War and myth

Jean-Loïc LE QUELLEC

Abstract: War is such a widespread activity that one would expect countless myths to explain its origins. However, such stories are relatively rare, whereas warrior deities are particularly numerous, and the very existence of war therefore seems to be self-evident and requiring no justification. Myths most often recount wars between different species (Geranomaquia, Celestials against Earthlings, etc.) or between various mythical beings (war of the Winds, winter against summer, Centauromachy, Gigantomachy, Theomachy, Titanomachy, etc.). These clashes are often said to explain the characteristics of species today, and in America, they are also said to explain how humans acquired fire. These are generally primordial, founding wars, often fought between two halves of the universe and establishing order in the world. Thus, according to myths about war, what matters is not so much its origin as what it establishes.
Keywords: Dioscuri, deities, eschatology, Geranomaquia, war, mythology.

1. GENERAL

The article on "war" in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* concludes that war is a "thematic obviousness" in traditional narratives, but that questions about its causes only emerged after the conflicts of the 19th century (Lehmann, 1996, p. 421). Yet, in mythology, wars are considered to be one of the calamities attributable to divine will, sometimes preceded by warning signs, like epidemics. When war is mentioned in fairy tales, it does not take place in a specific location or at a specific time. They simply refer to soldiers or going to war, without further details, as in Grimm's tale KHM081: "Once upon a time there was a great war, and when the war was over, many soldiers were sent into retirement" (Grimm and Grimm, 2009, vol. I, p. 433). In some variants of the ATU514 tale type, "The change of sex", a king with only three daughters must send a son to war; the three sisters ask to be allowed to pass themselves off as soldiers, but only the youngest passes her father's tests; she then disguises herself as a man and performs feats of war.

War and its consequences give rise to numerous rumours and false news stories, which are always based on pre-existing representations, as M. Bloch (1921) clearly observed. This is when old migration legends often resurface (Christiansen, 1958), featuring sunken bells, treasures (Szirtes, 2011, p. 50) or golden skittles that the besieged hide when the enemy arrives (Beitl,

1953, p. 109). These legends also feature armies sleeping in the mountains, as in Bytom (Poland) or like that of Saint Hedwig, who waits in a cave from which she will one day emerge to establish eternal peace (Siebs, 1913, p. 520). The tricks used to escape the pursuing army draw on traditional motifs, such as inverted horseshoes (Szirtes, 2011, p. 150). The same tunnels used by giants and other mythical beings to move around in tales and legends are used by insurgents to escape their attackers, as recounted in Holzmengen (Romania; Szirtes, p. 149). Motifs that were formerly used in Hungary in relation to the Tatar raids of the 13th to 18th centuries were revived in the 18th century to refer to the Kuruc rebels during the Rákóczi War of Independence. For example, the story of the young girl celebrated as a heroine for dispersing Tatars by throwing a beehive at them was also told about the Kuruc (Szirtes, p. 150). In Austria, it is said that all or part of the population of Ebnit took refuge in a cave to escape an enemy army (Beitl, 1953, no. 109) and it is sometimes added, as in Valduna, that some people never came out of their hiding place (Beitl, 1953, pp. 139–140). Place names and local legends also evoke memories of invasions by various more or less imaginary peoples: in Germany, the Turks; in Silesia, the Mongols (Kühnau, 1926, p. 369); and in France, the Saracens, of whom many people still claim to be descendants (Basset-Larissa, 2006). These foreign invaders are accused of having profaned sacred buildings. For example, the church in Tharnau (Silesia) is said to have been used as headquar-

ters by the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War and converted into stables when Napoleon waged war on Prussia (Kühnau, 1926, p. 46). In central western France, the Wars of the Vendée fuelled a rich repertoire of legendary tales (Bouras, 1986): the tree marking the spot where a war hero or heroine died bleeds when wounded; a skeleton is discovered when the trunk is cut open—it is said to have belonged to a priest who had taken refuge there to escape his pursuers (Le Quellec, 2013).

The mythification of military leaders is well documented. Garibaldi, for example, became the terrible djinn Kalliwali in Arabia, able to put his enemies to flight by his mere appearance (Mannhardt, 1878, p. 569). The motifs of the hero's survival (motif A570)[1] and the anticipation of his return (motif A580) are frequently revived in times of war or just after (Renard, 2010). Thus, in the 11th century, it was said that Charlemagne had returned to lead the First Crusade. Rumours of Hitler's survival, predicted by M. Bonaparte (1950, p. 9), arose soon after and persisted until the 1990s (Szabó, 1947).

Various omens can herald war: comets with unusually long tails, falling fireballs, reddish halos around the moon, aurora borealis and other celestial phenomena. Other omens include red discolouration of lake water, unusual bird behaviour, the passing of wild hunts (motif E501.1.1 according to Thompson, 1958) and various prophecies (motif M356.1). The end of war can also be foretold by exceptional events, such as a spring gushing, an earthquake, or out-of-season flowering (Dauzat, 1919, pp. 227–232).

2. ORIGIN

Myths rarely mention the causes of war. In Celtic and Icelandic tales, war is said to result from the falsification of a message (motif K1087), and is intended to seize territory (motif P23) or enforce alliances: for example, a foreign king declares war to obtain a princess in marriage (motif T0104), or it is launched by a rejected and frustrated suitor (motif T104.1). Alternatively, war may result from a duel that escalates into a vast conflict following the death of one of the two protagonists (Stokes, 1892).

Similarly, accounts explaining the emergence of war in the world are scarce. It may have been introduced among humans by a mythical being, as is the case with the Kaska of subarctic America: "At one time war was unknown. Rabbit introduced war, and the Indians imitated him. Since then there has been war among tribes and families. Had Rabbit not introduced war, people would know nothing of war now" (Teit, 1917, p. 469). In California, the Mono believe that it was the hero Pumkwesh, inventor of arrows and the tools used to straighten them, who introduced war and sororal polygyny (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 470). A similar belief exists among the Cahuila, where the demiurge Mukat distributes bows and arrows to humans and then teaches them to fight each other

(Lévi-Strauss, 1985, p. 186). In the Amazon, the Bororo claim that war is simply the consequence of an increasing population (Wilbert and Simoneau, 1983, p. 77).

In Africa, the Kono tell a story of a conflict motivated by a man and his son's jealousy over a woman named Lango. This leads to the first murder, followed by others, as various chiefs seek to seduce Lango … and that is how war came about (Willans, 1909, pp. 136–137). In Togo, Uwolowu, revered by the Akposo, started the first war for no apparent reason (Müller, 1907, pp. 204–205), and this was also the case for Kalala, who was responsible for the first war among the Holoholo of Central Africa (Scheub, 2000, pp. 86–97). Among the Lugbara, also in Central Africa, two hero-ancestors encountered a leper, cured her and had sexual intercourse with her. This led to a dispute with her family, and each had to pay a fine: this was the origin of war and dowry (Scheub, 2000, p. 83).

The first murder, followed by revenge and a wider confrontation, sparked the first war among the Toraja (Downs, 1955, p. 41), the Ayoreo (Wilbert and Simoneau, 1989, p. 134), and in an Irish myth (Stokes, 1892). For the Matako of the Chaco, the deceiver took advantage of a drinking session to sow discord among humans, convincing them to attack other villages and kill each other (Wilbert and Simoneau, 1982, pp. 92–93). Among the Sikuani of the Orinoco, Vulture introduced war among humans to avenge Kuwai, the creator, for sleeping with his wife (Wilbert and Simoneau, 1992, pp. 136–137). Similarly, one account states that Onoenrgodi introduced war among the Kadiweu of Mato Grosso because they had stolen fish from them (Wilbert and Simoneau, 1990, p. 27). War is also sometimes instituted to limit population growth, as among the Achomawi in north-eastern California (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 105). In the Indo-European world, wars involving gods and giants are often described in great detail, with numerous episodes and twists and turns. The favourable outcome for the gods marks the triumph of the Law over the forces that threaten it and signals the elimination of the chaos associated with the early cosmogonies allowing harmonious order to emerge. The gigantomachy is, in a way, the final act of the creation of the world, and the reasons for the conflict (such as revenge or resentment) seem to be of little importance. As for the origin of war in general, it is neglected (Vian, 1952; Lajoye, 2012).

Thus, unlike other major human characteristics or practices (such as death, sexuality, disease, cooking, fire-making, etc.), whose emergence in the world is recounted in numerous stories, war seems to have rarely been perceived as something that needed to be explained or justified. Conversely, the great rarity of origin myths about war makes it seem like a kind of eternal truth.

3. WARRIOR DEITIES

At first, creating a list of warrior deities seemed like a good way to approach the mythology of war. Easily accessible documentation from various sources (such

as dictionaries and encyclopaedias of religions) supplemented by extensive bibliographic research enabled me to build a database of 368 such deities, detailing their functions and attributes. The vast majority are gods, with only 19% of goddesses and just under 2% of beings that could be considered androgynous. These deities are very unevenly distributed around the world, being mainly concentrating in Western Eurasia and Western Polynesia (Fiji, Samoa, Niue, etc.; see fig. 1). In the latter area, this concentration may be due to a collection artefact. The data gathered is disparate, particularly outside of Eurasia and, more specifically, Western Europe, where it is based on ethnographic notes that are sometimes very succinct and of varying reliability. As the oceanographer J. Guiart pointed out, "If the personalities and practices of so many war deities have survived, it is because Europeans were fascinated by them: first to remove them from circulation, then to take pleasure in displaying them as their possessions in Europe" (Guiart, 1993, p. 103). On the other hand, the extreme concentration of these deities in Western Eurasia can be attributed various factors, including the abundance of written documentation. However, it is above all the history of each deity that must be considered, taking into account adoptions, identifications, assimilations, diffusions and transfers between languages and cultures over time. Rešep, for example, was the Syro-Canaanite god of war who appeared in Syria around the middle of the third millennium BCE. He was known as Rašap in Ebla and Rašp or Rašap in Ugarit, was introduced into Egypt during the 18th dynasty, where he became Ršpw and was later identified with Herishef. In the Hurrian pantheon, he is known as Aršappa, Iršappa, Iršap or Irša and
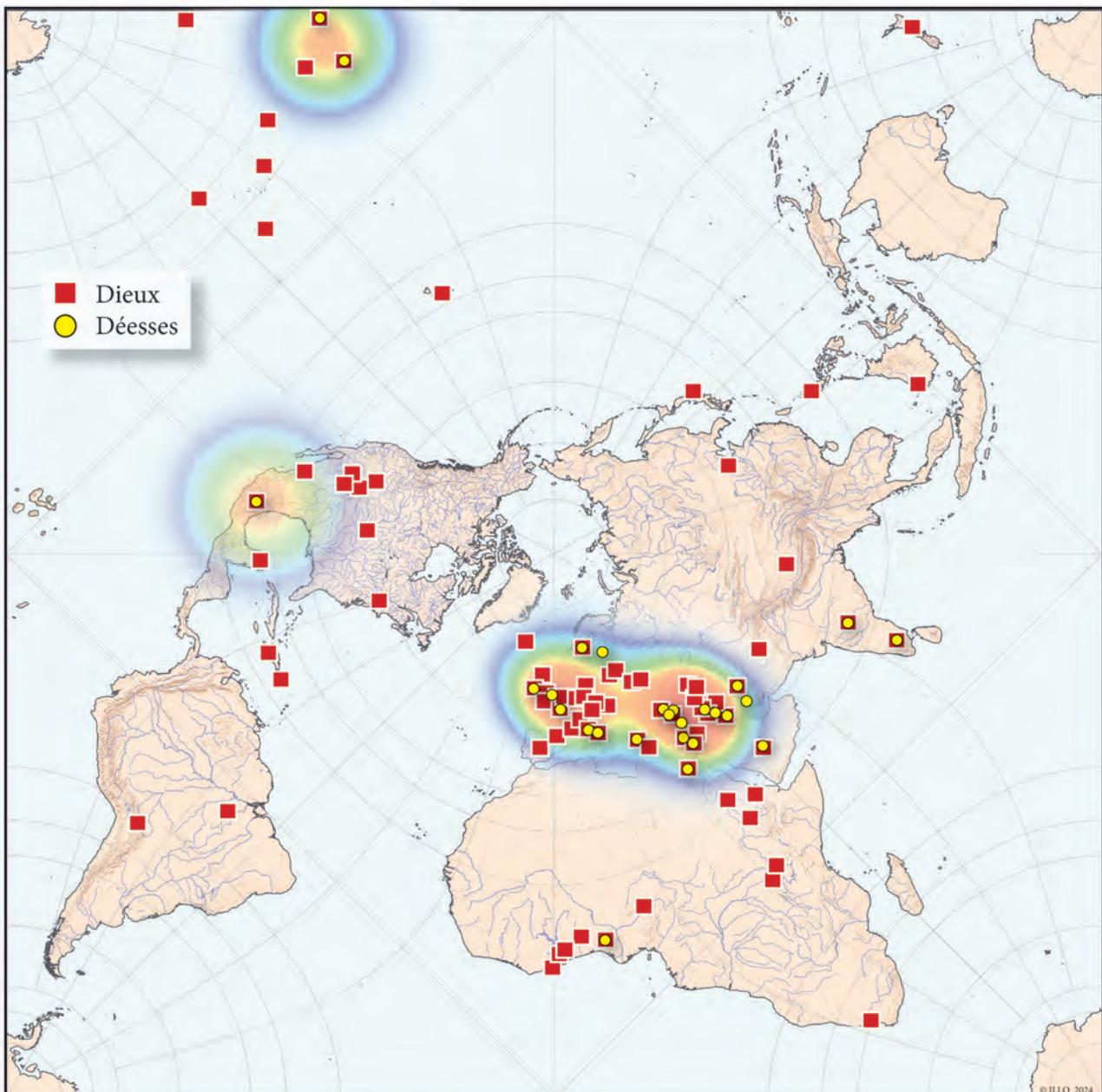

Fig. 1 – Global distribution of war deities, with the areas of highest density indicated.

as Ršp by the Phoenicians. His memory is preserved in the Hebrew Bible, where he is mentioned seven times. In Anatolia, he is attested by an inscription (Rešeph) at Karatepe. In Cyprus, he was identified with Apollo as the god of plague: this is because the gods of war often direct their weapons against the demons of disease, leading to their invocation against epidemics, particularly plague (Lipiński, 2009; Münnich, 2013; Bar, 2017). Equally complex trajectories characterise many other warrior deities, such as *aθtar. Originally androgynous, this deity of the second millennium was later associated with the star Venus and adopted in the Semitic world under names such as Aštar, Ištar, Astarte (masculine : *aθtar*, feminine: *aθtar-t*). These names have been linked to the Indo-European designation for the star: $*h_2st\hat{e}r$, cf. Greek *astêr*, English "star", etc. (D'iakonov, 1984, pp. 35–36). The feminine form was adopted by the Egyptians as a goddess of war armed with a bow and spear. Her cult spread as far as Spain thanks to the Phoenicians. Adopted by the Etruscans under the name Apru, she became so prevalent throughout the Mediterranean that her name, in the form 'Aštarot, is used indiscriminately in the Hebrew Bible to refer to all pagan deities (Jean-Baptiste, 2016, pp. 88–89). These two examples are mentioned only briefly to illustrate the complexity of the subject, which cannot be dealt with in detail here. However, it shows that the areal approach can at least provide a new perspective on these issues.

4. MOTIVATIONS

One of the main reasons for war in myths is the recovery of a herd of cows stolen by neighbours (motif K300.1) or a group of women captured by an enemy. In one particular Indo-European myth, a warrior hero named "Third" (*Trito) is aided by a warrior god to recover cattle stolen from his people by a foreigner. To do so, he must fight and slay a three-headed snake. In the *Ṛg-Veda* (10.8), this hero is Trita, who kills the monster Viśvarūpa—a three-headed snake (*ahi; tri-śīrṣāṇaṃ*)—with the help of the god of war Indra. This victory allows Trita to recover the stolen cattle. In Greek mythology, Heracles recovers the cattle stolen by Geryon, who is three-headed (*τρι-κέφαλος*) and also has a reptilian nature due to his mother Medusa, who has snake-like hair. In the Avesta (Yast 15), Θraētaona ("Son of the Third") is helped by the storm god Vāyu in his victorious struggle against the serpent Aži Dahāka, who is also three-headed (*θri-kamərədəm*), and is thus able to rescue a group of women. Traces of similar myths have also been noted in Germanic and Hittite traditions, and B. Lincoln has suggested that the recovery of cattle was part of a ritual sequence re-enacting the first cosmogonic sacrifice (Lincoln, 1976). Furthermore, the alternation between cows and women can be explained by the fact that, in the Avesta version, the abducted and recovered women are referred to by the term *vantā-*, the feminine form of the partici-

ple of a verb meaning "to desire", and can therefore be translated as "those who are desired" … a term that can be applied equally to women and cows, both of which the hero must recover. And in the *Ṛg-Veda*, the word *dhénā*, usually translated as "cows", derives from a verb meaning "to give milk", which can also be used for both cows and women. Indeed, its use to refer to women captured by enemies is attested (Lincoln, 1981, pp. 108–109).

It appears that when the reasons for a conflict between two human groups are indicated in a myth, they are frequently related to the conflictual relationships between men and women, or to the violent appropriation of women by men. This ties in with the "heroic rapist" myth, which associates military conquest with violence against women (Brownmiller, 1976, pp. 350–351).

In ancient mythology, the motif of the abduction of women already forms the basis for the founding of cities and empires, with the conquest of land and resources being equated with the conquest of women: "In the eyes of the conqueror, foreign territories and women are alike" (Weigel, 1990, p. 142). This tradition is richly illustrated in written and pictorial representations of armed conflicts between cities and countries (Weigel, pp. 149–179). C. Opitz has highlighted the abundance of colonial mythology celebrating the conquest of new worlds. This mythology refers to "virgin continents" and "penetration of unknown lands", treating the conquest of landscapes as if it were the conquering of female bodies (Opitz, 1992, p. 40).

5 WARRIOR HELPERS

Although myths rarely mention the origins of war, they sometimes refer to divine intervention in support of a warrior hero or one side against another. This type of myth was revived during the First World War, when, during the retreat from Mons on the 1st of September 1914, soldiers in a desperate situation reported seeing guardian angels hovering above the battlefield … and they were saved (Dauzat, 1919, p. 32).

These divine twins are most often the Dioscuri, who appear on the battlefield to favour one side. Etymologically, the name Dioscuri (Dios Kouroi) means "young men (*kouroi*) born of Zeus" in Greek, and this term has come to refer to all mythical twins, to the point of imagining an unlikely "Dioscuric religion" (Rendel Harris, 1903 and 1906—contra Walker, 2015).

These twins appear together in battle, often riding white horses. In ancient times, their wooden Spartan symbols, the dokana, were carried at the head of armies. Dioscurid phenomena have been cited in several instances of warfare. During the war between the Locrians and the Crotonians on the banks of the River Sagra in the 6th century BCE, an eagle appeared above the former's ranks as they were overwhelmed by their enemies, and "On the army's wings two young men were spotted with weapons different from the rest, men of extraordinary size,

with white horses and scarlet cloaks"; when the Locrians were victorious, they vanished (Justinus, 1862, p. 224). Pausanias (*Descriptiion of Greece*, 4.27.1–6) recounts that, just before the Battle of Stenykleron, Panormos and Gounippos, dressed in white and brandishing swords, appeared among the Lacedaemonians on the feast day of the Dioscuri. According to Cicero, in 496 BCE, "at the critical Battle of Lake Regillus between the dictator Aulus Postumius and Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum, Castor and Pollux were seen fighting on horseback in our ranks" (Cicero, *De Deo Natura*, II, 2). In gratitude, Postumius promised to build a temple to the divine twins (Frazer, 1929, p. 262). In his *Life of Lysander* (12.1), Plutarch reports that when Lysander commanded the Spartan fleet against Athens in the Battle of Aegospotami in 405 BCE, the Dioscuri appeared, this time in the form of stars … which may have been St. Elmo's fire (Van Compernolle, 1969; Giangiulio, 1983).

Florus (*Abridged History of Rome*, II, 12) reports one of their appearances, which is said to have occurred in 168 BCE: "The people of Rome received the joyful news of this victory long before they learned it from the general's letter; it was known at Rome on the very same day on which Perses was conquered. Two young men, with white horses, were seen cleansing themselves from dust and blood at the lake of Juturna; and these brought the news. It was generally supposed that they were Castor and Pollux, because they were two; that they had been present at the battle, because they were wet with blood; and that they had come from Macedonia, because they were still out of breath" (see Selby, 1889, p. 337). A similar tradition is cited for the Battle of Simancas in medieval Spain, where two young men riding on dazzling white horses appeared to decide the outcome of the confrontation (Krappe, 1938, p. 179); these were Saints James and Millán (Aemillianus), who are examples of the Christianisation of the Dioscuri (Krappe, 1932, p. 13). Other examples, include the twin saints Gervais and Protais, or Crépin and Crépinien, who are Christianisations of Lugus and his twin (Gricourt and Hollard, 2010, p. 49; Gricourt and Hollard, 2015; Gricourt and Hollard, 2017).

Traditions of this type are widespread throughout the Indo-European world. In India, the Aśvins/Aśvinau—or Vedic twin "horsemen"—(Aśvinau is a dual form) also save those who invoke them in battle (Ward, 1968, p. 18; Le Quellec and Sergent, 2017, pp. 346–347). This type of myth is based on the reality of twin births, but is considered to be the result of supernatural intervention. According to this conception, one of the brothers is fully human, while his twin is considered divine or likely to have been fathered by a mythical being. For example, the immortal Pollux (Poludeukēs), one of the Dioscuri, is the son of Zeus, while his twin, Castor (Kastōr), who is mortal, is the son of Tyndareus, an ordinary man and the king of Sparta; both are represented in the constellation Gemini. Of the two *aśvins*, one is the son of Dyau, meaning "Heaven", the other of a certain Sumakha, meaning "very vigorous, great warrior". In India, Manu ("man") is the brother of Yamá ("twin"). In Roman mythology, Romulus' interven-

tion, as the brother of Remus (a name thought to derive from *Yemos, "twin"), reminds us that in Indo-European mythology, twins with similar names often act as founders of cities or nations (Puhvel, 1987, p. 289). Just as Castor and Pollux are associated with Sparta, Hēraklēs and Iphiklēs preside over the fortress of Tiryns, Idas and Lunkeus founded Messina, and the Christian saints Gervais and Protais, following in the footsteps of the Gallic brothers Segoveus and Bellovesus, are said to have founded Milan. Ferrutius and Ferrutio (Saints Ferréol and Ferjeux) founded the first church in Besançon (Meurant, 2000, p. 35). As for the Danish brothers Hengest ("stallion") and Horsa ("horse"), originally from Jutland, they founded the kingdom of Kent (Ward, 1968, pp. 18–19; Ciubotaru, 2006, p. 173). It seems that there is a cosmogonic model based on the idea of a "primordial couple consisting of a 'man', the ancestor of humanity, and his 'twin' who was killed so that the world could come into being" (Sergent, 1995, p. 350).

The myth was revived in Myanmar in 2001 when the Thai army arrested two "mysterious twins" on January 17. They were believed to have commanded, since 1997, the "Army of God", a fundamentalist Protestant-inspired militia composed of dissident Karen insurgents from the Karen National Union fighting against the Burmese military junta. These teenage twins, Johnny and Luther Htoo, were said to have magical powers, and their militiamen were convinced that they were immune to their opponents' bullets (Le Quellec and Sergent, 2017, p. 352). Their story inspired a comic book by writer B. Lavie and artists T. and A. Hanuka—themselves twins (Lavie et al., 2015)—as well as a film by director A. Bower, titled *Guerilla* and released in 2020.

6. FOUNDING WARS

In the Indo-European world, another myth, that of the founding war, pits two large segments of society against each other, namely representatives of "functions" I (sovereignty) and II (force) against those of "function" III (fertility/abundance). At the end of the conflict, the latter is incorporated into society as a whole (see Sergent, 2004, for more on these "functions" or "concepts"). The clearest example of this type can be found in the *Ynglingasaga* (*Prose Edda*), which recounts the first war in the world, between the Æsir (Ases) led by Óðinn (I) and þórr (II) on one side, and the Vanir (Vanes) led by Freyr (III) on the other, in a conflict with no apparent motive (Dumézil, 1995, p. 31). Freyr is also joined in battle by his sister, Freyja, and Njörðr. As the war threatens to drag on with neither side gaining the upper hand, the belligerents decide to end it. In exchange for hostages, Freyr, Freyja, and Njörðr go to live with the Æsir, and the society of gods is thus complete. G. Dumézil (1974) demonstrated that a similar story was historicised in Rome. Romulus, protected by Jupiter and the founder of Rome for having traced the sacred furrow (I), but also a warrior (II)

as the son of Mars, fought Titus Tatius and his wealthy Sabines, who possessed fertility (III), represented by the Sabine women. The war threatens to drag on, but the Romans capture the Sabine women, who throw themselves between their fathers and their captors, ending the conflict and enabling Roman society to embrace the three functions. G. Dumézil concludes his analysis of these stories by stating that "The simplest, most humble explanation is to admit that the Romans, like the Scandinavians, took this scenario from a common earlier tradition and simply rejuvenated the details, adapting them to their 'geography', their 'history' and their customs, introducing names of countries, peoples, and heroes suggested by current events" (Dumézil, 1974, p. 88).

Traces of this myth have been identified among the Ossetians (Dumézil, 1995, pp. 100–118), in Ireland with the Second Battle of Mag Tuired (Puhvel, 1987, p. 181) and in Greece with the Trojan War, where the Achaeans represent functions I and II, while the Trojans embody function III. A similar structure can be found in India, where the conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, as recounted in the *Mahābhārata*, culminates in the acceptance of the divine twins Aśvins (III) into the pantheon of gods by Indra (Littleton, 1970; Mallory, 1997). In all these stories, the war between two essential components of society ends with an alliance that allows a complete society to form (Dumézil, 1974, pp. 82–85). It is therefore a sociogenic myth.

7. ESCHATOLOGICAL WAR

Eschatological myths concern the "last things" (*ta eschata* in Greek), on either a personal or cosmic level. In the latter case, they may refer to final salvation through redemption (soteriology), or more generally to the destruction of the cosmic order, followed by its regeneration. This regeneration may be the result of a universal cataclysm, such as a flood or ekpyrosis (universal conflagration), or a war between mythical beings, giants, monsters, or deities.

In Iran, the apocalyptic myth of Fraškart, as recounted in the *Bundahišn*, depicts divine entities fighting and defeating the daēva (a kind of evil spirit). The main episode is the trial of strength between Ohrmazd, the supreme deity, and Ahriman, the evil being who opposes him. Once the good side has triumphed, the Saošyant (a kind of saviour) resurrects everyone, and each person is subjected for three days to an ordeal by molten metal, which tortures the wicked but is like a bath of milk for the good (Puhvel, 1987, p. 116).

In Germanic mythology, Ragnarök, or "the final destiny of the powers" (not Ragnarékkr, meaning "twilight of the gods", or *Götterdämmerung* in German), will be preceded by a "terrible winter" (Fimbulvetr). According to the anonymous Old Norse poem *Völupsá*, composed in the 10th or 11th century, and *Snorri's Edda*, an Old Icelandic text from the 13th century, the final massacre will take place on the battlefield of Vígriðr. The sun will be swallowed by the wolf Fenrir and a universal fire will destroy the world while the earth sinks into the ocean. Almost all men and gods will die, because they are both guilty of crimes and wars. However, a few will survive, and a new, purified world will emerge from the waves. The god Baldr will make it green again, and the last surviving human couple, a woman named Líf ("Life") and a man named Lífþrasir ("Tenacious Life"), will repopulate it (Simek, 1996, pp. 275–276).

This story shares common mythemes with the Kurukṣetra war in the *Mahābhārata*. It also tells of a final cosmic battle between the "good" gods, the Pāṇḍavas and their allies, and the Kaurava or "evil" demons. All the kings of the earth are divided between the two sides in a general battle that results in the near-total destruction of the world. The "evil" perish and the only survivors are the Pāṇḍava and a few heroes. The world is then renewed under the reign of the just and virtuous Yudhiṣṭhira. Comparing these stories reveals the existence of a "vast myth about the history and destiny of the world, about the relationship between good and evil, which must already have existed [...] among at least some of the Indo-Europeans" (Dumézil, 1986, p. 255).

The question of whether the stories in the *Mahābhārata* have a historical basis is resolved by suggesting that they are merely mythology transposed into history, with the latter serving as a receptacle for the former. A similar process occurred in the traditions about the origin of Rome and the transition from monarchy to republic in 509, which evoke the overthrow of the Etruscan Tarquin dynasty, the establishment of the Republic, the siege of the city by the Etruscan king Porsenna, and finally the battle of Lake Regillus between the Patriots and the confederated Latins who came to support the Tarquins. Contemporary historians have questioned the authenticity of this battle and of this grand narrative, which reflects the Indo-European myth of the eschatological war that leads to the destruction and regeneration of the world order. In this narrative, the Patriots and the Tarquins play the same role as the Pāṇḍavas against the Kauravas. D. Briquel revisited this issue, incorporating elements from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and concluded that "everything we are told about the overthrow of the last of the kings and the victorious resistance of the young republic to his attempts at restoration seems to correspond, in its overall structure, to a plot similar to that found in other versions of this ancient mythical scheme, primarily the *Mahābhārata* epic in India, which is undoubtedly the best point of comparison for understanding it" (Briquel, 2007, p. 321).

P. and A. Sauzeau (2017) have demonstrated that all of these tales stem from a single "mythical matrix", a basic narrative framework that has been enriched and refined over time: that of the "Final Battle", as S. O'Brien (1976) called it. All these myths tell of the end of an age, which occurs when a grandiose and catastrophic conflict threatens humanity and even the cosmos (Sauzeau and Sauzeau, 2017).

8. ANIMAL WARFARE

Returning to the areal approach, let us analyse a very widespread type of myth: that of warfare between two groups of animals (fig. 2). There are two main types, depending on whether the conflict is between wild and domestic animals (motif K2323) or only between wild animals (motif B263). The latter is often a war between celestial and terrestrial beings. According to the international classification of tales, type ATU222, entitled "War between birds (insects) and quadrupeds" (Uther, 2004, p. 140), tells the story of a bear (wolf, lion) insulting the children of a wren (insect). The offended animal then declares war, resulting in a general conflict between flying animals and quadrupeds, with each side taking a position. The leader of the land animals is the fox, who warns that

he will raise his tail to indicate when it is time to advance or attack. Everything goes well until insects (wasps, bees, etc.) sting him under his tail, causing him to lower it in pain. Thinking they have lost, the quadrupeds retreat (motif K2323.1), and the flying animals win (motif B261). A variant of this story (B263.4) was recorded among the Nāga Angāmi of Assam in India, where birds are pitted against reptiles (Hutton, 1914) In Samoa and among the Thompson family in North America, there is a war between birds and fish (Brown, 1915; Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 386), while Talmudic literature mentions a war between snakes and storks (B263.7). In British Columbia, wars between different groups of fish are still known, for example between trout and salmon, and there are also conflicts between fish and quadrupeds (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 386).

In the ATU222A tale type, "The bat in the war between the birds and the quadrupeds", the bat first joins the birds,
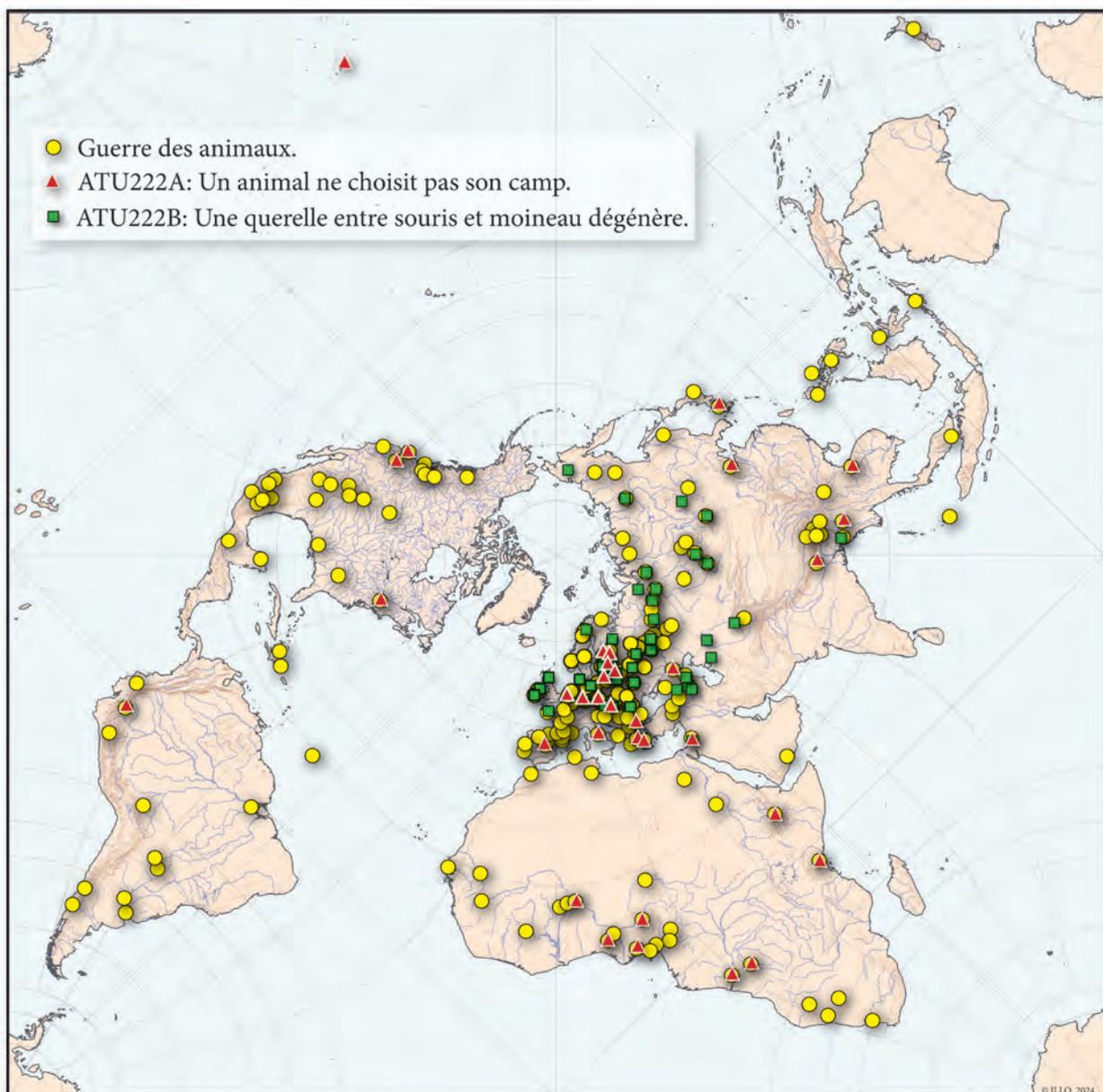

Fig. 2 – Global distribution of different variants of the myth of the war between celestial and terrestrial animals.

then the quadrupeds, always siding with the victors. The other animals realise this when it comes time to make peace, which is why the bat has been despised ever since (motif B261.1). This story is often used to explain why bats only come out at night (motif A2491.1), and owes much of its distribution to the success of Aesop's fables, which contain a similar version (Gibbs, 2002, no. 363). However, the final etiological notation is more recent, and only appears in Latin collections. These were then repeated by medieval isopets in German, Spanish, and Dutch (Burrus and Goldberg, 1990; Schippers, 1995). For this reason, stories of this kind have been considered to be of scholarly origin (Dähnhardt, 1912, p. 198).

The ATU222B tale type ("The quarrel between the mouse and the sparrow") recounts how war began among the animals, starting with a simple dispute between a mouse and a sparrow over how to share their stored winter food. When only on grain remains, both animals want to take it for themselves, and the dispute escalates into a general war between birds and four-legged animals. The war ends when the eagle is wounded. In other versions, the mouse and the sparrow get drunk at a party and start insulting each other. In an attempt to resolve the dispute, the two sides turn to their respective kings (judges; eagle, lion), but they also begin to argue, and the situation escalates into a great war between the birds and the quadrupeds. This situation is finally resolved by a duel in which each combatant represents his own side. In some versions, the mouse complains to the snake, who then becomes the leader of the quadrupeds. This type ATU222B often serves as an introduction to long stories that end with the defeat of the eagle and his rescue by a man (type ATU0537).

The type ATU103 ("The war between wild beasts and domestic animals") typically recounts that a conflict between wild and domestic animals that begins with a dispute between a dog and a wolf. Each side seeks allies: the cat and the rooster join the dog, and the fox and the boar join the wolf. The army of wild animals appears much more powerful, but when the cat raises its tail, the wild beasts mistake it for a gun. This causes a stampede, during which the bear falls from a tree and breaks its back (motifs B262, K2323, K2324). Other clashes involve various groups: toads against frogs in Brittany (B0263.01), elephants against ants in Indonesia (B0263.02), and monkeys against grasshoppers in China (B0263.06).

Stories based on the theme of animal warfare are very unevenly distributed around the world. According to my current count, there are at least 400 stories in Eurasia, 51 in America, 37 in Africa, 14 in Oceania, and three in the Middle East. These differences cannot be explained by documentary bias, as shown by the map of all the mythologies taken into account for this study (fig. 3).

Widespread dissemination through books and missionary sermons is generally considered all the more likely given that the ATU222A tale type appears in collections of examples from which clergy drew inspiration for their sermons (Tubach, 1969, p. 501). However, some examples are difficult to explain in this way. This is the case in the Samoan tale of the war between birds and fish (not against land animals), where the animal that always sides with the winners when the outcome is uncertain is the sea cucumber, locally considered to have two mouths and therefore thought to be perfectly equipped to literally speak with a forked tongue (Krämer, 1902). Again, it is the same idea of a war between two large groups of animals with an intermediary being who does not want to choose sides. However, a direct influence seems unlikely, especially since, in Samoan tradition, the gods of war Sepo-Malosi and Taisumalie have the appearance of a bat or a flying fox. Tradition holds that if they fly ahead of the warriors, all will be well, but their turning back is a sign of defeat (Turner, 1884, pp. 51, 56–57). The bat is therefore prevalent in regional mythology and could easily have been incorporated in a borrowed story in which it is the main character. One might wonder whether Taufeleleaki, the god of war in Niue, whose name means "he who flies from side to side", exhibits behaviour similar to that of the uncertain bat (Loeb, 1926, p. 162). The theme of conflict between birds and fish, considered terrestrial animals as opposed to flying ones, is found elsewhere. For example, among the Quinault and Quileute Native Americans of the West Coast of the United States, birds are pitted against fish. During the fight, the ray turns sideways to dodge the crow's arrows and manages to pierce its beak (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 487).

Aesop's influence should also be put into perspective, given that medieval texts provide no explanation for the conflict. The authors simply provide a brief introduction such as *Avibus pugna erat cum quadrupedibus* ("There was a fight between the birds and the four-legged animals"). Erasmus Alberus (c. 1500-1553) appears to be the only author to provide the reason for the dispute, in his fable *Vom Streit der Vögel und Vierfüßigen* ("On the quarrel between the birds and the quadrupeds"); he recounts that the sparrow and the mouse were good neighbours, but the mouse became drunk during a drinking bout, and this sparked a dispute that was soon stirred up by other animals (Alberus, 1892, pp. lx and 146–153). However, I. Levin, who reviewed the entire file in the 1990s, concluded that the oral versions of ATU222B certainly do not all date back to Alberus' initiative. He demonstrated that ATU537 originated in Mesopotamia and corresponds to the plot of the myth of Etana. He also suggested that ATU222B, which so often forms its introduction, could be just as old, since some of its details, such as the snake being the king of the quadrupeds and the mouse breaking the eagle's wings and leaving it defenceless. These episodes can only be understood in the context of the myth of Etana (Levin, 1966, p. 59–61, and 1994, p. 5).

9. GERANOMACHY

There are few myths that mention wars between humans and animals. In Uttar Pradesh (India), mice are said to have won a war against woodcutters (Crooke and Rouse, 1899). Another story, recorded among the
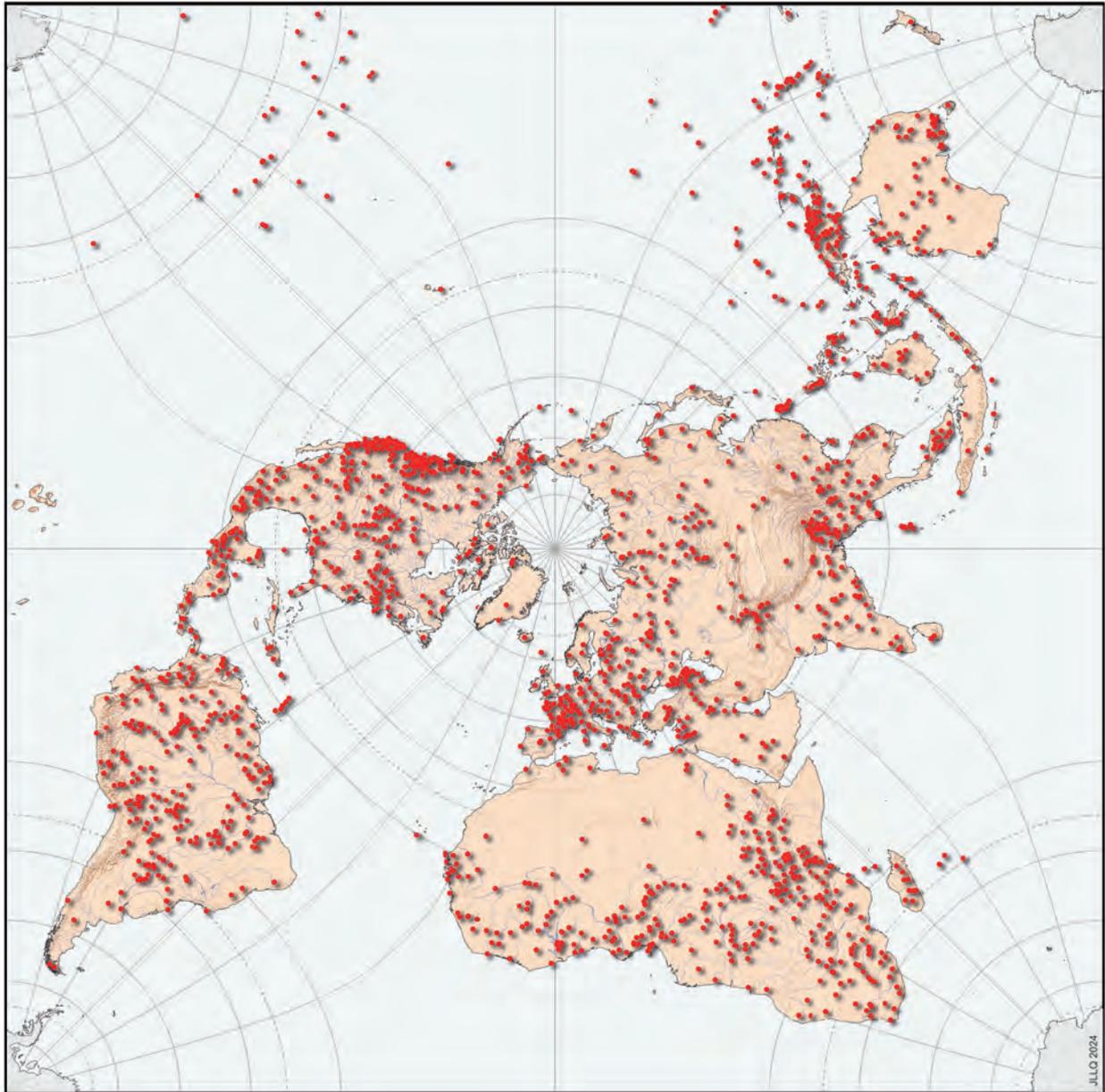
Fig. 3 – Set of mythologies used to create the previous maps. Their distribution shows that the distribution shown in the previous maps is not the result of documentary bias.

Semaa Naga, mentions bats that regularly wage war against Amazons (Hutton, 1921, pp. 258–259). In Siberia, the Karagas tell of sables that regularly massacre a race of dwarves (Dangel, 1931, p. 133).

One of these confrontations is widespread enough (fig. 4) to have been given a specific name: the Geranomachy, or the "fight against the cranes." This term encompasses all stories recounting the periodic confrontations between these large birds and dwarves or pygmies. This motif (F535.5.1) is found in the Old World (ancient Greece and China, ancient Rome, medieval Iran, etc.), as well as in North America (Cherokee, Nisgaa-Nass, Comox, Nisqualli, Kwakiutl, Snohomish, Salish, Tsimshian, Bella Kula, Skagit, Yakima, Fox-Meskawi, Natchez, Zuñi, Lipan, Atsina-Gros Ventre, Crow) and South America (Emberá, Kuikuru, Takana, Shuar). In these sto-

ries, the dwarves are seen as chthonic beings and often have problems with blocked or missing orifices: eyes in the Old World, mouths in North America, anuses in Central America, the Xingu Basin and the northern Amazon. Dwarves without anuses are the opposite of those without mouths or with tiny mouths, hence their opposite problems with eating and defecation. They are everywhere rescued by a stranger who has lost his way in their country and takes pity on them, delivering them from attacks by birds. In America, the stranger then teaches them how to eat or defecate. A phylogenetic and areal study of all known versions shows that these tales probably originate from an ancient Asian story about a Land of Dwarves located beyond the sea. The inhabitants of this land were dwarves suffering from a deformity of one orifice, and their enemies were migratory birds that attacked them
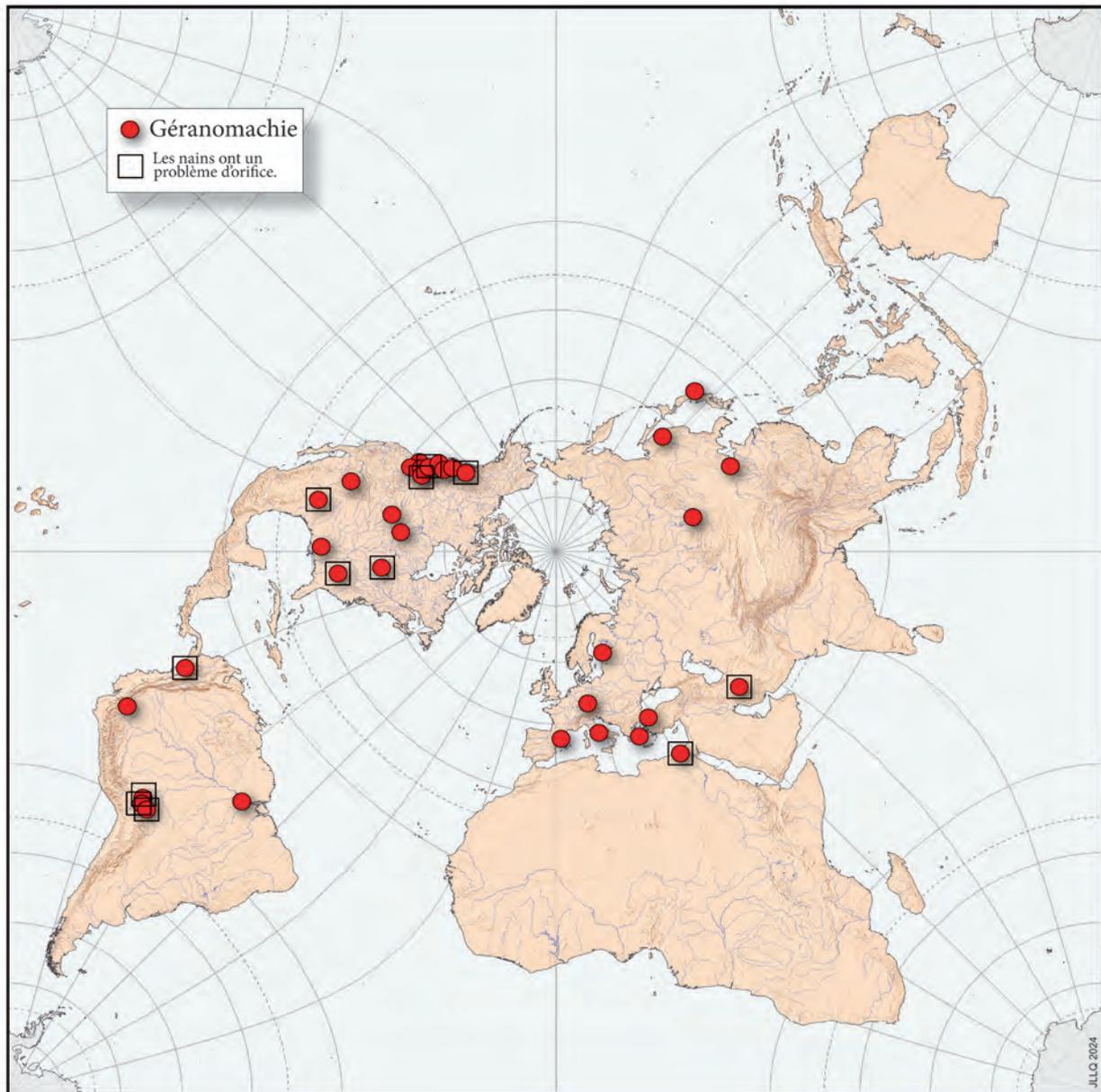
Fig. 4 – Global distribution of myths of Geranomachy or "battle of the pygmies against the cranes."

periodically until a stranger discovered them by chance, healed them, and saved them before returning home. This myth was introduced to the Americas via Beringia in the Late Paleolithic, and then spread southwards, undergoing various inversions along the way (Le Quellec and d'Huy, 2017).

Ultimately, the Geranomachy recounts the memory of an imperfect state of the world, when animal people could still defeat humans. At that time, humans were not yet fully developed, notably because not all of their orifices were fully functional. Thanks to an inversion typical of myths (Le Quellec and Sergent, 2017, pp. 363–364; Le Quellec, 2021, p. 15), all humans now have a mouth and an anus, and cranes live among them without bothering them.

Thus, the Geranomachy also relates to the ordering of the world.

10. WAR OF THE WINDS

In France, this is a battle that takes place between January 25 (the Feast of Saint Paul's conversion) and February 3 (the Feast of Saint Blaise, hence the saying: *À la Saint-Blaise, tout s'apaise* ["on Saint-Blaise's Day, everything calms down"]). The wind that blows on that day is the winner of the battle and will dominate for the rest of the year. "If it is the north wind, the farmers rejoice, because, according to them, it is the 'grenaison' wind (wind that sets grain), whereas they are less welcoming of the south wind, which heralds rain and is so harmful when it lasts a long time" (Heuillard, 1903). This tradition has been recorded in Franche-Comté, Meurth, Marne, Lorraine, and Wallonia (Sébillot, 1904, p. 80), and is still alive to this day in many other places.

However, the wind war is also known in North America, particularly among the Snuqalmi, Chehalis, Kathlamet, Puyallup, Makah, Kwakiutl, Quinaut, Quileute, and Shuswap peoples. There, the conflict pits the north-easterly and south-westerly winds against each other. The north-easterly winds are associated with winter, cold, and the sky, while the south-westerly winds are associated with summer, warmth, and the earth (and the sea). According to the Chehalis account, a cosmic battle ensues after which the animals descend back from the sky, where they had been transformed into constellations (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 489, and 1991, pp. 308–311). In general, these are battles in which heaven and earth "mobilise all their troops, that is, the entire creation" (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 527).

This theme thus echoes that of the battle between Earthlings and Celestials, and therefore that of a clash between two halves of the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 444).

CONCLUSION

Countless origin myths form all over the world explain how various human practices came about, including agriculture, writing, cooking, language, metallurgy, funeral rites, murder, masks, cannibalism, music, adornment, circumcision and excision, laughter, sexuality … Given that war is such a widespread custom, one would expect to find just as many stories recounting its origins. However, although warrior deities are common, particularly in Western Eurasia, mythologies are virtually silent on the origin of war in general, as its existence does not appear to require justification. Myths about its origins are extremely rare and lack detail. Nevertheless, the causes of specific conflicts are occasionally explained, and in these instances, they are frequently associated with conflictual relationships between men and women, or to the violent appropriation of women by men. In the Indo-European world, a very productive mythical theme is that of the "final battle", recounting a grandiose conflict that endangers the entire world and marks the end of an age and the beginning of the present time, or will mark the end of humanity and the cosmos. Countless stories tell of wars between two large social groups, or between Earthlings and Celestials, between humans and animals, between two opposing groups of animals, or even between the north-easterly and south-westerly winds. These form many variations on a clash between two halves of the world. After this battle, the universe acquires its current characteristics. The stakes of this conflict are therefore cosmogonic, whereas those of the more modestly sociogenic Indo-European founding wars pit representatives of essential components of society against each other. In myths, war is therefore generally evoked only for what it produces: it is a means of bringing order to the world and does not need to be justified in itself.

NOTE

1 The motif numbers refer to Stith Thompson's index, which provides information on their geographical distribution as well as a bibliography (Thompson, 1958).

Jean-Loïc Le Quellec
CNRS, IMAf, UMR 8171, St-Benoist-sur-Mer, France
JLLQ@me.com

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DISCUSSION

Maxime Petitjean: We were just discussing on the way here whether there are any myths that explain the origin of war. At the time, none came to my mind. But now I have a little bit of an insight. I don't know if you have looked into the Zoroastrian tradition, the religion of the ancient Persians. There is a very rare text in Middle Persian has been preserved—it is a cosmological text called the Bundahishn. It explains the origins of the world and the eternal struggle between Good and Evil, represented by Ohrmazd on one side and Ahriman on the other. This text presents the history of the cosmos as a 12,000-year cycle, at the end of which Ohrmazd's undivided reign must come about, allowing humanity to live in eternal bliss. This text explains that initially, during the first 3,000 years, Ohrmazd and Ahriman were locked in conflict. Seeing that he could not get rid of Ahriman, Ohrmazd decided to make a pact with him. He decided to create humanity, precisely so that humans would wage a perpetual war against the forces that are supposed to be incarnations of Ahriman in the earthly world, evil and lies. So, this myth really describes the origin of war. And without this earthly war that is supposed to bring about a new eschatological order, in fact, there can be no eternal bliss. It is perhaps the only example I'll have—I don't know if it fits what you had in mind, if it really explains the origin of war, but in any case it seems to account for why war is waged in the human world.

Jean-Loïc Le Quellec: Yes, it's one example, but what strikes me is that there are actually very few. I've only found a dozen. That's really not many, because if you take any major universal phenomenon, or probably universal, the number of founding myths is much higher. So, when it comes to war, it is curious that there are so few mythical justifications. Of course, it is a negative proposition, but still, it makes me wonder a lot. How is this possible? It is as if war were something completely natural: there is no need to explain it. Death, yes; the presence of women, yes—we have to explain why women exist, it's not obvious at all! Sexuality, yes, of course. Many things are explained or justified by myths; war, is not. There are a few cases like that, but they are really the exception. And it's all the more striking because there are myths that feature wars, but we don't know their causes or origins. What is important and interesting is what happens during and after the war. But the origin? No: it's just natural, it's just normal.

François Bon: To pick up on this surprising scarcity of myths about the origins of war, are there more myths about the origins of the warrior? We have talked a lot about the warrior in previous presentations. Does this figure possess its own mythological corpus?

J.-L. L. Q.: I haven't looked into it specifically, but offhand, many stories are about warriors and recount the exploits of heroes. But that comes after: there are warriors because there is war. We do see regional patterns. For example, in the European world, we find the famous

three sins of the warrior, there are ritualized deaths. But all that comes after. As for the appearance of the warrior, I don't know of any myths that explain it. Why are there warriors? To answer this question would be to answer the question of why there is war.

F. B.: Yes, but it could take on different mythological forms.

J.-L. L. Q.: I don't know of any. I'm interested! That's what I said at the beginning about the database: it's a job that can't be done alone. It isn't just a stance I'm taking, it's a reality. This type of work is inherently collaborative.

Alexandre Hamez: In places where we find more traditional creation myths, are they separate from those with a creation by war myth? Or do both types coexist? Is it possible that destruction leads to creation, or is there continuity between the two?

J.-L. L. Q.: I would say at least for now, and depending on a more thorough inventory, that creation myths involving war could easily be considered a subgroup of dual creation myths. Dual creation myths form a much broader category: they do not necessarily involve a war. Their plot is that initial creation is unsuitable, chaotic, or problematic: it must therefore be destroyed and started over. This pattern is extremely widespread, and one of the means of destroying the first creation can be war. But that, once again, is the function: it is a means to an end, like the flood.

Marion Corbé: I was wondering if the presence or absence of the myth in certain parts of the world could be linked to the fact that we are looking for something that is not very well defined. We have talked about it all day: what is war? How do we explain its absence in Australia and its presence in other regions of the world? I am not sure about the chronological span covered by the database you have built. From when are these myths collected? Do they only deal with very recent periods? Could the absence or presence of these myths be linked to the forms that a particular type of conflict take? When you know that these stories are present in Europe, isn't it because there are particular forms of war there which, as a result, fit into something that needs to be explained as a social phenomenon?

J.-L. L. Q.: Indeed, an essential piece of information is missing, the one I was talking about when I mentioned the cube earlier, which is the chronological information. Globally, the data on mythology comes mainly from ethnographic monographs, which are extremely valuable because they often contain mythical narratives. Missionaries also sometimes recorded some of these stories with varying degrees of accuracy. There are biases to consider. But most of this material is very recent. There are some older texts (such as those of Thevet), from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. But they represent a drop in the ocean of literature, compared to the vast majority of documents from the 19th and 20th centuries. Obviously, this creates a significant bias. We would like to have as much,

for example, from the 3rd century. For Antiquity, we have texts, but for many parts of the world, there is a geographical-chronological bias. The documentation in Greece, for example, is abundant, but in Indonesia, it is completely absent. This is a real problem. In several places in the world, however, writing has existed for a long time. Besides ancient Greece, we can mention Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, and more recently Mesoamerica. Thus, in certain places in the world, writings date back thousands of years. Myths have been recorded for a very long time, with varying degrees of chronological depth, but these still provide important reference points. So, this chronological dimension does not appear in my maps; it is a gap that should be addressed, I completely agree with that. I am thinking particularly of the map of deities: in my view, the high concentration of gods and goddesses in the European Mediterranean world can be easily explained by the metamorphosis, multiplication and dissemination of the same gods or goddesses over time. In Mesopotamia, there is a hermaphroditic god named Ashtar, a god of the planet Venus and war. From hermaphrodite, he becomes feminine and becomes Ishtar, then becomes Astarte, who becomes Astaroth in Hebrew. This is shown as different points on the map because they belong to different cultures, but fundamentally it is the same one that moves through time and space. As I said, it's like Darwin's principle of modified descent: it's always the same story that is being told, with small changes. Initially hermaphroditic, some accentuated the masculine side, others the feminine side. He is a god of war, and the gods of war are fighters, and fighters must also fight disease. So he becomes the protector of disease. This is a recurring feature among many war deities who, among other things, are also protectors against plague; and this in cultures that apparently have not really exchanged ideas with each other, because similar causes produce similar effects, as the materialists would say. So we have to add the historical dimension, the chronological depth, but for me, that still doesn't explain everything. It is not enough to account for the extreme condensation in certain places and the total absence in Australia, for example.

Pierre Lemonnier: Two things. First, there is the wonderful article written by C. Lévi-Strauss in 1948 on war and trade. This article shows that violent exchanges and exchanges of goods are essentially the same thing. Are there any myths about the origins of trade or exchange (not just the origin of gift-giving)? The second thing on my mind: when we look at a map like this one, with empty spaces, can we try to see if it corresponds to P. Descola's ontologies? Are there people who wouldn't need to think about the origin of war? The main debate is "diffusionism or non-diffusionism". So, are there myths about the origins of trade, about people beginning to give or exchange things? Because for C. Lévi-Strauss, it is of the same as the origins of war.

J.-L. L. Q.: None that come to mind. But that certainly doesn't mean there aren't any!

Christophe Darmangeat: Much like you, I find this absence, or near-absence, of an origin myth about war

very striking. And indeed, the first explanation that comes to mind (I don't know if it's the right one) is that it's a phenomenon that doesn't need to be explained because it's part of the natural order of things. In fact, it even seems less strange than the division of society by gender or other things of the same kind! I wonder if we could refine this approach a little bit by asking ourselves whether the conflicts (I don't know if we should call them "wars") that these stories depict always involve the idea that beings are both similar and dissimilar. We are more likely to talk about war between humans than war of humans against the wind or against trees. To fight, you have to be somewhat alike, but not entirely: otherwise, there's no reason to fight. I wonder if this idea doesn't come through a little in the myths. Also, one more point about headhunting, which you have noticed, I find particularly fascinating…

J.-L. L. Q.: That's perfectly understandable!

C. D.: Regarding R. E. Downs' explanation, unless I am mistaken, other authors have since written that it probably applied to the people he was describing, but it did not have general validity. We had already talked about it a little, but for my part, if we are talking about headhunting in the strict sense—not just taking trophies to boast about defeating the enemy, but where the taking of heads, teeth, etc. is the very purpose of the operations, because, if treated properly, they will make children grow, they will produce coconuts, and so on. I have the feeling that, in this case, it is very often justified by myths. It's the opposite of war. While war apparently does not need to be explained, headhunting needs to be justified. Since we are at the point where we tell amusing stories, somewhere in Burma, a white man once asked the locals: "But why do you go haedhunting?

— That is such a White man's question! Well, long ago, we (foolishly?) used to wage normal war. But one day, the toad on our path said to us: 'On your expeditions, you should bring back one or two heads. Then you wouldn't have any more diseases, the rice would grow better, etc.' We didn't believe him, but we did it anyway and since then we have seen that it works beyond all expectations. That's why we do it."

The White man then replied: "Don't tell me you believe such nonsense?

— I can see how you think we're stupid; the fact remains that since you white people arrived and banned us from doing it, we have been getting all sorts of diseases that we never had before. So you see…"

To return to serious matters—although this is serious too—I get the impression there is a real contrast between the origins of war in general, which are not found in the myths, and headhunting, which appears almost systematically. I don't know what you think about it…

J.-L. L. Q.: I completely agree. Indeed, although I haven't explored the topic fully, it seems there are many myths and stories that justify headhunting or describe the first headhunt.

Sylvain Lemoine: In fact, this absence of myths about the origins of war might not be so surprising. It men-

tioned here: this is the normal state of affairs, why should it be explained? On the other hand, have you tried to see if your mapping of the myths that refer to war matches up with societies that wage war? Or are there societies that do not wage war, but still have myths that talk about it? Are there myths that talk about war in all warring societies?

J.-L. L. Q.: There is a very moderate correlation. Because Australia, for example, is precisely the emblematic case where you have all the elements of war, but where there are no myths. There are generally no deities at all and certainly no war deities.

S. L.: So this leads to the question of why people create myths. A myth may have a function, but this function is not always necessary.

J.-L. L. Q.: A vast debate! There, from the start, I have said (we've said) that myths are there to explain, to justify things, and so on. But in fact, their main purpose is to give meaning. The idea that myths explain things, that they are a kind of pre-scientific way of seeing the world, is a 19th-century view: things have to be explained, so people make do with what they have when science is not available. Myths are described as pre-science: that's J. G. Frazer's view. But everything shows that this way of seeing things does not hold up, since myths still exist today, even in our own society. Myths persist within individuals too: one can be a very good scientist and at the same time believe in many myths without any real problem. So, in my view, after setting aside those other explanations, the only real purpose of myth is to give meaning. Indeed, it answers the question: "Why? Why do you do that? Why are you chopping people's heads off?" It's not a real explanation, but it gives meaning. That's why the White guy replies: "Are you kidding me? It's not true, you can't really believe in such nonsense!" But this is exactly how someone would react and think if they see myths are pre-science: as soon as you are a little rational, you can't believe such things. But it's a very broad debate which, in my opinion, comes down to how we define myth. In my opinion, the condition for recognizing a myth is otherness. It is very easy to recognize the myths of others which, for others, are the truth. Recognizing your own myths is quite a different matter! You need distance, you need otherness to recognize mythology and myths—chronological distance or geographical distance. So you go to Australia, Sumba or wherever, and there you can easily identify everything people say about the world as mythology. You see it right away: no need for theory, everyone agrees. People compile collections of myths. Entire libraries are filled with such volumes, the prefaces of which do not contain a single word explaining what a myth is. It is taken for granted. So how do we recognize them? By the fact that they are stories that other people tell about the world. The same goes for Antiquity and all ancient periods. It is also another type of distance, temporal this time, where what people (the ancient Greeks, Romans, ancient Egyptians, ancient Scandinavians, etc.) tell about the world is mythology, because it is not what we ourselves tell. For me, that is the ultimate point, the one that lies at the heart of the matter. But I do not claim to have the final answer to this question, which troubles many people.