both of them, to explain just what was fated
for king Kronos and her son
with his powerful heart.

So they sent her to Lyktos
in the rich land of Crete when she
was just about to give birth to great Zeus,
the last of her children.

And there huge Gaia received him
on the broad shores of Crete
to nurse and raise him.
She brought him there to Lyktos first
under cover of night
and taking him in her hands she hid
him in a deep cave
in the depths of holy earth
on Mt. Aigaion with its thick woods.

She then wrapped a great stone
in baby's clothes and gave this
to the great lord, the son of Ouranos,
the king of the former gods.

He took it in his hands
and put it down into his gut,
cruel god, who didn't see
that the stone was not his son;
that his son was still alive—not troubled,
unable to be defeated;
that his son would overcome him
with his bare hands by brute force
and take revenge; that his own son
would be lord of the immortals.

And so Zeus' strength and glistening arms
and legs grew quickly.
And when a year had passed, great Kronos,
whose plans are crafty, but whom Gaia's
wiser plans deceived, spit up his children.
And first was the stone, the last he'd swallowed,
which Zeus set up on earth with its wide paths
at the sanctuary of Pytho in the valleys
beneath Mt. Parnassos:
he left it as a sign, a wonder to mortals.

Out of the Blue

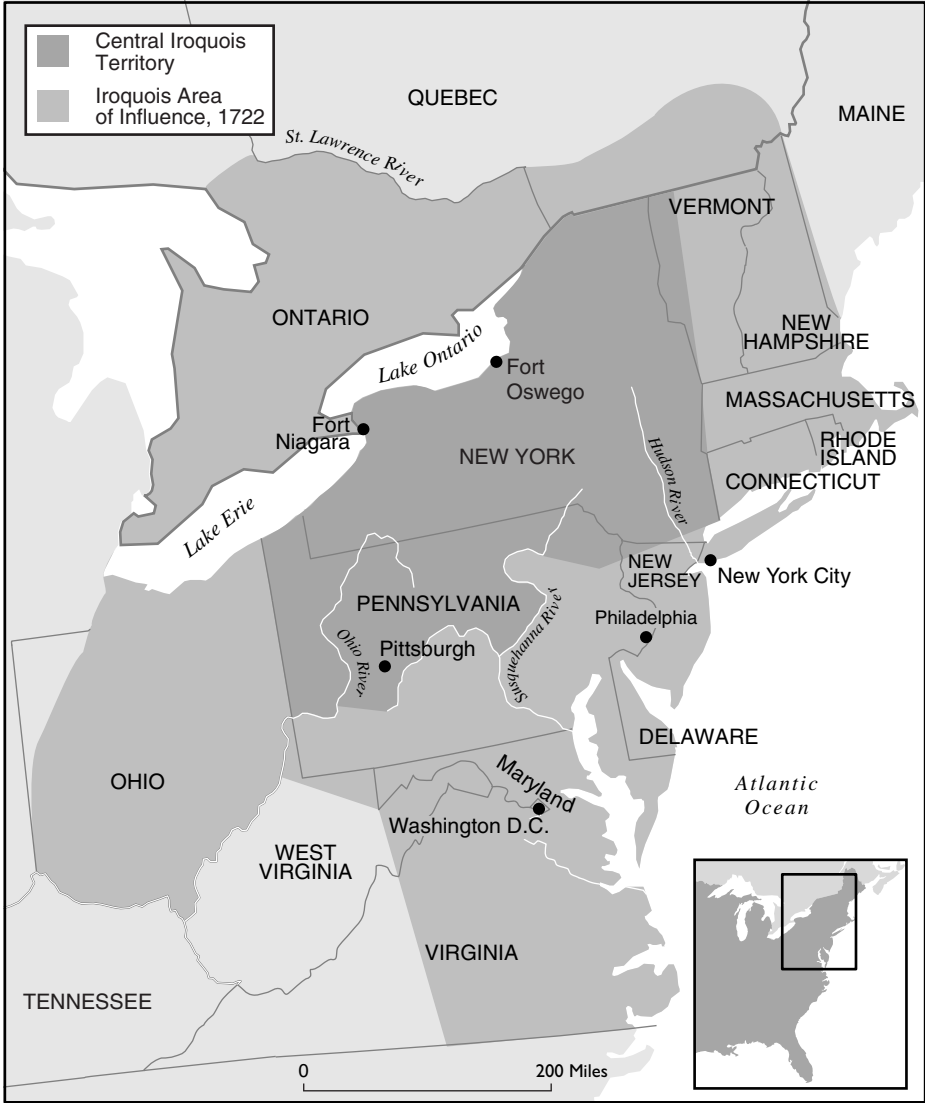
Iroquois: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora (Northeastern United States and Southeastern Canada)

Versions of this story (or parts of it) have been widely anthologized and have been attributed to most of the six nations comprising the Iroquois League after 1722 (the Tuscarora were admitted to the League at that time). Tradition has it that the League was formed through the efforts of a Mohawk, Hiawatha (not the hero of Longfellow's poem), around 1550. At the height of its influence in the 17th century, the Iroquois League controlled a vast territory that included most of the Great Lakes watershed, extending from the Atlantic coast to Michigan and from Ontario to North Carolina. Coordinating their political and military efforts through a democratic intertribal republic, each of the League's nations were represented by delegates elected from nominations submitted by the tribes' mothers. Tribal chiefs, too, owed their positions to matrilineal succession and acted with the consent and cooperation of their tribe's women of child-bearing age.

As one might expect in a society where prestige and identity are conferred through the mother's bloodline, the Iroquoian nations attributed the creation of our world to a female being who jumped into a hole in the ground of her world and emerged from the sky of ours. Indeed, one will find her referred to as Sky Woman in some anthologies. The version of the story presented here was synthesized from a number of earlier versions by Paula Gunn Allen in consultation with elders of the surviving tribes of the Iroquois League. Those interested in reading versions gathered from Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca sources around 1899 and in reading a 19th-century "ethnological" analysis of Iroquoian cosmology should consult Hewitt's *Iroquoian Cosmology* (1899–1900), which was reprinted in 1974.

When Sky Woman was a maiden, she was told by her dead father to go and marry a stranger. Being a strange woman, she did as he said, not taking her mother's counsel in the matter as she should have done. She journeyed to the place where the dead father had directed her to go, and there she found the man she was to marry.

Now this man was a renowned magician, a sorcerer. He heard her proposal that they marry skeptically. He said to himself, "This woman is but a girl. It would be more fitting for her to ask to be my apprentice than my wife." But he only listened



MAP 2.4 Iroquois Territory and Area of Influence in Mid-18th Century

silently to her, then he said, “It is well. If you can meet my tests, we will see if I will make you my wife.”

He took her into his lodge and said, “Now you must grind corn.” She took the corn and boiled it slightly, using wood he brought her for the fire. When the kernels were softened, she began to grind them on the grinding stone. And though there were mounds and mounds of stuff to be ground, still she was done with the task in

a very short time. Seeing this, the sorcerer was amazed, but he kept silent. Instead he ordered her to remove all her clothing. When she was naked, he told her to cook the corn in the huge pot that hung over the fire. This she did, though the hot corn popped and spattered scalding clinging mush all over her. But she did not flinch, enduring the burns with calm.

When the mush was done, the woman told the sorcerer it was ready. "Good," he said, "now you will feed my servants." He noted that her body was covered with corn mush. Opening the door, he called in several huge beasts who ran to the woman and began to lick the mush from her body with their razor sharp tongues, leaving deep gashes where their tongues sliced her flesh. Still she did not recoil but endured the torment, not letting her face lose its look of calm composure.

Seeing this, the sorcerer let the beasts back out, then said she and he would be married, and so they were. After four nights that they spent sleeping opposite each other with the soles of their feet touching, he sent her back to her village with gifts of meat for the people. He commanded her to divide the meat evenly among all the people and further, to see to it that every lodge had its roof removed that night, as he was going to send a white corn rain among them. She did as she was told, and after the village had received its gifts, the meat and the white corn rain, she returned to her husband's lodge.

Outside his lodge there grew a tree that was always filled with blossoms so bright they gave light to his whole land. The woman loved the tree, loved to sit under it and converse with the spirits and her dead father, whom she held dear in her heart. She so loved the light tree that once, when everyone was sleeping, she lay down under it and opened her legs and her body to it. A blossom fell on her vagina then, touching her with sweetness and a certain joy. And soon she knew she was pregnant.

About that same time, her husband became weak and ill. His medicine people could not heal him, but told him that his sickness was caused by his wife. He was certain they were right, for he had never met anyone so powerful as she. He feared that her power was greater than his own, for hadn't she been able to withstand his most difficult tests: "What should I do?" he asked his advisors. They did not advise him to divorce her, because that kind of separation was unknown to them. The only death that had occurred was of the woman's father, and they did not understand what had happened to him.

After deliberating on the matter for four days, the advisors told the sorcerer that he should uproot the tree of light. Then, lying beside it, he should call his wife to come and sit with him. He should by some ruse get her to fall over the edge of the hole the uprooted tree would leave, and she would fall into the void. When she had fallen, they said, he was to replace the tree and then he would recover his health and his power.

That afternoon he went outside his lodge and pulled up the tree. He peered over the edge of the hole it left, and he could see another world below. He called his wife to come and see it. When she had come, he said, "Lean over the edge. You can see another world below." She knelt beside the hole and leaning over the edge, looked down. She saw emptiness, and a long way below, she thought that she saw blue, a shining blue that seemed filled with promise and delight. She looked at her husband and

smiled, eyes dancing with pleasure. "It looks like a beautiful place there," she said. "Who would have thought that the tree of light would be growing over such a place!"

"Yes," her husband agreed. "It surely seems beautiful there." He regarded her for a moment carefully; then he said, "I wonder what it is like there. Maybe somebody could go down there and find out."

Astonished, the woman looked at her husband. "But how would someone do that?"

"Jump," the husband said.

"Jump?" She asked, looking down through the opening, trying to calculate the distance. "But it is very far."

"Someone of your power could do it," he said. "You could jump. Become the wind or a petal from this tree." He indicated the tree lying fallen next to them. "A petal could fall, gently. On the wind it would be carried. You could be a petal in the wind. You could be a butterfly, a down-gliding bright-bird."

She gazed for a long time at the shining emptiness below her. "I could jump like that. I could float downward. I could fall into the shining blue world below us."

"Yes," he said. "So you could."

For another long moment she knelt gazing downward, then taking a deep breath she stood, and flexing her knees and raising her arms high over her head she leaned into the opening and dove through.

For some time the sorcerer watched her body as it fell downward through the dark, toward the blue. "She jumped," he finally said to the council as they made their way slowly toward him. "She's gone." And they raised the tree and placed it back firmly in its place, covering the opening to the other world with its roots.

She fell. She fell so long she no longer remembered where she had come from or why she had jumped. She forgot the name of her clan and the transparent box her dead father had lain in. She forgot she had once long ago climbed up its side to sit and take his counsel, or that she had been a wise woman of such power that she had bested the most powerful of shamans in all the galaxy. She forgot the place of her home, the place of her origins. All she knew was falling. It filled her mind and it filled all the space around her until it became all that existed in creation. She forgot coming and going. She no longer remembered time or circumstance. She forgot what it was to begin, what it was to end.

There were consciousnesses, awarenesses, intelligent beings, who lived in the emptiness she fell through. None were beings such as she, but they had their own meanings, their own forms. There was a certain quality to each of them, a quality the stories have recorded as Waterfowl, Beaver, and Turtle. These beings became aware of the woman falling through the void. They watched her with their awareness for a long time, wondering. They thought about what to do, whether they should do anything.

After taking thought together, contemplating, they decided to slow her endless fall. There was a task she needed to complete, a part she was playing in the great order of the universe, and her falling was only one portion of her task. They grew aware that they also had a part to play in the great dance, the unfolding that was before them now. Seven Waterfowl moved through the emptiness and came together, forming a firm nexus of energy, a tidal whorl, a security. So arranged, they moved

their thought-wings, their intelligence-net beneath her, and her fall came to rest in their arms. Not that her motion ended; they all moved together in harmony. The directionless movement, the endless drift through the nothing she had entered when the other world ended and she fell beneath the tree of light took on a coherence, a form, that connected her within the order of all that is. They stopped her fall.

For another endless time she swam with them through the waters of night. She slept then. She dreamed. In time they again took thought of their task, and of hers. They became aware of the next opening, the next coiling or uncoiling in the flow of being that is the universe as it moved toward what it moved toward.

They knew, as they contemplated, a time that she should enter another kind of motion, one that spun slowly, slowly, one as ordered and serene as the dancing of human women as it would arise out of the same pattern, the same knowing in another loop of the endless coil of creation. Beaver said, "Let me move through the reaches of space until I can find that which she needs. Somewhere there is a being that moves just so, as she will move, as we will see."

Long, long Beaver searched, using intelligence he did not know he possessed. Long, long they called, sending over great reaches of the formless sea of endlessness a sweet, haunting call like that issuing from the throats of waterfowl on earth to recall that time, that timeless place.

When the call was complete, when the search was fulfilled, an ancient being such as they but distinct in her form, her essence, as Beaver and the Waterfowl were distinct, came swimming through the void. "Lay her upon my back," she said, "as it suits the endless motion in this timeless place."

Infinitely gentle, they placed their burden upon the broad firm plane. Infinitely wondrous, they withdrew within themselves. Infinitely sensible, they made their thought complete. Beaver again: "I will seek and find that which will take its shape from her thought. I will seek that which will give her significance in her essence. I will recover that which forms the next loop in the coil of endless unfolding."

Alone with her dreaming burden, Turtle swam deeply and wide. Calmly she waited, as was the purpose of her being. After an endless place of sea change, Beaver swam within her awareness clutching a substance that was shapely in its potential, nurturing in its possibility, loving in its being. "This is the pattern of the substance she will use to make and shape the possibilities that will become her earth," he said. And so saying, he blew outward in his awareness the pattern he had remembered, and it fell about her like fur and down, like beads of rain and early light, like clear crystal notes sung in a high, cold place. Then he swam endlessly away.

The woman who fell still dreamed. She dreamed she was awash on an endless sea, adrift upon an endless sky where neither memory nor anticipation had ever dwelt. She dreamed she was held safe on a course whose purpose she did not know but whose fittingness she did not question. She sighed and sank at last into a dreamless sleep. Is it any wonder she awoke at last and saw about her endless dark and felt beneath her naked form the deep pull of Turtle's muscles pulling, pulling in a slow inexorable flow.

When she was fully awake, when her knowledge of herself and what had gone before revealed themselves whole in her awareness, she sat and gazed within. Slowly, slowly, with infinite care, she stretched out her hands and felt the pattern

Beaver had blown around her. She began to sing, a long slow song, a chant that flowed through her being in ordered variousness, in cycles of multiplicity. And as she sang, the pattern entered her thought as her being entered its being, and together they sang. As they sang, Turtle's circular swimming slowed and slowed. They entered the galaxy of stars and night. They found their way to the outer reaches of the spiral whorl, the path that life would follow after, from Turtle's back, to night, to the spiraling void, to the tree of light.

After the primordial patterns were fixed in place, Sky Woman recognized her incompleteness. Again she began to chant and sing. This time she danced—a certain hopping step, almost birdlike in its execution, weaving methodically to and fro as she stepped. She danced and chanted a very long time. Turtle moved a full three circuits before Sky Woman stopped. She paused. She listened. At last she sighed. Then she began again. Hopping and chanting, meandering this way and that, she danced on and on. Old Turtle pulled through the darkness steadily until four full circuits were fulfilled. Sky Woman paused. She stood in utter stillness. No thought moved within her. No memory, no dream stirred. In that absolute calm, she waited, perfectly still.

Then she crouched down, her legs spread wide. She placed the fingers of her left hand within the folds of the darkness between her legs and slowly withdrew a long slender stalk. She pulled and pulled and the stalk lengthened as it uncoiled at her fingers' urging. At last she straightened the slender stalk. It was very long. She breathed upon it until it dried, then she waited a certain interval. Finally she took its closer end and tamped it firmly into the substance that covered Turtle's back like an ever-moving cloak of darkness. When it was thus firmly planted, Sky Woman began again to sing, and as she sang the farther end of the stalk began to rise until it pointed straight up from Turtle's back. She sang again and the pole thickened and branches formed. She sang again and it grew more layers, and more branches formed. Changing her song slightly, she chanted once more and balls of light began to glimmer here and there upon the most slender boughs.

When the tree of light she had carried within her from her husband's far home had blossomed anew in this strange place, Sky Woman lay beneath it and fell asleep. She awakened slowly from her dream, or into her dream, to see her daughter emerge into the tree's sweet light. *Now*, thought Sky Woman, *I am complete*.

Sky Woman and her daughter lived comfortably on their island. Sometimes Sky Woman wondered what had become of the shimmering blue she had seen far below just before she jumped into the well of darkness so long before. Sometimes she dreamed of the song of the Waterfowl, their sweet song moving her heart nearly to tears. Sometimes she was lonely. But there was much to do to ready this sphere of intelligence into energies that would suit it to unfold through its destined cycles. She raised her daughter and taught her the ways of women beings. She taught her the ways of the sorceries she had learned long ago. She told her of her origins and cautioned her never to forget what she was taught or the stories she was told.

When she was grown, Sky Woman's daughter was wise and wondrous. Her active intelligence led her to seek in dreams—for what, she did not know. It made her dreaming restless, filled her belly with stirrings she did not recognize and could neither shape nor name. So in a kind of desperation, she left her mother's lodge and

took to wandering. She would wander for days, seeking, musing, calling within her being, groping for a shape, a substance, she couldn't fathom.

One time, after many cycles of Turtle's turnings and spins, she came to rest beneath the shining tree. She lay in the same spot where her mother had lain eons before. And there she fell asleep. When she awoke, she became slowly aware of a large being standing before her, softly luminous, enticing in the tree's sweet light. Her thought began to dance within her and she smiled. *Ah*, she said within, *you're here*.

"Yes," the large luminous shadow replied. "I'm here."

They moved then into each other, dancing the dream she had sung into life, the dream she had made unknowingly, the dream that had rustled within her sending her forth to call from the darkness where Turtle swam. After they had danced and sung beneath the tree of light, the tree of life, for what seemed an endless span of time, the huge one faded from her being, faded ever so slowly until he became so faint he all but disappeared, leaving within her being only the tiniest fragment of his thought.

When their dance thus ended, Sky Woman's daughter returned to her mother's lodge and they resumed their earlier rhythms, the quiet order of their lives.

After a span of time, Sky Woman's daughter again went out. She went to the place of her dreaming and crouched against the tree of light. She breathed the fullness of her thought, the entirety of the dancing into ripeness, and felt her consciousness oddly slip into two parts. As she contemplated the sensation, which seemed to make two separate awarenesses within her—or was it four separate awarenesses?—she heard two voices speaking in the center of her being where earlier she had placed the fullness of her thought. One said, "This is how I will emerge," and she knew he was her son, and he would do it wrong. "No," the other said. "It is this way we should enter the sacred ground." And he emerged from her folds of darkness, from the place of origin and formless being into the place of shape and knowing that he was.

The other, anxious to emerge, longing to arise and become what he could not be, struggled his way from the being of his mother, nearer to her heart, tearing her asunder as he fled her cradling in sly rage. "See," he crooned, "I made it out the better way." But his mother had become another kind of being, and his elder brother could only weep.

Sky Woman, Grandmother, had become aware that something had transpired. She came to the place where the two new beings sat at the base of the tree of life near their mother's body. "Eh, what's this?" She gazed in consternation at the two small beings. Bud, the one who had emerged from his mother's being where no egress was said quickly, "He did that to our mother. He wouldn't emerge from her being as is proper but insisted on going another way. I tried to prevent him, but I was still too weak and he would not heed me." At this he burst into tears.

The sly one's brother said nothing. He was wrapped in his grief and did not speak. He was wrapped in drawing from his mother's quiet form all her knowledge and power, matching the energy patterns of her skill to his own which were as yet unformed.

"Come with me," the Old One said to her sly grandson. And taking Bud up in her arms she set off for her lodge, leaving Sapling to mourn beside the body of his mother beneath the tree of life.

Later, when the Ancient One returned, he was gone. She didn't search for him. She had no intention of taking him in—in fact, she would have been relieved if he

had simply disappeared. She believed he was responsible for her daughter's death. But as things in those times were as they were, for this was long before the world we humans would inhabit had come into being, neither Sapling nor his mother could really die. Sapling lived in the wilderness far from his grandmother and his half-formed brother. He sang to the darkness and learned the ways of creation, for creating the world the human beings would live on would be his task.

So the Old One came to the tree of life, the light tree she had brought from her world far away, and mourning and singing she raised the body of her daughter and set it in a high branch of the tree. As it touched the branch, it began to give forth a soft, lovely light. It was the light of the night, the light by which plants and many creatures would find their way and being, and its seasons would set the seasons of human women in the way of their mother, the daughter of the woman god who fell from the sky.

Singing yet, the Ancient One lifted the head of her daughter and sent it spinning upward until it reached the top branch of the tree. It settled there and began to shine, its radiance growing ever more brilliant as she sang. And as she sang, she became aware that her daughter's task had reached its time of ripeness, and her purpose had been realized. Her daughter had not died; she had only been transformed. As the realization claimed the mind of Sky Woman, she began to dance, her chanting increased in volume, and its rhythm took on the imperturbable cadence of surety.

She realized that the new time had begun, and that with the coming of her grandsons the work of readying the earth—the back of the Turtle which the four of them rode through the darkness—for its myriad creatures and features had moved to a new plane. She danced and sang beneath her daughter's softly gleaming body and bright shining head. She gave thanks.

The Creation of Ulligara and Zalgarra

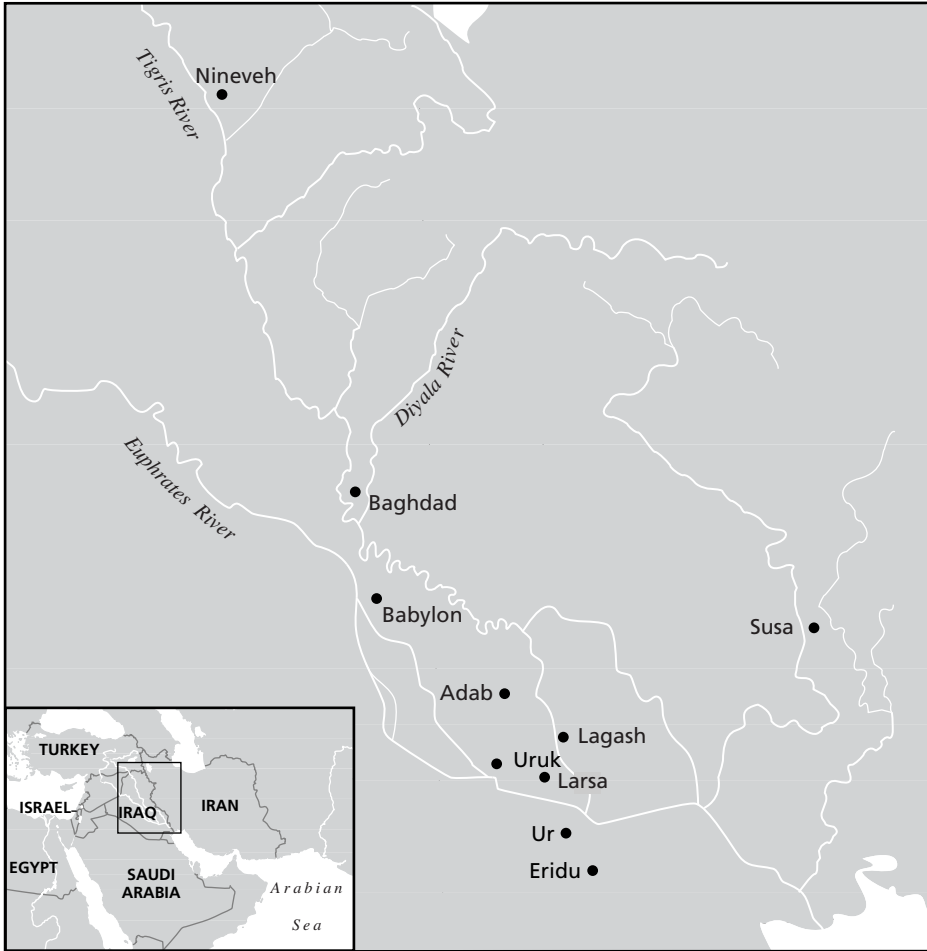
Sumerian (Iraq)

The tablets from which this myth have been translated were found in what is modern-day Iraq. The tablets have been dated approximately 800 BCE, and the myth belongs to the incantatory subgenre of sacred narratives. That is, the following story was likely sung or recited by temple officials during certain festivals as part of a magical ritual intended to encourage prosperity and abundance (note the meaning of the two created beings' names below). Indeed, a magical-religious performance like this one is just what Eliade means when he says that myths provide us with a means of

reconnecting with the primordial moment of creation through ritual and thus renewing our lease on life. In his *Thespis: Myth, Ritual, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, myth-ritualist Theodor Gaster asserts a similar point rather convincingly. According to Gaster, the ancient Near East's myths derived from rituals connected to seasonal religious observances marking the waxing and waning of vegetative fertility throughout the year. Thus, Gaster argues, when crops could not grow in winter, the ancients believed the fertility spirit (Enlil in the story that follows) had died and his life-giving powers had been withdrawn from Earth. When the rains and vegetation returned in spring, the fertility spirit was thought to have been resurrected. The myth-ritualists believed that religious rituals commemorating these seasonal fluctuations between bounteous fertility and the scarcity accompanying dormancy eventually resulted in myths, like the one below, that narrated their significance.

In the following story, a celebration of the mystery of fertility and abundance is combined with an account of the creation of the first human beings. The action begins with a consultation among the gods representing the four elements—Anu (god of air and sky), Enlil (god of storms and earth), Shamash (god of the sun and fire), and Ea (god of water)—and the Anunnaki, whose pronouncements become destiny. After having made the heavens and earth, the gods wonder among themselves what else is needed to complete their work. The answer, apparently, is human beings. As in the Assyrian myth of *Attrahasis*, the blood of slain gods is a crucial ingredient for creating the first human beings. With this divine spark, the prototypical human beings Ulligara (“establisher of abundance”) and Zalgarra (“establisher of plenty”) are created in order to build the gods' temples and increase the fruitfulness of plant and animal life. If stories of human creation are told, at least in part, to answer questions about the human being's purpose and place in the cosmos, then this story answers such questions by saying that the gods needed someone to do the daily labor of tending fields, raising livestock, and ensuring that the gods' rightful offerings are made. What consequences might such a worldview have on the religious imagination and social structures?

When both heaven and earth had been completely finished,
 And the mother of the goddesses had been brought into being;
 When the earth had been brought forth [and] the earth had been shaped;
 When the destinies of heaven and earth had been fixed;
 [When] trench and canal had been given their right course;
 [And] the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates had been established,
 [Then] Anu, Enlil, Shamash, [and] Ea,
 The great gods,



MAP 2.5 Ancient Sumeria and Babylonia

Seated themselves [with] the Anunnaki, the great gods,
 In the exalted sanctuary
 And recounted among themselves what had been created.
 “Now that the destinies of heaven and earth have been fixed;
 Trench and canal have been given their right course;
 The banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates
 Have been established;
 What [else] shall we do?
 What [else] shall we create?
 O Anunnaki, ye great gods,
 What [else] shall we do?
 What [else] shall we create?”

The great gods who were present,
 The Anunnaki, who fix the destinies,
 Both [groups] of them, made answer to Enlil:
 “In Uzumua, the bond of heaven and earth,
 Let us slay the Lamma gods.
 With their blood let us create mankind;
 The service of the gods be their portion,
 For all times
 To establish the boundary ditch,
 To place the spade and the basket
 Into their hands
 For the dwelling of the great gods,
 Which is fit to be an exalted sanctuary,
 To mark off field from field;
 For all times to establish the boundary ditch,
 To give the trench (its) right course,
 To establish the boundary,
 To water the four regions of the earth,
 To raise the plants . . .
 [the tablet breaks off here]
 To establish the boundary,
 To fill(?) the granary,
 [tablet is broken here]
 To make the field of the Anunnaki produce,
 To increase the abundance of the land,
 To celebrate the festival of the gods,
 To pour out cold water
 For the great house of the gods, which is fit to be an exalted sanctuary,
 Ulligarra [and] Zalgarra
 They called their names.
 [That Ulligarra and Zalgarra should] increase ox, sheep, cattle, fish, and fowl,
 The abundance in the land,
 Enul [and] Ereshul
 Decreed with their holy mouths.
 Aruru, the lady of the gods, who is fit for rulership,
 Ordained for them mighty destinies:
 Skilled worker to produce for skilled worker [and] unskilled worker for
 unskilled worker,
 Springing up among them like grain from the ground,
 A thing which, [like] the star[s] of heaven, shall not be changed forever.
 Day and night
 To celebrate the festival of the gods,
 [These] mighty destinies,
 Among themselves
 Did Anu, Enlil,
 Ea, and Ninmah,

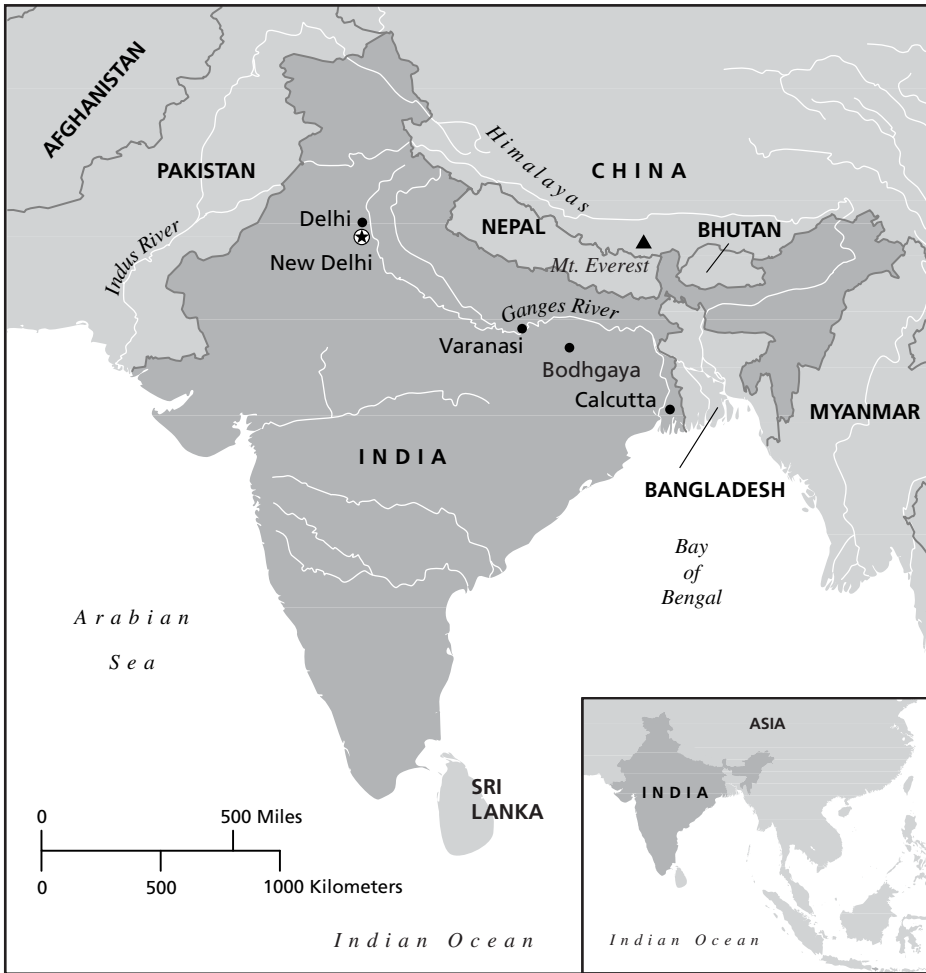
The great gods, decree [for the first human beings].
 In the place where mankind was created,
 There Nisaba was firmly established.
 Let the wise teach the mystery to the wise.

Creation Myth from the *Vishnu Purana*

Hindu (India)

Indian religion and metaphysical thought have developed over at least the last 3,500 years and, unlike those of many of the cultures represented in this book, are part of a thriving tradition that still has many millions of adherents. Several distinct traditions influence Indian religious thought; of particular note are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam. The earliest is the Vedic tradition of Hinduism, the texts of which are among the world's oldest written scriptures. The Veda comprises four kinds of writing: Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishad. The Samhita contains songs and hymns; the Brahmana are prose commentaries on religious ritual, particularly fire sacrifice; the Aranyaka focuses upon meditation practices; and the Upanishad records metaphysical speculations on the often abstract mystical questions raised by Hindu religion.

The Puranas, all 18 volumes and some 150,000 stanzas of them, emerge from the Vedic tradition, but are nevertheless separate from them. Sources as early as 400 BCE speak of an original Purana (a Sanskrit word which means "ancient") that is older than even the Veda; but if this most-ancient Purana ever existed, it has long since been lost. Certainly the Puranas assume the basic Hindu cosmology and religious practices of the Veda, but they tend to be less esoteric, less focused on priestly duties, and therefore more widely known among India's populace. The Puranas are said to contain five parts: (1) a cosmogony; (2) an outline of the cyclical creation and destruction of the universe; (3) a genealogy of the gods and patriarchs; (4) the reigns of the Manus, the sages and lawgivers that inaugurate civilization when each new world emerges from the destruction of the last; and (5) a history of the solar and lunar races and their descendants into modern times. The



MAP 2.6 India is the mother of several world religions, including Buddhism and, most ancient of all organized religions, Hinduism. Complex mythic traditions predate even Hinduism and infuse the writings of both religions as well as the multilayered cultures of India, both past and present.

mechanism for telling these stories is the same in each of the Puranas: someone asks a question and a sage or god answers it.

The *Vishnu Purana*, from which the following excerpt is taken, follows this five-part pattern more carefully and thoroughly than the other Puranas, a fact which may be evidence of greater antiquity since strict adherence to literary forms often relaxes over time. In the story presented here, Maitreya asks the questions that occasion Parasara’s discussion of the earth’s creation, but Earth (Prithivi) herself eulogizes Narayan (one of the many forms of Brahman) and takes up one of the most complicated and vexing prob-

lems in Hindu metaphysics—the distinction between appearance and reality—and attempts to simplify it. The world, as it appears to the human mind, seems separate from the self and composed of many discrete objects and other selves. Yet, according to the Hindu sages, our customary distinction between subject (“I”) and object (“not-I”) is an error based on illusion. In this view, the entire universe is one entity, called Brahman. Ultimately, this distinction is a matter of perspective. From the deluded perspective of human beings embedded in space and time, the universe is comprised of discrete objects that are other than the self. From the perspective of the Absolute, everything—“I,” you, a pencil, a flower, a rock on a planet in a distant solar system—are indiscrete (inseparable) expressions of Brahman. Enlightenment—freedom from the endless cycle of birth, suffering, and death—is a matter of fully actualizing this Oneness.

Hindu metaphysics assumes that the universe is continuously made and destroyed over vast cycles of time. Between each cycle, chaos reigns for 100 years, represented, not surprisingly, by a vast ocean. Each great creation–destruction cycle is called a *kalpa*, a day in the life of Brahma, which, according to one of many analogies, is the amount of time it would take a bird to wear away Mount Everest if it flew over the peak once in every 1,000 years and dragged a silk scarf over the mountain’s uppermost tip. For the more scientifically minded, a *kalpa* is said to be 4,320,000,000 years. Thus references to various ages of creation and destruction in the story below are to be understood as subdivisions of the current *kalpa*, which will end in a great apocalypse called the *Mahapralaya*.

MAITREYA: Tell me, mighty sage, how, in the commencement of the [present] Kalpa, Narayan, who is named Brahma, created all existent things.

PARASARA: In what manner the divine Brahma, who is one with Narayana, created progeny, and is thence named the lord of progeny [Prajapati], the lord god, you shall hear.

At the close of the past Kalpa [Padma], the divine Brahma, endowed with the quality of goodness, awoke from his night of sleep, and beheld the universe void. He, the supreme Narayana the incomprehensible, the sovereign of all creatures, invested with the form of Brahma, the god without beginning, the creator of all things; of whom, with respect to his name Narayana, the god who has the form of Brahma, the imperishable origin of the world, this verse is repeated: “The waters are called Nara, because they were the offspring of Nara [the supreme spirit]; and, as, in them, his first progress [in the form of Brahman] took place, he is thence named Narayan [he whose place of moving was the waters].” He, the lord, concluding that within the waters lay the earth, and being desirous to raise it up, created another form for that purpose; and, as, in preceding Kalpas, he has assumed the shape of a fish or a tortoise, so, in this, he took the figure of a boar. Having adopted a form composed

of the sacrifices of the Vedas, for the preservation of the whole earth, the eternal, supreme, and universal soul, the great progenitor of created beings, eulogized by Sanaka and the other saints who dwell in the sphere of holy men [Janaloka]; he, the supporter of spiritual and material being, plunged into the ocean. The goddess Earth, beholding him thus descending to the subterranean regions, bowed in devout adoration, and thus glorified the god:—

PRITHIVI: Hail to thee, who are all creatures; to thee, the holder of the mace and shell: elevate me now from this place, as thou has upraised me in days of old. From thee have I proceeded; of thee do I consist; as do the skies and all other existing things. Hail to thee, spirit of the supreme spirit; to thee, soul of soul; to thee, who are discrete and indiscrete matter; who art one with the elements and with time. Thou art the creator of all things, their preserver, and their destroyer, in the forms, O lord, of Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra, at the seasons of creation, duration, and dissolution. When thou has devoured all things, thou reposest on the ocean that sweeps over the world, meditated upon, O Govinda, by the wise. No one knoweth thy true nature; and the gods adore thee only in the forms it hath pleased thee to assume. They who are desirous of final liberation worship thee as the supreme Brahma; and who that adores not Vasudeva shall obtain emancipation? Whatever may be apprehended by the mind, whatever may be perceived by the senses, whatever may be discerned by the intellect, all is but a form of thee. I am of thee, upheld by thee; thou art my creator, and to thee I fly for refuge: hence, in this universe, Madhavi [the bride of Madhava, a form of Vishnu] is my designation. Triumph to the essence of all wisdom, to the unchangeable, the imperishable: triumph to the eternal; to the indiscrete, to the essence of discrete things: to him who is both cause and effect; who is the universe; the sinless lord of sacrifice; triumph. Thou art sacrifice; thou art the oblation; thou art the mystic Omkara; thou art the sacrificial fires; thou art the Vedas, and their dependent sciences; thou art, Hari, the object of all worship. The sun, the stars, the planets, the whole world; all that is formless, or that has form; all that is visible, or invisible; all. Purushottama, that I have said, or left unsaid; all this, Supreme, thou art. Hail to thee, again and again! hail! all hail!

PARASARA: The auspicious supporter of the world, being thus hymned by the earth, emitted a low murmuring sound, like the chanting of the Sama Veda; and the mighty boar, whose eyes were like the lotus, and whose body, vast as the Nila mountain, was of the dark color of the lotus-leaves, uplifted upon his ample tusks the earth from the lowest regions. As he reared his head, the waters shed from his brow purified the great sages, Sanandana and others, residing in the sphere of the saints. Through the indentations made by his hoofs, the waters rushed into the lower worlds with a thundering noise. Before his breath the pious denizens of Janaloka were scattered; and the Munis sought for shelter amongst the bristles upon the scriptural body of the boar, trembling as he rose up, supporting the earth, and dripping with moisture. Then the great sages, Sanandana and the rest, residing continually in the sphere of saints, were inspired with delight; and, blowing lowly, they praised the stern-eyed upholder of the earth.

THE YOGINS: Triumph, lord of lords supreme; Kesava, sovereign of the earth, the wielder of the mace, the shell, the discus, and the sword: cause of production,

destruction, and existence. THOU ART, O god: there is no other supreme condition but thou. Thou, lord, art the person of sacrifice: for thy feet are the Vedas, thy tusks are the stake to which the victim is bound; in thy teeth are the offerings; thy mouth is the altar; thy tongue is the fire; and the hairs of thy body are the sacrificial grass. Thine eyes, O omnipotent, are day and night; thy head is the seat of all, the place of Brahma; thy name is all the hymns of the Vedas; thy nostrils are all oblations: O thou, whose snout is the ladle of oblation; whose deep voice is the chanting of the Sama Veda; whose body is the hall of sacrifice; whose joints are the different ceremonies; and whose ears have the properties of both voluntary and obligatory rites; do thou, who art eternal, who art in size a mountain, be propitious. We acknowledge thee, who hast traversed the world, O universal form, to be the beginning, the continuance, and the destruction of all things: thou art the supreme god. Have pity on us, O lord of conscious and unconscious beings. The orb of the earth is seen seated on the tip of thy tusks, as if thou hadst been sporting amidst a lake where the lotus floats, and hadst borne away the leaves covered with soil. The space between heaven and earth is occupied by thy body, O thou of unequalled glory, resplendent with the power of pervading the universe, O lord, for the benefit of all. Thou art the aim of all: there is none other than thee, sovereign of the world: this is thy might, by which all things, fixed or movable, are pervaded. This form, which is now beheld, is thy form, as one essentially with wisdom. Those who have practiced devotion conceive erroneously of the nature of the world. The ignorant who do not perceive that this universe is of the nature of wisdom, and judge of it as an object of perception only, are lost in the ocean of spiritual ignorance. But they who know true wisdom, and whose minds are pure, behold this whole world as one with divine knowledge, as one with thee, O god. Be favorable, O universal spirit: raise up this earth, for the habitation of created beings. Inscrutable deity, whose eyes are like lotuses, give us felicity. O lord, thou art endowed with the quality of goodness: raise up, Govinda, this earth, for the general good. Grant us happiness, O lotus-eyed. May this, thy activity in creation, be beneficial to the earth. Salutation to thee. Grant us happiness, O lotus-eyed.

PARASARA: The supreme being thus eulogized, upholding the earth, raised it quickly, and placed it on the summit of the ocean, where it floats like a mighty vessel, and, from its expansive surface, does not sink beneath the waters. Then, having leveled the earth, the great eternal deity divided it into portions, by mountains. He who never wills in vain created, by his irresistible power, those mountains again upon the earth, which had been consumed at the destruction of the world. Having then divided the earth into seven great portions for continents, as it was before, he constructed, in like manner, the four (lower) spheres, earth, sky, heaven, and sphere of the sages (Maharloka). Thus Heri, the four-faced god, invested with the quality of activity, and taking the form of Brahma, accomplished the creation. But he (Brahma) is only the instrumental cause of things to be created; the things that are capable of being created arise from nature as a common material cause. With exception of one instrumental cause alone, there is no need of any other cause; for (imperceptible) substance becomes perceptible substance according to the powers with which it is originally imbued.

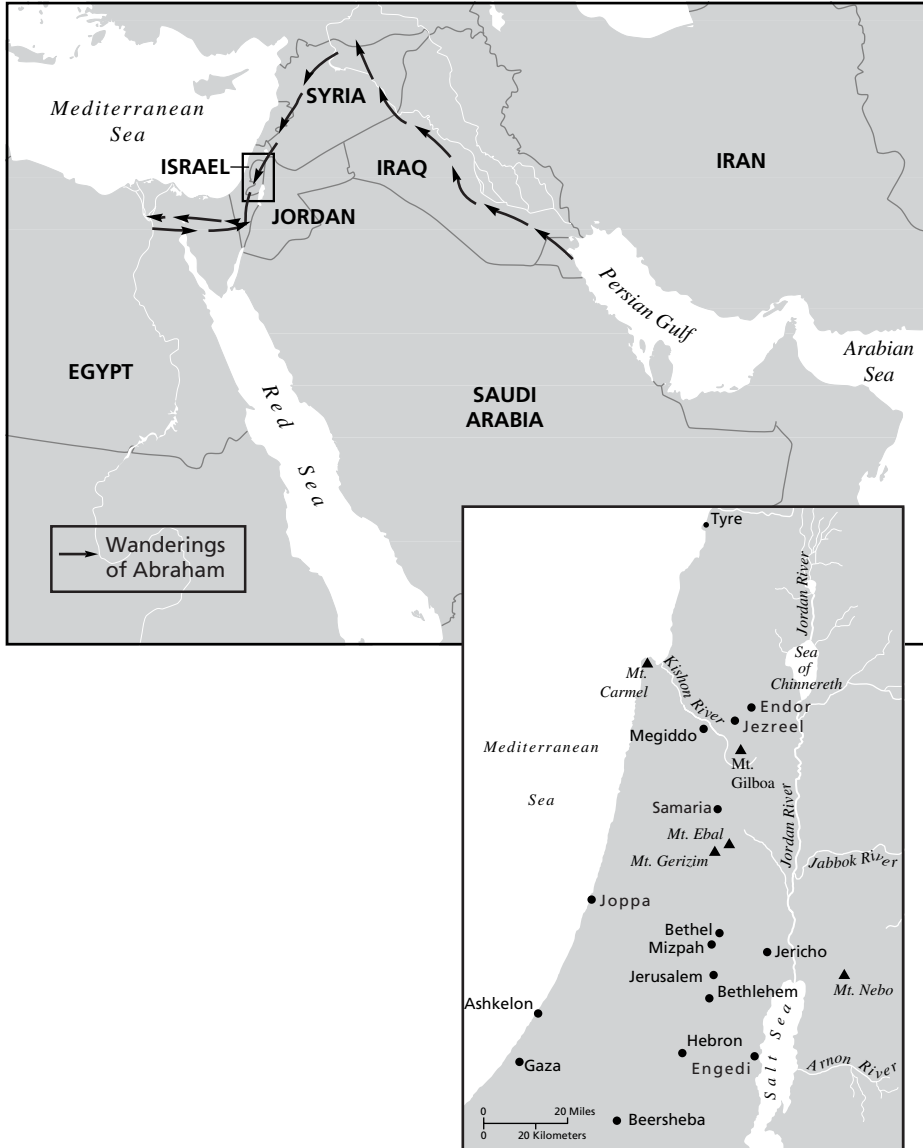
Genesis

The Creation Account

Hebrew (Israel/Middle East)

Modern Jews trace their origins to the culture hero Abraham, who, according to biblical tradition, descended from Shem, one of Noah's sons. As a young man, Abram (later named Abraham) received a divine summons to leave his ancestral home in modern-day Iraq and journey to Canaan—though it is crucial to the story that Abram did not know at the time of his calling where God was taking him. It is Abram's belief in God's promise that he would make of Abram a "great nation" and that he and his descendants would always enjoy divine blessing and protection that established the basic character of Judaism as a covenant-based religion. According to most historians, Abram's people were originally a group of nomadic tribes that roamed Mesopotamia, Palestine, and northern Egypt from about 1950 to 1500 BCE. It was at the end of this period that the Hebrew-speaking peoples settled relatively permanently in the fertile land of northern Egypt called Goshen and the land of Canaan (an area that included modern-day Israel). It was here that this wandering tribe developed a national identity and a religious and ethical system from which each of the modern world's major monotheistic religions sprang.

The first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, or Torah (Pentateuch in Greek), were, according to Jewish and Christian traditions, attributed to Moses until modern times. Most biblical scholars now agree that the Torah is composed of at least four separate and distinct narratives, compiled from an original oral tradition and eventually written down over the course of several centuries. Looking closely at the following story, we can see for ourselves evidence of its having been compiled from more than one source. The first words of the Book of Genesis, transliterated from the Hebrew, are: *b'reshit · bara · elohim · et · ha'shamayim · v'et · ha'aretz*. "In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word *elohim*, which literally means "gods," has traditionally been translated as "God"—a tradition that faithful Jews, Christians, and Muslims have emphatically defended through the years. Interestingly, this "elohist" creation account of the first chapter of Genesis gives way to a supplementary creation story in which *yehovah-elohim* (translated as "LORD GOD" in most Torahs and Bibles) moves about on the newly formed earth to create "the



MAP 2.7 Map of Ancient Israel

man" (*ha'ahdahm*, or "Adam") from dust, plant a garden in Eden, make other vegetation grow, and then put the man in charge of Eden, commanding him not to eat of the "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

This presentation of two parallel creation accounts, each with its own focus, each giving the creator a different name—and a

host of additional textual anomalies scattered throughout the rest of the book—has led to a consensus among biblical scholars that the Book of Genesis derives from three major traditions: the Yahwist, the Elohist, and the Priestly. The Yahwist and Elohist traditions are thought to have derived from cultural and sacerdotal differences between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. These traditions date to sometime between 950 and 750 BCE and tend to be interested in such mythic issues as dreams, prophecies, and the revelation of the Divine character. The Priestly tradition, which probably was worked into the basic mythic material sometime during the sixth century BCE, focused on genealogies, historical dating, and ritual observances. We see its presence most clearly in the following excerpt when, at the end of creation, God “rests” from his work and proclaims the seventh day holy and, in a passage not included here, when the generations from Adam to Noah are recited.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Then God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.” And God created the

great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven. Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. And the name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree



Marc Chagall. "The Creation of Man." Oil on canvas. Chagall, a Russian Jew who fled his homeland and lived most of his life in Paris, was noted for the dreamlike quality of his paintings. In this image, a winged figure carries the inert body of Adam through the darkness. In the swirl of activity near the light, we see the tablets of the Mosaic Law and the crucified Christ.
Source: Photo © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every

beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said, "This is now one of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Now the serpent was craftier than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

And the man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all the cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth; in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to

the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. The Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The *Popul Vu*

Maya (Guatemala/The Yucatán)

The ancient Maya civilization, at its height, occupied the eastern third of Mesoamerica, with important cultural centers in Guatemala and in southeastern Mexico’s Yucatán. The Maya, despite numerous references to *the* “Mayan” civilization, were not members of a unified empire. Rather, like the ancient Greeks, they lived in “city-states,” united by language and religion but politically quite distinct from one another. Indeed, Maya cities often were at war with each other.

The “classic period” of Maya development (ca. 300–900 CE) saw the Maya refining a long-count calendar and developing an advanced written language. Early in the Classic Period, the Maya were heavily influenced by the civilization of Teotihuacán to the north—a relationship that undoubtedly accounts for the many similarities between Maya and Mexica mythic traditions. After the collapse of Teotihuacán around 650 CE, the Maya reached their cultural acme, making advances in art, astronomy, and mathematics that continue to astound modern researchers. The Maya were, for example, able to measure the orbits of celestial bodies with unprecedented accuracy—without the benefit of Sir Isaac Newton’s calculus.

The Maya are also famous for their ornate hieroglyphic writing system through which they recorded astronomical observations, noted important events in the lives of their rulers, and transmitted their myths from one generation to the next. Only priests and nobility, it appears, were given an education, particularly in



MAP 2.8 Maya Territory during Classic Period

the sacred art of symbol making. Inscriptions appear on tree bark books, stone, and wood and were frequently incorporated into Maya architecture. Unfortunately, a great deal of the written record did not survive the vicissitudes of the tropical climate or the invasion of the Spanish, who regarded these symbols as the work of the devil.

The Maya peaked gloriously, but faded quickly. By 750 CE—and for reasons that we do not fully understand—the tide had begun to turn. A few citadels clung to life in Belize and the Yucatán, but most Maya cities in what is now Guatemala were abandoned and their inhabitants moved to the highlands and farming villages. The descendants of the Maya can still be found in Guatemala working small farms and tending herds much as they have done since the great calamity that befell their people in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The *Popul Vu*, the Maya's cultural charter and repository of its stories of creation and the people's migrations, was a hieroglyphic manuscript predating European contact with the Americas and was used as a basis for oral performance even after the Spanish Conquest. The following text is at least one step removed from this

original hieroglyphic manuscript and was, according to Markman and Markman, “written in Quiché in the European alphabet in Santa Cruz Quiché by an unknown writer. That manuscript, which has been lost since 1855, was copied by a young Dominican parish priest, Francisco Ximénez . . . in the early eighteenth century” (1992, 104). Although the influence of Christianity can be detected in this text, it is considered by most experts to be comparatively uncorrupted. We get a solid sense of the narrative style and mystical content of the original. The number four, sacred to many indigenous tribes from Alaska to Argentina, appears in this text as well. There are four sacred colors, four sacred directions, and four distinct creations, only the last of which culminates in the creation of the Quiché, the “daykeepers,” who will at last be able to fulfill the will of the gods by keeping track of the calendar and making sacrifice in its appropriate season. Note that not only does this story feature the kind of *deus faber* fashioning found in the Genesis account of creation, but there is also an account of a great flood that wipes out an early, imperfect attempt to make man. In addition, the Maya gods are concerned, like the God of the Hebrew scriptures, that humanity could become too like themselves. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden; the first Quiché are “unmade a little.” Whether or not these similarities are a result of contact with missionizing Europeans is a call that we leave to our readers.

This is the beginning of the Ancient Word, here in this place called Quiché. Here we shall inscribe, we shall implant the Ancient Word, the potential and source for everything done in the citadel of Quiché, in the nation of Quiché people. And here we shall take up the demonstration, revelation, and account of how things were put in shadow and brought to light by the Maker, Modeler, named Bearer, Begetter, Hunahpu Possum, Hunahpu Coyote, Great White Peccary, Tapir, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Heart of the Lake, Heart of the Sea, Maker of the Blue-Green Plate, Maker of the Blue-Green Bowl, as they are called, also named, also described as the midwife, matchmaker named Xpiyacoc, Xmucane, defender, protector, twice a midwife, twice a matchmaker, as is said in the words of Quiché.

They accounted for everything—and did it, too—as enlightened beings, in enlightened words. We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now. We shall bring it out because there is no longer a place to see it, a Council Book, a place to see “The Light That Came from Across the Sea,” the account of “Our Place in the Shadows,” a place to see “The Dawn of Life,” as it is called. There is the original book and ancient writing, but he who reads and ponders it hides his face. It takes a long performance and account to complete the emergence of all the sky-earth: the fourfold siding, fourfold cornering, fourfold measuring, fourfold staking, halving the cord, stretching the cord in the sky, on the earth, the four sides, the four corners, as it is said, by the Maker, Modeler, Mother-Father of life, of humankind, giver of breath, giver of heart, bearer, up-bringer in the light that

lasts of those born in the light, begotten in the light; worrier, knower of everything, whatever there is: sky-earth, lake-sea.

This is the account; here it is. Now it still ripples, now it still murmurs, ripples, it still sighs, still hums, and it is empty under the sky. Here follow the first words, the first eloquence: There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest. Only the sky alone is there; the face of the earth is not clear. Only the sea alone is pooled under all the sky; there is nothing whatever gathered together. It is at rest; not a single thing stirs. It is held back, kept at rest under the sky. Whatever there is that might be is simply not there: only the pooled water, only the calm sea, only it alone is pooled.

Whatever might be is simply not there: only murmurs, ripples, in the dark, in the night. Only the Maker, Modeler alone, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, the Bearers, Begetters are in the water, a glittering light. They are there, they are enclosed in quetzal feathers, in blue-green. Thus the name, "Plumed Serpent." They are great knowers, great thinkers in their very being.

And of course there is the sky, and there is also the Heart of Sky. This is the name of the god, as it is spoken. And then came his word, he came here to the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, here in the blackness, in the early dawn. He spoke with the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, and they talked, then they thought, then they worried. They agreed with each other, they joined their words, their thoughts. Then it was clear; then they reached accord in the light; and then humanity was clear, when they conceived the growth, the generation of trees, of bushes, and the growth of life, of humankind, in the blackness, in the early dawn, all because of the Heart of Sky, named Hurricane. Thunderbolt Hurricane comes first, the second is Newborn Thunderbolt, and the third is Raw Thunderbolt. So there were three of them, as Heart of Sky, who came to the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, when the dawn of life was conceived: "How should it be sown, how should it dawn? Who is to be the provider, nurturer?"

"Let it be this way, think about it: this water should be removed, emptied out for the formation of the earth's own plate and platform, then comes the sowing, the dawning of the sky-earth. But there will be no high days and no bright praise for our work, our design, until the rise of the human work, the human design," they said.

And then the earth arose because of them; it was simply their word that brought it forth. For the forming of the earth they said "*Earth!*" It arose suddenly, just like a cloud, like a mist, now forming, unfolding. Then the mountains were separated from the water; all at once the great mountains came forth. By their genius alone, by their cutting edge alone they carried out the conception of the mountain-plain, whose face grew instant groves of cypress and pine.

And the Plumed Serpent was pleased with this: "It was good that you came, Heart of Sky, Hurricane, and Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt. Our work, our design will turn out well," they said.

And the earth was formed first, the mountain-plain. The channels of water were separated; their branches wound their ways among the mountains. The waters were divided when the great mountains appeared. Such was the formation of the earth when it was brought forth by the Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, as they are called,

since they were the first to think of it. The sky was set apart; and the earth was set apart in the midst of the waters. Such was their plan when they thought, when they worried about the completion of their work.

Now they planned the animals of the mountains, all the guardians of the forests, creatures of the mountains: the deer, birds, pumas, jaguars, serpents, rattlesnakes, yellowbite, guardians of the bushes.

A Bearer, Begetter speaks: “Why this pointless humming? Why should there merely be rustling beneath the trees and bushes?”

“Indeed—they had better have guardians,” the others replied. As soon as they thought it and said it, deer and birds came forth. And then they gave out homes to the deer and birds: “You, the deer: sleep along the rivers, in the canyons. Be here in the meadows, in the thickets, in the forests, multiply yourselves. You will stand and walk on all fours,” they were told.

So then they established the nests of the birds, small and great: “You, precious birds: your nests, your houses are in the trees, in the bushes. Multiply there, scatter there, in the branches of trees, the branches of bushes,” the deer and birds were told.

When this deed had been done, all of them had received a place to sleep and a place to stay. So it is that the nests of the animals are on the earth, given by the Bearer, Begetter. Now the arrangement of the deer and birds was complete. And then the deer and birds were told by the Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter: “Talk, speak out. Don’t moan, don’t cry out. Please talk, each to each, within each kind, within each group,” they were told—the deer, birds, puma, jaguar, serpent.

“Name now our names, praise us. We are your mother; we are your father. Speak now: ‘Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt, Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter,’ speak, pray to us, keep our days,” they were told. But it didn’t turn out that they spoke like people: they just squawked, they just chattered, they just howled. It wasn’t apparent what language they spoke; each one gave a different cry.

When the Maker, Modeler heard this: “It hasn’t turned out well; they haven’t spoken,” they said among themselves. “It hasn’t turned out that our names have been named. Since we are their mason and sculptor, this will not do,” the Bearers and Begetters said among themselves.

So they told them: “You will simply have to be transformed. Since it hasn’t turned out well and you haven’t spoken, we have changed our word: ‘What you feed on, what you eat, the places where you sleep, the places where you stay, whatever is yours will remain in the canyons, the forests. Although it turned out that our days were not kept, nor did you pray to us, there may yet be strength in the keeper of days, the giver of praise whom we have yet to make. Just accept your service; just let your flesh be eaten.

“So be it, this must be your service,” they were told when they were instructed—the animals, small and great, on the face of the earth.

And then they wanted to test their timing again; they wanted to experiment again; and they wanted to prepare for the keeping of days again. They had not heard their speech among the animals; it did not come to fruition and it was not complete. And so their [the animals’] flesh was brought low: they served, they were eaten, they were killed—the animals on the face of the earth.

Again there comes an experiment with the human work, the human design, by the Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter: "It must simply be tried again. The time for the planting and dawning is nearing. For this we must make a provider and nurturer. How else can we be invoked and remembered on the face of the earth? We have already made our first try at our work and design, but it turned out that they didn't keep our days, nor did they glorify us. So now let's try to make a giver of praise, giver of respect, provider, nurturer," they said.

So then comes the building and working with earth and mud. They made a body, but it didn't look good to them. It was just separating, just crumbling, just loosening, just softening, just disintegrating, and just dissolving. Its head wouldn't turn, either. Its face was just lopsided, its face was just twisted. It couldn't look around. It talked at first, but senselessly. It was quickly dissolving in the water.

"It won't last," the mason and sculptor said then. "It seems to be dwindling away, so let it just dwindle. It can't walk and it can't multiply, so let it be merely a thought," they said.

So then they dismantled, again they brought down their work and design. Again they talked: "What is there for us to make that would turn out well, that would succeed in keeping our days and praying to us?" they said.

Then they planned again: "We'll just tell Xpiyacoc, Xmucane, Hunahpu Possum, Hunahpu Coyote, to try a counting of days, a counting of lots," the mason and sculptor said to themselves. Then they invoked Xpiyacoc, Xmucane. Then came the naming of those who are the midmost seers: the "Grandmother of Day, Grandmother of Light," as the Maker, Modeler called them. These are names of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane.

When Hurricane had spoken with the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, they invoked the daykeepers, diviners, the midmost seers: "There is yet to find, yet to discover how we are to model a person, construct a person again, a provider, nurturer, so that we are called upon and we are recognized: our recompense is in words.

"Midwife, matchmaker, our grandmother, our grandfather, Xpiyacoc, Xmucane, let there be planting, let there be the dawning of our invocation, our sustenance, our recognition by the human work, the human design, the human figure, the human mass. So be it, fulfill your names: Possum, Hunahpu Coyote, Bearer twice over, Begetter twice over, Great Peccary, Great Tapir, lapidary, jeweler, sawyer, carpenter, Maker of the Blue-Green Plate, Maker of the Blue-Green Bowl, incense maker, master craftsman, Grandmother of Day, Grandmother of Light.

"You have been called upon because of our work, our design. Run your hands over the kernels of corn, over the seeds of the coral tree, just get it done, just let it come out whether we should carve and gouge a mouth, a face in wood," they told the daykeepers.

And then comes the borrowing, the counting of days; the hand is moved over the corn kernels, over the coral seeds, the days, the lots. Then they spoke to them, one of them a grandmother, the other a grandfather. This is the grandfather; this is the master of the coral seeds: Xpiyacoc is his name. And this is the grandmother, the daykeeper, diviner who stands behind others: Xmucane is her name.

And they said, as they set out the days: "Just let it be found; just let it be discovered; say it; our ear is listening; may you talk; may you speak; just find the wood

for the carving and sculpting by the builder, sculptor. Is this to be the provider, the nurturer when it comes to the planting, the dawning? You corn kernels, you coral seeds, you days, you lots: may you succeed, may you be accurate,” they said to the corn kernels, coral seeds, days, lots.

“Have shame, you up there, Heart of Sky: attempt no deception before the mouth and face of Sovereign Plumed Serpent,” they said.

Then they spoke straight to the point: “It is well that there be your manikins, woodcarvings, talking, speaking, there on the face of the earth.”

“So be it,” they replied. The moment they spoke it was done: the manikins, woodcarvings, human in looks and human in speech. This was the peopling of the face of the earth. They came into being, they multiplied, they had daughters, they had sons, these manikins, woodcarvings. But there was nothing in their hearts and nothing in their minds, no memory of their mason and builder. They just went and walked wherever they wanted. Nor did they remember the Heart of Sky. And so they fell, just an experiment and just a cutout for humankind. They were talking at first but their faces were dry. They were not yet developed in the legs and arms. They had no blood, no lymph. They had no sweat, no fat. Their complexions were dry; their faces were crusty. They flailed their legs and arms; their bodies were deformed. And so they accomplished nothing before the Maker, Modeler who gave them birth, gave them heart. They became the first numerous people here on the face of the earth.

Again there comes a humiliation, destruction, and demolition. The manikins, woodcarvings were killed when the Heart of Sky devised a flood for them. A great flood was made; it came down on the heads of the manikins, woodcarvings. The man’s body was carved from the wood of the coral tree by the Maker, Modeler. And as for the woman, the Maker, Modeler needed the pith of reeds for the woman’s body. They were not competent, nor did they speak before the builder and sculptor who made them and brought them forth, and so they were killed, done in by a flood: There came a rain of resin from the sky. There came the one named Gouger of Faces: he gouged out their eyeballs. There came Sudden Bloodletter: he snapped off their heads. There came Crunching Jaguar: he ate their flesh. There came Tearing Jaguar: he tore them open.

They were pounded down to the bones and tendons, smashed and pulverized even to the bones. Their faces were smashed because they were incompetent before their mother and their father, the Heart of Sky, named Hurricane. The earth was blackened because of this; the black rainstorm began, rain all day and rain all night. Into their houses came the animals, small and great. Their faces were crushed by things of wood and stone. Everything spoke: their water jars, their tortilla griddles, their plates, their cooking pots, their dogs, their grinding stones, each and every thing crushed their faces.

Their dogs and turkeys told them: “You caused us pain; you ate us, but now it is you whom we shall eat.”

And this is the grinding stone: “We were undone because of you. Every day, every day, in the dark, in the dawn forever, r-r-rip, r-r-rip, r-r-rub, r-r-rub, right in our faces, because of you. This was the service we gave you at first, when you were still people, but today you will learn of our power. We shall pound and we shall grind your flesh,” their grinding stones told them.

And this is what their dogs said, when they spoke in their turn: “Why is it you can’t seem to give us our food? We just watch and you just keep us down, and throw us around. You keep a stick ready when you eat, just so you can hit us. We don’t talk, so we’ve received nothing from you. How could you not have known? You did know that we were wasting away there, behind you. So, this very day you will taste the teeth in our mouths. We shall eat you,” their dogs told them, and their faces were crushed.

And then their tortilla griddles and cooking pots spoke to them in turn: “Pain! That’s all you’ve done for us. Our mouths are sooty; our faces are sooty. By setting us on the fire all the time, you burn us. Since we felt no pain, you try it. We shall burn you,” all their cooking pots said, crushing their faces.

The stones, their hearthstones were shooting out, coming right out of the fire, going for their heads, causing them pain. Now they run for it, helter-skelter. They want to climb up on the houses, but they fall as the houses collapse. They want to climb the trees; they’re thrown off by the trees. They want to get inside caves, but the caves slam shut in their faces.

Such was the scattering of the human work, the human design. The people were ground down, overthrown. The mouths and faces of all of them were destroyed and crushed. And it used to be said that the monkeys in the forests today are a sign of this. They were left as a sign because wood alone was used for their flesh by the builder and sculptor. So this is why monkeys look like people: they are a sign of a previous human work, human design—mere manikins, mere woodcarvings.

[The lengthy description of the journey of the hero twins that is included at this point in the original manuscript is omitted here.]

And here is the beginning of the conception of humans, and of the search for the ingredients of the human body. So they spoke, the Bearer, Begetter, the Makers, Modelers named Sovereign Plumed Serpent: “The dawn has approached, preparations have been made, and morning has come for the provider, nurturer, born in the light, begotten in the light. Morning has come for humankind, for the people of the face of the earth,” they said.

It all came together as they went on thinking in the darkness, in the night, as they searched and they sifted, they thought and they wondered. And here their thoughts came out in clear light. They sought and discovered what was needed for human flesh. It was only a short while before the sun, moon, and stars were to appear above the Makers and Modelers. Broken Place, Bitter Water Place is the name: the yellow corn, white corn came from there. And these are the names of the animals that brought the food: fox, coyote, parrot, crow. There were four animals that brought the news of the ears of yellow corn and white corn. They were coming from over there at Broken Place, they showed the way to the break. And this was when they found the staple foods. And these were the ingredients for the flesh of the human work, the human design, and the water was for the blood. It became human blood, and corn was also used by the Bearer, Begetter.

And so they were happy over the provisions of the good mountain, filled with sweet things, thick with yellow corn, white corn, and thick with pataxte and cacao, countless zapotes, anonas, jocotes, nances, matasanos, sweets—the rich foods filling up the citadel named Broken Place, Bitter Water Place. All the edible fruits were there: small staples, great staples, small plants, great plants. The way was shown by

the animals. And then the yellow corn and white corn were ground, and Xmucane did the grinding nine times. Corn was used, along with the water she rinsed her hands with, for the creation of grease; it became human fat when it was worked by the Bearer, Begetter, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, as they are called. After that, they put it into words: the making, the modeling of our first mother-father, with yellow corn, white corn alone for the flesh, food alone for the human legs and arms, for our first fathers, the four human works.

It was staples alone that made up their flesh.

This is the first person: Jaguar Quitze. And now the second: Jaguar Night. And now the third: Mahucutah. And the fourth: True Jaguar. And these are the names of our first mother-fathers. They were simply made and modeled, it is said; they had no mother and no father. We have named the men by themselves. No woman gave birth to them, nor were they begotten by the builder, sculptor, Bearer, Begetter. By sacrifice alone, by genius alone they were made, they were modeled by the Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter, Sovereign Plumed Serpent. And when they came to fruition, they came out human:

They talked and they made words.

They looked and they listened.

They walked; they worked.

They were good people, handsome, with looks of the male kind. Thoughts came into existence and they gazed; their vision came all at once. Perfectly they saw, perfectly they knew everything under the sky, whenever they looked. The moment they turned around and looked around in the sky, on the earth, everything was seen without any obstruction. They didn't have to walk around before they could see what was under the sky; they just stayed where they were. As they looked, their knowledge became intense. Their sight passed through trees, through rocks, through lakes, through seas, through mountains, through plains. Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Mahucutah, and True Jaguar were truly gifted people. And then they were asked by the Builder and Mason: "What do you know about your being? Don't you look? Don't you listen? Isn't your speech good, and your walk? So you must look, to see out under the sky. Don't you see the mountain-plain clearly? So try it," they were told. And then they saw everything under the sky perfectly.

After that, they thanked the Maker, Modeler: "Truly now, double thanks, triple thanks that we've been formed. We've been given our mouths, our faces. We speak, we listen, we wonder, we move, our knowledge is good. We've understood what is far and near, and we've seen what is great and small under the sky, on the earth. Thanks to you we've been formed, we've come to be made and modeled, our grandmother, our grandfather," they said when they gave thanks for having been made and modeled.

They understood everything perfectly, they sighted the four sides, the four corners in the sky, on the earth, and this didn't sound good to the builder and sculptor: "What our works and designs have said is no good: 'We have understood everything, great and small,' they say."

And so the Bearer, Begetter took back their knowledge: “What should we do with them now? Their vision should at least reach nearby, they should see at least a small part of the face of the earth, but what they’re saying isn’t good. Aren’t they merely ‘works’ and ‘designs’ in their very names? Yet they’ll become as great as gods, unless they procreate, proliferate at the sowing, the dawning, unless they increase.”

“Let it be this way: now we’ll take them apart just a little, that’s what we need. What we’ve found out isn’t good. Their deeds would become equal to ours, just because their knowledge reaches so far. They see everything,” so said the Heart of Sky, Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Bearer, Begetter, Xpiyacoc, Xmucane, Maker, Modeler, as they are called.

And when they changed the nature of their works, their designs, it was enough that the eyes be marred by the Heart of Sky. They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were weakened. Now it was only when they looked nearby that things were clear. And such was the loss of the means of understanding, along with the means of knowing everything, by the four humans.

The root was implanted. And such was the making, modeling of our first grandfather, our father, by the Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth. And then their wives and women came into being. Again, the same gods thought of it. It was as if they were asleep when they received them, truly beautiful women were there with Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Mahucutah, and True Jaguar. With their women there they became wider awake. Right away they were happy at heart again, because of their wives.

Celebrated Seahouse is the name of the wife of Jaguar Quitze. Prawn House is the name of the wife of Jaguar Night. Hummingbird House is the name of the wife of Mahucutah. Macaw House is the name of the wife of True Jaguar. So these are the names of their wives, who became ladies of rank, giving birth to the people of the tribes, small and great.

And this is our root, we who are Quiché people. And there came to be a crowd of penitents and sacrificers. It wasn’t only four who came into being then but there were four mothers for us, the Quiché people. There were different names for each of the peoples when they multiplied, there in the east.

WORKS CITED AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Alderink, Larry J. *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism*. American Philosophical Association, American Classical Studies, no. 8. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. *Grandmothers of Light: A Medicine Woman’s Sourcebook*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.
- Beckwith, Martha Warren, ed. and trans. *The Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972.
- Bierhorst, John. *The Red Swan: Myths and Tales of the American Indians*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976.

- Brandon, S. G. F. *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963.
- Budge, E. A. Wallis. *The Gods of the Egyptians*. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Dover, 1969.
- Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Norse Myths*. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Doria, Charles, and Harris Lenowitz, eds. and trans. *Origins: Creation Texts from the Ancient Mediterranean, A Chrestomathy*. Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1976.
- The Elder Edda: A Selection*. Trans. Paul B. Taylor and W. H. Auden. London: Salus, 1969.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Gods, Goddesses, and Myths of Creation: A Thematic Source Book of the History of Religions*. Part I of *From Primitives to Zen*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- . *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Farmer, Penelope, ed. *Beginnings: Creation Myths of the World*. New York: Atheneum, 1979.
- Freund, Philip. *Myths of Creation*. Levittown, NY: Transatlantic Arts, 1975.
- Gaster, Theodor. *Thespis: Myth, Ritual, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. New York: Gordian, 1975.
- Griaule, Marcel. *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Heidel, Alexander. *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Hewitt, John Napoleon Brinton. *Iroquoian Cosmology*. 21st Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology (1899–1900). Rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1974.
- Kramer, Samuel Noah. *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1989.
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Long, Charles H. *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*. New York: George Braziller, 1963.
- Maclagan, David. *Creation Myths: Man's Introduction to the World*. Art and Imagination Series. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.
- Markman, Roberta H., and Peter T. Markman. *The Flayed God: The Meso-American Mythological Tradition: Sacred Texts and Images from Pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Newell, Venetia. *An Egg at Easter: A Folklore Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971.
- O'Brien, Joan, and Wilfred Major. *In the Beginning: Creation Myths from Ancient Mesopotamia, Israel, and Greece*. American Academy of Religion. Aids for the Study of Religion Series, no. 11. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.
- O'Bryan, Aileen. *The Dine: Origin Myths of the Navajo Indians*. Smithsonian, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 163. Washington: GPO, 1956.
- The Prose Edda*. Trans. Jean I. Young. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Reichard, Gladys A. *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*. 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Rooth, Anna Birgitta. "Creation Myths of the North American Indians." *Anthropos* 52 (1957): 497–508.

- Sproul, Barbara, ed. *Primal Myths: Creating the World*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991.
- Van Over, Raymond, ed. *Sun Songs: Creation Myths from Around the World*. New York: Penguin, 1984.
- Van Wolde, Ellen. *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1–11 and Other Creation Stories*. Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse, 1997.
- Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *Patterns of Creativity Mirrored in Creation Myths*. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1972.
- Weigle, Marta. *Creation and Procreation: Feminist Reflections on Mythologies of Cosmogony and Parturition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.
- Wilson, Horace Hayman. *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition Translated from the Original Sanskrit and Illustrated by Notes Derived Chiefly from Other Puranas*. Calcutta, India: Punthi Pustak, 1972.