

Encabeza el volumen una extensa introducción redactada por Federico Bossert, Pablo F. Sendón y Diego Villar, sobre la “Relevancia y actualidad de los estudios de parentesco en antropología” (15–77). No cabe duda que este texto se convertirá pronto, a su vez, en uno de los “textos fundamentales” de los estudios de parentesco. En un lenguaje ameno acompañado por una formidable erudición, los autores hacen mucho más que presentar los estudios compilados. Lo que nos ofrecen, más allá de los años transcurridos, de las controversias y de las escuelas particulares, es un verdadero diálogo entre los autores “clásicos” del parentesco desde el nacimiento de la antropología como disciplina. Sin tomar partido – o bien expresando sus opiniones de manera serena y pausada –, Bossert, Sendón y Villar nos llevan de la mano en los escritos de Morgan (1980 [1877]), Tylor y sus sucesores o detractores, entre la alianza y la descendencia, entre la función y la estructura, desde el evolucionismo y el formalismo: Malinowski discute con Lévi-Strauss, Kroeber con Rivers y Radcliffe-Brown con Dumont en algo que va mucho más allá de una simple presentación o esbozo histórico de los estudios de parentesco. Como lo notan los editores, a partir de textos fundadores como los de Morgan o Tylor, “puede establecerse una continuidad definida entre el desarrollo de la antropología como disciplina científica profesional y el estudio de los sistemas de parentesco” (17): de hecho, es a una verdadera historia de la antropología misma que nos convida este denso texto introductorio.

La última sección, y la más larga, de esta introducción merece una mención aparte. Se trata de responder a una pregunta por cierto apremiante: ¿“en qué medida el repaso de estas teorías [del parentesco] resulta relevante para el estudio de los casos sudamericanos” (49)? La intención declarada de los autores es demostrar que el estudio del parentesco que representan esos textos “clásicos” no sólo pertenece al ámbito teórico o a la historia del pensamiento antropológico: constituye, por lo contrario, una herramienta poderosa e imprescindible “para acceder a la comprensión cabal de las discusiones contemporáneas sobre la organización social de las sociedades amerindias” (49). Para ello se examinan tres estudios de casos pertenecientes a tres áreas culturales y geográficas distintas: el parentesco inca; los sistemas dravidianos y kariera en la Amazonia; y el problema de la organización social en el Gran Chaco – “amor[fa] y decadente” en términos de Métraux (61). La puesta en relación de estas tres áreas constituye, por cierto, una “première” en la antropología sudamericana: los estudios teóricos se vuelven herramientas concretas; la influencia de Morgan sobre los estudios del parentesco inca, la de Dumont en la Amazonia o la de Murdock (“Social Structure”, 1949) sobre los estudios chaqueños son recordadas, explicitadas, instrumentalizadas y utilizadas para lograr una mejor comprensión del fenómeno social que es, en definitiva, la meta de toda obra antropológica.

Los textos de los “monstruos sagrados” de la disciplina no son, definitivamente, “piezas de museo”, y el objetivo declarado de este libro es dar a conocer “las propuestas de un número considerable de estudiosos de valía que dedicaron tiempo y esfuerzo a la labor antropológica” (22),

y cuya herencia no puede ser por tanto olvidada u obviada. Ya, en 2001, los mismos tres editores publicaron una pequeña compilación de escritos de antropología social traducidos al español para el público sudamericano, que reunía a otros tantos clásicos como Malinowski, Mauss, Lienhardt o Fortes (“De la función al significado. Escritos de antropología social”. Lima). No se trata de hacer alarde de erudición, sino de rendir homenaje y sobre todo de saber aprovechar de los estudios, las intuiciones y por qué no los errores de aquellos que nos precedieron. Para los tres editores de “El parentesco” “[I]o que este volumen en definitiva cuestiona es la noción misma de que haya modelos de parentesco ‘clásicos’: simplemente, hay buenos y malos modelos” (22). De la misma manera existen buenos y malos libros: y este libro pertenece, sin duda alguna, a la primera categoría.

Isabelle Combès

**Van Binsbergen, Wim M. J., and Eric Venbrux** (eds.): *New Perspectives on Myth. Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology*, Ravenstein (The Netherlands) 19–21 August, 2008. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2010. 465 pp. ISBN 978-90-78382-07-2. (PIP-TraCS, 5) Price: € 90.00

In recent decades the theoretical front in the study of religions have been dominated by ritual studies. For different reasons – among them the collapse of the Eliadean type of phenomenology of religion – the study of myth has, on the contrary, been perceived in many quarters as old-fashioned, naively “humanistic,” and oriented towards elite high culture. It, therefore, came as something of a surprise when the International Association for Comparative Mythology was launched in 2006. Hopefully the IACM will be able to strongly promote the fascinating field of comparative mythology – a field rich in liaisons with other humanistic field so diverse as sociology and philosophy, history and semiotics, literature and psychology.

The anthology “New Perspectives on Myth” (ed. Wim M. J. van Binsbergen and Eric Venbrux) contains the proceedings from the second conference held by IACM and includes 18 articles brought together under four different organizing themes: “Mythology of Death and Dying,” “Mythological Continuities between Africa and Other Continents,” “Theoretical and methodological advances,” and “Work in progress.” It goes without saying that when it comes to topics and theoretical framework, as well as to the grade of general interest, the articles extend over almost all possibilities. There are several solid and rather traditional articles, for example, by Victoria Kryukova, Joseph Harris, Nick Allen, Boris Oguibénine and Nataliya Yanchevskaya, which accumulate to our knowledge on the mythology of the world. (For what could only be extra-scholarly reason – the heated debate about the relationship between George Dumézil’s work and his fascist views – the seminal work of Bruce Lincoln is pitifully concealing throughout the anthology by these and other authors.) Anyone who has recently visited a religious study conference would be surprised not to find an article based on what Marxists once used to call “vulgar mate-

rialism” and indeed an article (by Steve Farmer) on “The Neurobiological Origins of Primitive Religion” is incorporated in the anthology.

There is at least one article that surely will be discussed, criticised, and influential for a long time to come and that is the inopportunist defence of “old comparativism” by Robert A. Segal, author of several important studies on myth and of a splendid introduction to the field. According to Segal, recent attempts to refocus and vitalise the study of myth – trying to save it from accusations for ignorance when it comes to historical contexts and cultural differences, and for being the servant of a power-driven knowledge subject aiming for the reduction of lived plurality to schematic formulas – have not only been unsuccessful, but profoundly mistaken. The “old comparativists,” exemplified mainly by Frazer, were never, in Segal’s exposition, as square and reductionist as later scholars would have it. The core of Segal’s argument hence touches upon issues about the overarching trends in contemporary humanities and the “postmodern” one-eyed (“reductionist” if one likes to use the weapons of the enemies against themselves) focus on difference and locally situated meaning.

In “New Perspectives on Myth” we do find several contributions with a strong interest in cultural similarities and with a resolute notion of human nature – but perhaps not in the humanistic way that Segal would have it. The predominant topic of this anthology – and the subject one will probably remember after having finished the book – are a number of daring articles about prehistorical mythology, or “humankind’s remoter cultural history.” The subject reaches 65.000 years back in time! Throughout the articles by van Binsbergen, Berezkin, and Witzel I find myself in strange land: lists of unknown people (Lushei, Wa, Kond, Moi, Ma, etc.); maps of “the global distribution of the motif *Shed skin as condition for immortality*” and maps full of arrows proving the “Africa-Eurasian Mythological Continuity”; dates like “80 ka BP”; alien languages like “Borean” and equally unfamiliar “global etymologies”; tables of “Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITIs) in the Global History of Anatomically Modern Humans’ Mythology”; mythical elements presented as parts of “the primeval mythology known to the first people migrated out of Africa” and stemming from realms of “Gondwana” and “Laurasia”. The claims of these articles are as high (van Binsbergen compares himself to Newton) as all the facts they are building on and are difficult for any reasonable smart scholar to evaluate. Whether one finds the mixture of anthropology, historical linguistics, folkloristics, and archaeology impressive or confusing is perhaps a matter of the individual nature of one’s curiosity. Or maybe the problem has more to do with pedagogies – a possibility van Binsbergen proves himself to be fully aware of when he, in his 80 pages long article, writes that his earlier presentations have been “too grandiose and too audacious to convince in detail, and my initial data were of admittedly poor qualities.”

Karl Popper has taught us to dare to raise wide-ranging hypothesis. One reason for this is of course the fact

that a wide-ranging hypothesis (for example: “most if not all mythologies outside Africa can be taken to descend, in part, from postulated pre-Exodus mythologies developed in Africa between 200 and 80 ka BP”) explains a lot. Another reason is the fact that a more general hypothesis ought to be more easily falsified. I guess that one of my problems with the extremely diffusionist and decontextualist perspectives on myths by van Binsbergen, Witzel, and Berezkin is that even though their articles are overloaded by facts, I will not be able, without exhausting efforts, to put forward basic propositions that could prove the theories of these enthusiastic scholars wrong. For me, the articles about prehistorical African mythologies are a jungle. On the other hand, the effort to correct the every so often strong focus in comparative mythology on Indo-European myths should be welcomed and not least African mythologies are definitively all too unknown in the scholarly world. I doubt, unfortunately, that these articles will give us a deeper understanding of the real African people, their ideas, feelings, hopes and social relations that created and transmitted these narratives.

Together with Segal’s article the most challenging of the texts are perhaps the more philosophical inclined texts. Willem Duprés’ general reflection on the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* and Nadia Sels’ on the work on myth by Hans Blumenberg are among the most thought-provoking of the articles. Maybe the future for the study of myth lies not in the connection to more social scientific areas such as sociology and anthropology, but rather – and I guess this is a slightly “old comparativistic” – to core humanistic studies such as history, semiotics and, precisely, philosophy?

Stefan Arvidsson

**Voss, Ehler:** *Mediales Heilen in Deutschland. Eine Ethnographie.* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2011. 416 pp. ISBN 978-3-496-02843-7. Preis: € 34.95

Ehler Voss legt mit der hier zu besprechenden Arbeit “Mediales Heilen in Deutschland. Eine Ethnographie” seine 2009 unter dem Titel “‘Es geht nicht nur um Heilung, es geht um alles!’ Ethnographie Medialen Heilens in Deutschland” am Leipziger Institut für Ethnologie eingereichte Dissertation in leicht überarbeiteter Form vor (23). Sowohl der ursprüngliche als auch der für die Publikation gewählte Titel lassen einen weiten Interpretationsspielraum zu und lösen bei den LeserInnen wohl deutlich variierende Assoziationen aus. Auf diesen Umstand verweist der Buchautor selbst, wenn er durchaus selbstironisch vermerkt, dass beispielsweise angenommen wurde, sein Forschungsprojekt bezöge sich auf Heilungspraktiken, die im Zusammenhang mit dem technischen Medium Fernsehen stünden (27).

Voss’ Ethnographie bezieht sich auf ein anderes und gleichzeitig weiteres Feld. Er wendet sich in seiner Untersuchung dem “kulturell Fremden” im Eigenen zu und versucht Selbstverständnisse “medialer Heiler”, die in Deutschland wirken, ethnographisch darzustellen und in einem zweiten Schritt herauszuarbeiten. Er befasst sich somit mit HeilerInnen, die gemeinhin der sog. Esote-