CHAPTER FIVE

Indo-European Religion

The oldest religious rites of Indo-European peoples do not presuppose temples or idols. Nor is there a reconstructible term for 'temple'. But there is a 'worship', conceived as a hospitable reception with a meal, consisting of slaughtered animals, and accompanying recitation of poetry, the 'celestial' coming, as it were, on a visit to the 'earthly ones'.

Paul Thieme, 1964

In what did the Proto-Indo-Europeans believe, or, to use their own words, to what did they 'put their hearts'? This archaic expression is still preserved in a roundabout way in English where the Latin verb *credo 'I believe' has been borrowed to fashion our English *creed. This word finds cognates in Old Irish *creitim, the Hittite karatan daia, Indic *sra-da and Avestan *zrzd-. Admittedly with some linguistic difficulty, the Proto-Indo-European expression appears to have been built from the words for heart (*kerd-) and put (*dhe). In order to examine the ideology of the Proto-Indo-Europeans we will require access not only to the direct evidence of the reconstructed vocabulary but also to the less-tangible evidence of the myths of the various Indo-European peoples. As Indo-European mythology has attracted an enormous volume of scholarly interest, we will prune the subject down by concentrating our attention primarily where the evidence for Indo-European religion may tell us something of the ritual behaviour and structure of Proto-Indo-European society.

Although philologists have long been interested in the religion of the ancient Indo-Europeans, the results produced by the type of linguistic reconstruction we employed in the last chapter are neither numerous nor always particularly solid. One of the more obvious correspondences can be seen in the similarity of Sanskrit devas, Latin deus, Lithuanian dievus, Old Irish diai and the Old Norse plural *tiwaz 'gods'. In addition, there is that most striking of all comparisons:

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<th>Language</th>
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<td>Proto-Indo-European</td>
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Although we can produce a fairly facile translation of Proto-Indo-European *dyeus poter as 'Father Sky', we cannot be confident that we understand the role of this god in the religion of the Proto-Indo-European community. Some would doubt that 'father' here connotated a progenitor of gods or man but rather, as has long been argued, that it signalled only the type of authority which one associates with the Latin paterfamilias. Secondly, we find this same god at the apex of some Indo-European religions such as Greek and Roman, but of less obvious importance in others such as Indic. Some have regarded the ascendancy of 'Father Sky' in the Mediterranean to have been a relatively recent phenomenon involving the conflation of an earlier Proto-Indo-European god with local Mediterranean weather/storm deities.

Most other lexical correspondences tend to be associated with predictable natural phenomena. For example, a sun-god (or goddess) is normally postulated on the correspondence of Sanskrit Surya, Gaulish Sulis, Lithuanian Saule, Germanic Sol and the Slavic Tsar Solntse. Furthermore, we may reconstruct common names for moon and dawn, both of which appear as divine figures in various Indo-European religions. A somewhat more difficult correspondence may conceal a thunder- or rain-god behind the debatable comparison of the Indic rain-god Parjanyas, Lithuanian Perkunas, Slavic Perun' and the Norse Fjórgyn, the mother of Thor whose credentials as a thunder-god hardly need defending.

With such correspondences it is small wonder that many Indo-Europeanists were content to view the Proto-Indo-European pantheon as little more than the theomorphization of the major elements of nature. To press beyond this level of comparison required a certain amount of linguistic legerdemain which yielded rarely accepted equations. Some, for example, could point to the possible linguistic similarity between Kerberos, the guardian dog of the Greek Hades, and the epithet sabala 'spotted, varicoloured' (*kerbero?), the standard epithet of one of the dogs of Yama, the Indic god of the dead. And even after more force than the comparative method in linguistics will normally allow, all one gains by postulating such a correspondence is the somewhat incongruous image of a Proto-Indo-European canine guard of the realm of the dead who answered to the name of 'Spot!'

More promising perhaps are those mythological reconstructions whose linguistic credentials are reasonable although they do not necessarily provide us with a clear image of their place in Proto-Indo-European ideology. Certainly one of the more intriguing examples is the comparison of the Indic (and Avestan) Apam Napat 'grandson/nephew of water' with Latin Neptunus and the Irish Nechtain. The latter two preserve only the element *nepos 'grandson or nephew' but were still closely associated with water, the Latin god as the Roman equivalent of Poseidon, the god of waters, and the Irish figure Nechtain who maintained a sacred well. The *nepos also figures prominently in eschatological literature. The epic traditions of a number of Indo-European peoples preserve an account of the 'final battle', for example, Kurukshetra in the great Indian epic, the Mahabharata; the 'Second Battle of Mag Tured'
among the early Irish; Ragnarok among the Norse; and several others. A common structure has been found to underlie these different accounts which casts the *nepos* in the role of the protagonist against his evil opponent.

We also have the correspondence between the Indic Manu, the ancestor of the human race, and the Germanic founder-figure Mannus. The Indic god Aryaman, a deification of the concept of Aryan-hood, may share a Celtic cognate with the Gaulish Ario-manus and Old Irish Airem. Finally, we may note the similarity between the Indic god Bhaga 'sharer or dispenser of goods (which, via its Iranian cognate was lent into the Slavic languages as the word for god), and the Phrygian Zeus Bagaitos.

But all of these comparisons have never been regarded as entirely satisfying and it seems that straight lexical reconstructions of Proto-Indo-European divinities have proved far less rewarding here than they have for the reconstruction of other aspects of culture. If any further progress is to be made, some argue, then it requires the replacement of a method based on comparative philology with a 'new comparative mythology'.

Dumézil and tripartition

The foundation of much of what is currently written about Indo-European mythology has its origins in the sociological approach to the study of religion championed by Emile Durkheim. He and his followers proceeded from the assumption that myths expressed certain social and cultural realities. The attractiveness of such an approach is immediately apparent to anyone who has pondered the range of social structures reflected in the mythologies of various peoples. The Sumerians, for example, appear to have venerated a pantheon of gods organized according to an archaic version of their own social order. Among the Indo-European peoples we find the old Germanic social system and values encapsulated in the Old Norse pantheon housed at Valhalla, while the ancient Greek Olympus more closely reflected the more complex and specialized institutions of early Greek society. Moreover, the myths of a people were not only to some extent ciphers of their (often archaic) social structures, but they also reinforced social behaviour and served as divine charters for political realities. The Scythian origin myth, for example, records how their neighbours, the Agathyrsi and Geloni, had to resign themselves to subservience to Scythian power since their eponymous ancestors (Agathyrsus and Gelonus) had failed in a mythic contest of strength to string Herakles' bow. Scythes, the progenitor of the Scythians, had naturally accomplished the task and secured a divine charter guaranteeing the superior social position of the Scythians. With such an approach, the study of Indo-European religion invites our closest attention since the antiquated social realities which might be preserved in the myths of different Indo-European peoples may shed some light on the nature of Proto-Indo-European society itself. It is obvious, however, that if we are to pursue this line of inquiry, we must abandon our hesitation stated at the beginning of the last chapter at employing such evidence. Reconstruction of Proto-Indo-
European ideology by comparing the structures of the myths of different peoples without further linguistic support differs little from other cross-cultural comparisons similarly obtained. Yet to dismiss such evidence here would exclude any discussion of the work of the majority of scholars now engaged in the study of Indo-European myth. So much for my procedural rigour.

An obvious starting point to such an investigation is how the various Indo-European peoples perceived the social divisions of their own communities. Among the earliest attested is the familiar division of society in Vedic India into the brahmanas ‘priests’, ksatriyas ‘warriors’ and vaisyas ‘herder-cultivators’, with the sudras, the lowest group, outside the Aryan community and composed of the suppressed indigenous population. Such a scheme has not only been remarkably persistent in India until the present but is quite analogous to the social divisions imputed to other Indo-European societies as can be seen in the following table:

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<td>I</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>herder-</td>
<td>vaisyas</td>
<td>labours</td>
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All of this evidence suggests a conceptual framework among early Indo-European-speaking peoples that tripartizes society into three classes: priests, warriors and herder-cultivators. Is a residue of such a system also recoverable from Indo-European mythology?

An emphatically affirmative answer to this question is given by the eminent French comparativist Georges Dumézil and his colleagues and followers. They have produce a vast corpus of evidence that has apparently formed a foundation for interpretation solid enough to withstand not only its bitterest critics but even the frequent excesses of its over-zealous supporters.

Dumézil argues that the evidence for tripartition of Indo-European society can be seen in one of the earliest sources of Indo-European religion – the treaty between Matiwaža, King of Mitanni, and the Hittite king, dating to about 1380 BC and discovered in the archives of Bogazköy (Hattusa). The Mitanni king, as we have seen before, evoked the names of the transparently Indic gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the Nasatyas. The first two names are characteristically found co-joined in the Veda, that is, Mitra-Varuna, and they represent, according to Dumézil, the two main aspects of Indic sovereignty. Mitra personifies the concept of contact and governs the legalistic aspect of sovereignty while Varuna’s domain pertains more appropriately to the magical or religious. The god Indra is the warrior-god par excellence while the Nasatyas are twins, associated closely with horses, and find their clearest roles in the maintenance of health in both livestock and people. In short, the three
fundamental estates of Indo-European society are presented in canonical order in the Mitanni treaty.

This same tripartite division is seen over and over again throughout the mythologies of the Indo-European peoples. Herodotus records, for example, how the kingship of the Scythians was awarded to one of three brothers who could pick up three heavenly (but burning) objects that fell to the earth—a cup, an axe, and a plough with yoke. The first is regarded as a symbol of the ritual and sovereign function, the axe is the instrument of war and the plough with yoke are clearly symbols of the cultivator. The pre-Capitoline divine trio in ancient Rome consisted of the sovereign Jupiter, the war-god Mars and, finally, Quirinus, the patron of the people. Or, to take a more well-known example, preparatory to the disastrous judgment of Paris in Greek mythology, the three goddesses in competition each attempted to bribe Paris with a primary aspect of their own character. Hera offered sovereignty, Athena promised military prowess while Aphrodite promised the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, an arguably obvious aspect of fertility.

Tripartition is by no means limited to divine figures but permeates other aspects of society. Medicine, for example, is also divided when we find that, according to Pindar, the Greek healer Asklepios heals sores with spells, wounds with incisions and exhaustion with herbs and potions. A similar system is encountered in the Iranian Avesta where three types of medicine are listed: spell-medicine, knife-medicine and herb-medicine. Diseases and cures pertaining to the sovereign class are healed with spells appropriate to the techniques of priests. Wounds inflicted in battle, or fractures, are the province of surgery. Wasting diseases that threaten general well-being are treated with herbs and potions.

These comparisons are almost limitless and new articles invariably add to the number of canonical recitations of Indo-European tripartition. The underlying system, according to Dumézil, is one where society is encapsulated in three basic elements or, to use the Dumézilian expression, ‘functions’:

1 The first function embraces sovereignty and is marked by a priestly stratum of society which maintains both magico-religious and legal order. The gods assigned the sovereign function are often presented as a pair, each of which reflects a specific aspect: religious such as the Indic Varuna or Norse Odin, and legal such as Mitra or Tyr.

2 A second military function assigned to the warrior stratum and concerned with the execution of both aggressive and defensive force, for example, the war-gods Indra, Mars and Thor.

3 A third estate conceptualizing fertility or sustenance and embracing the herder-cultivators. Here the mythic personages normally take the form of divine twins, intimately associated with horses, and accompanied by a female figure, for example, the Indic Asvins (horsemen) and Sarasvati, the Greek Castor and Pollux with Helen, the Norse Frey, Freyr and Njörðr.

Although the tripartite conceptual system proposed for the ancient Indo-Europeans offers some opportunity for archaeological confirmation, it is a bit surprising to see how little use of archaeology has been made by those interested in comparative mythology. One of the few exceptions has been an attempt by
Dumézil himself to analyze one of the Luristan bronzes according to Indo-European mythology. The bronze capitol, dated to about the seventh or eighth century BC, is illustrated with seven registers, the upper and bottom two of which can be dismissed as primarily ornamental. It is the three central friezes that offer, according to Dumézil, iconographic evidence of the Indo-European system of tripartition. The upper register portrays two figures symbolically co-joined by both holding the same palm in the centre. The left hand figure stands next to an altar, a clear association with religious functions, while the right hand figure stands next to a bovine. Dumézil reminds us that the bull was the titular animal of Mitra, and he identifies the two figures as the sovereign gods Varuna and Mitra. The middle register depicts a figure standing between two lions with a bird overhead. Dumézil suggests that the figure is quite probably of Indra, the Indic warrior-god. Of the 36 mentions of a bird in the Rig Veda, 23 of them are associated with Indra while another 6 occur with the Maruts, Indra’s warrior band. Twelve of the 13 mentions of a lion in the Rig Veda are connected with Indra or the Maruts. The lower register depicts two figures, interpreted as the Indic divine twins, the Asvins, assisting an older figure, an iconographic representation of an incident in the Rig Veda where the twins rejuvenate an old man.

Whether one is impressed by this interpretation or not, it must be admitted that there is ample room for archaeological ‘testing’ of the tripartite model.

One of the more obvious symbols of social tripartition is colour, emphasized by the fact that both ancient India and Iran expressed the concept of caste with the word for colour (varna). A survey of the social significance of different colours is fairly clear cut, at least for the first two functions. Indo-Iranian, Hittite, Celtic and Latin ritual all assign white to priests and red to the warrior. The third function would appear to have been marked by a darker colour such as black or blue. Unfortunately, the preservation of coloured textiles among a prehistoric people is possible but seldom encountered and one must seek more enduring markers of Indo-European social classes.

Perhaps a potentially more rewarding area for examination can be found among the ritual animal sacrifices that we encounter among the early Indo-Europeans. The evidence of these rituals, especially those preserved in ancient India and Rome, demonstrates how a hierarchy of different victims were sacrificed to, or associated with, the various divinities who filled out the major social ‘functions’ of Indo-European mythology. In the Indic sastramani, for example, the priestly Sarasvati received a ram, the warlike Indra obtained a bull, and the Asvins, the twins who represented the third estate, were offered a he-goat. In the Avesta, the great goddess Aradvi Sura Anahita, who embraced all three functions, received the sacrifice of horses, cattle and sheep. The Roman purification sacrifice of the suovetaurilia preserved within its very name the identity of its three ritual victims – su ‘pig’, ovis ‘sheep’ and taurus ‘bull’.

Although the sacrificial sequence in these and other rituals was clearly hierarchical, the precise identity or sequence of the victims sacrificed was not rigidly observed within the same culture, much less between different Indo-
74-77 Lusitanian house carving for a shrine dating to about the eighth or seventh century BC (L. 8.25 cm).
Georges Dumézil has interpreted the figures as representatives of the three Indo-European 'functions'. These registers are shown in detail: From top to bottom, Register 3: The 'sovereign' figures; Register 4: The 'warrior' figure; and Register 5: The 'twins'.
European peoples. In examining the Indic evidence, for example, Jaan Puhvel notes that where the horse is identified as one of the victims it is dedicated to the warrior-god, while a sheep or hornless ram is offered to the priestly deity and cattle or goat to those representing the third estate. But where the horse is absent from the ritual, cattle replaces it and the third function receives a goat or pig. The Roman evidence shows even greater variability, and in the Greek triple sacrifice known as the triittua, we find that the animals are often a ram, bull and a boar.

The difficulties involved in extrapolating from this type of evidence to the Proto-Indo-Europeans are fairly obvious. While the horse may normally be associated with a warrior-deity and the sow is certainly an archetypal third-function fertility symbol, we can see how exceedingly difficult it is to assign specific socio-ritual identities to the other victims. As Jaan Puhvel observes, the important factor may not necessarily rest in any inherent symbolism associated with a particular species but rather to whom they are to be sacrificed, different gods requiring different constellations of three ritual victims. We need not totally despair of such evidence in seeking to understand better the earliest Indo-Europeans since we are clearly discussing a series of domestic animals all known to the Proto-Indo-Europeans. We may hope to find some evidence for tripartite or triple sacrifice even if we cannot be secure of the precise beliefs that prompted the ritual behaviour.

Horse sacrifice

Some would maintain that the premier animal of Indo-European sacrifice and ritual was probably the horse. We have already seen how its embedment in Proto-Indo-European society lies not just in its lexical reconstruction but also in the proliferation of personal names which contain ‘horse’ as an element among the various Indo-European peoples. Furthermore, we witness the importance of the horse in Indo-European rituals and mythology. One of the most obvious examples is the recurrent depiction of twins such as the Indic Asvins ‘horsemen’, the Greek horsemen Castor and Pollux, the legendary Anglo-Saxon settlers of Britain, Horsa and Hengist (literally Horse and Stallion) or the Irish twins of Macha, born after she had completed a horse race. All of these attest the existence of Indo-European divine twins associated with or represented by horses.

The major ritual enactment of a horse-centred myth is supported by evidence from ancient India and Rome and, more distantly, medieval Ireland. The Indic ritual is the asvamedha, probably the most spectacular of the ancient Indic ceremonies. It began in the spring under the direction of four priests, acting under the patronage of the king who was dedicating the sacrifice to the divine representatives of his warrior class. A prized stallion was selected as the victim and after rituals initiating the ceremony, the stallion was set free to wander for an entire year, 400 warriors trailing behind to ensure that the course of the stallion was neither interfered with nor that it had contact with mares.
Ancillary rituals took place throughout the year until the horse was returned for the final three day finale. This involved, among other things, the horse pulling the king's chariot, a large sacrifice of a variety of animals, and the smothering of the horse, after which the king's favourite wife 'co-habited' with the dead stallion under covers. The horse was then dismembered into three portions, each dedicated to deities who played out the canonical order of Dumézil's three 'functions'.

The *asvamedha* bears comparison with the major Roman horse sacrifice which was known as the *October Equus*. Following a horse race on the ides of October, the right-sided horse of the team was dispatched by a spear and then dismembered, again in such a fashion as to indicate its 'functional' division into the three estates. As with the Indic ritual, the major recipient of the sacrifice was the warrior-god (Mars). In medieval Ireland, and through the admittedly somewhat jaundiced eyes of the Norman Geraldus, we read how in the inauguration of one of the tribal kings of Ulster, a mare was sacrificed and then dismembered. In a classic example of Ulster pragmatism, the pieces of horse flesh were then boiled in order to make a great broth in which the king subsequently bathed while devouring the morsels of meat.

A detailed analysis of this and other material has led Jaan Puhvel to propose a Proto-Indo-European myth and ritual which involved the mating of a figure from the royal class with a horse from which ultimately sprung the famous equine divine twins. He offers some additional linguistic support for such a ritual in the very name of the Indic ceremony, the *asvamedha*. This derives from the Proto-Indo-European *ekwo-meydha* 'horse-drunk', attesting a ritual which included both a horse and drunkenness. This is quite comparable to the personal name Epomeduas which is found in ancient Gaul and appears to derive from *ekwo-medu* 'horse-mead'. The modern English mead is transparently part of the same series that gives us Sanskrit madhu-, Greek methy, Old Church Slavonic medu, Lithuanian medus, Old Irish mid, and Tocharian B mit, all of which provide us with our word for the Proto-Indo-European alcoholic and ritual drink *medhu* 'mead'. Hence, both the Indic and Celtic worlds still preserve the ancient Proto-Indo-European name of a horse-centred ceremony involving intoxication.

The horse ritual warrants one more comment since it illustrates all too well how a comparison of myths may lead us along paths that appear to be contradicted by archaeological evidence. Both the *asvamedha* and *October Equus* clearly concern the sacrifice of a draught horse and in a striking instance of parallelism, both require that the horse in question excels on the right side of the chariot (cf. a Hittite ritual where the vehicle is drawn by a mule on the left side and a horse on the right). Clearly, this suggests that the horse is selected from a paired chariot team. But archaeological evidence indicates that the horse was not likely to have been employed in paired draught until the invention of the spoked wheel and chariot, which is normally dated after about 2500 BC and, consequently, some time after we would have assumed the disintegration of the Proto-Indo-European community. Indeed, the entire concept of horse-twins
totally points to paired draught, while the archaeological evidence suggests that this should not be so at the time-depth we normally assign to Proto-Indo-European. Although cultural borrowing or parallel development may be suggested, this is a problem yet to be resolved.

One final element of ritual associated with the horse sacrifice is the distribution of its anatomy after its death. In the *asvamedha*, for example, we have seen how the horse was butchered and offered to three different deities who can be assigned tripartite functions in Dumézilian fashion. As animal remains frequently accompany burials, we may hope that Indo-European rituals may shed some light on the patterns of offerings discovered in the archaeological record of the earliest Indo-Europeans.

The cattle cycle

We have already seen how lexical correspondences permit us to reconstruct proto-Indo-European expressions for ‘to raid for cattle’ and ‘sacrifice of a hundred cattle’. At first glance we might regard these as the chance residue of the vocabulary concerning the secular (raiding) and sacred (sacrifice) disposition of cattle in Proto-Indo-European society. But in an extensive examination of the role of cattle in both society and belief among the Indo-Iranians, and a number of peoples of East Africa, Bruce Lincoln suggests the paramount role of cattle in early Indo-European economy and religion.

From mythological evidence primarily drawn from the Indians and Iranians, but also from the Greeks, Romans, Germans, Celts and Hittites, Lincoln reconstructs an Indo-European myth of the first cattle raid. This concerned a hero figure *Triio* ‘third’ (Vedic Trīta Apta, Avestan Thraetaona Aitūya, Greek Ἡράκλης, Norse Hymir, Hittite Hupasiya) who loses his cattle to a three-headed monster, normally a serpent, which at least in Indo-Iranian tradition is closely associated with local non-Indo-European populations. In a return encounter *Triio*, with the assistance of the Indo-European warrior-god, defeats the three-headed monster and recovers his cattle. Lincoln suggests that this cattle-raiding myth served as a charter which both helped to define the role

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78 Bruce Lincoln suggests that the early Germanic Gallehus horn (c. AD 400) depicts a three-headed figure from the Indo-European cattle-raiding myth.
of the warrior in Indo-European society (the proper activity of the warrior was cattle raiding), and sanctioned Aryan cattle raiding against foreigners who, according to the myth, had previously robbed the Aryans.

Lincoln brings this warrior-class-centred myth into contrast with the myth of the first cattle sacrifice which served to underpin the position of the priest. This myth, about which we will have more to say below, involved the sacrifice of both a man and an ox (or bull) from whose parts the world was created. On a practical level this myth chartered the position of the priest who sacrificed victims to a sky-god who then bestowed both men and cattle on the kings or warriors of the Aryans in exchange. These were then expected to turn over cattle to the priest for sacrifice so that the cycle which secured the free flow of cattle through both human society and the cosmos was perpetuated.

Lincoln argues that the striking similarities which he finds between the cattle-keeper’s religion of the Indo-Iranians and East Africans is due to similar ecologies where possession of cattle defined the economic basis of society. Both cattle raiding to secure more of the principal commodity and cattle sacrifice to recompense and perhaps manipulate the deities were natural developments of such cattle-based societies. These two different activities encouraged the formalization of two separate classes – warriors and priests – whose own behaviour was patterned after the myths of the first cattle raid and first sacrifice. Although Lincoln’s study is primarily directed at the behaviour of the Indo-Iranians, his frequent recourse to general Indo-European mythology, especially in the reconstruction of these mythic charters, suggests that the roots of the cattle-keeping religion and world view, with its attendant social ramifications, might also be projected back to Proto-Indo-European society.

**Human sacrifice and punishment**

Human sacrifice is not a common occurrence among the rituals of the earliest Indo-European peoples, although there is hardly a group where some evidence
for it cannot be found. In Germanc and Celtic tradition the evidence amounts to a reasonably well-supported pattern of 'The Threefold Death', wherein we can see human sacrifice or punishment applied in a clear trifunctional fashion. The manner of execution was carried out in a manner appropriate to the three Dumézilian functions. The ancient Gauls, for example, made offerings to three gods – Esus, Taranis and Teutates – by recourse to hanging, burning and drowning, respectively. This pattern is replicated in the pagan Germanic punishments of hanging, stabbing and drowning, each technique correlated to the crime for which the victim was convicted. The underlying scheme suggests that human sacrifice to a deity occupying a priestly or juridical role (or the death penalty for one who violated these particular interests) was death by hanging. A violation of the warrior code, or an offering to the god(s) of war, most appropriately awarded death either by burning or by the sword. Fertility deities were satisfied by drowned victims. Although the best evidence is primarily confined to the westernmost Indo-Europeans, there is some additional support to indicate that threefold sacrifices may have been more widespread.

War of the Functions

Certain striking parallels concerning the Roman account of the Sabine War, the Norse myth concerning the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, and the Indic epic Mahabharata have provided support for a Proto-Indo-European 'War of the Functions' from which some have drawn important conclusions about the formation of the Proto-Indo-European community. Basically, the parallels concern the presence of first- (magico-juridical) and second- (warrior) function representatives on the victorious side of a war that ultimately subdued and incorporates third function characters, for example, the Sabine women or the Norse Vanir. Indeed, the Iliad itself has also been examined in a similar light. The ultimate structure of the myth, then, is that the three estates of Proto-Indo-European society were fused only after a war between the first two against the third. From this mythic model, it has been suggested that the possible historical reality underlying the myth may be the conquest of settled agriculturalists by a non-sedentary community. This comes too close to one popular archaeological solution to the Indo-European homeland problem to pass without comment.

The idea that there existed an historical reality behind the 'War of the Functions' is both highly speculative and unnecessary. We have already seen, for example, how the origin myth of the Scythians was constructed to serve as a social charter of behaviour and status within the Pontic region, that is, an Agathyrsi or a Geloni was subservient to a Scythian because his ancestors were incapable of stringing Herakles' bow, while Scythes, the ancestor of the Scythians, was successful. Similarly, if we admit a Proto-Indo-European 'War of the Functions', this need not reflect anything more than a reminder to the productive members of society that they remain subservient to both priests and warriors, a situation divinely chartered by a mythical war which their ancestors lost but whose historical validity is no more secure than Herakles' bow.
Dualism and Indo-European ideology

We have already seen how Dumézil and his colleagues propose a pattern of dualism that cuts across the tripartite structure of Indo-European ideology. The first or sovereign function, for example, is expressed through paired gods (Varuna-Mitra, Jupiter-Dius Fidius, Odinn-Tyr) who are each respectively charged with the magico-religious and juridical-contractual aspects of rulership. The divine twins provide even more obvious evidence for dualism.

The significance of twins in Indo-European mythology can be readily seen in the creation or foundation myths of the Indo-Europeans. The Proto-Indo-European *yem- ‘twin’ underlies the name of a god common to the Indo-Iranians (Indic Yama, Avestan Yima) who becomes the progenitor of mankind. In a recent study, Jaan Puhvel argues that the underlying form for the name of Remus, the brother of Romulus in the story of the founding of Rome, was actually *temus, the early Italic form of Proto-Indo-European *yemos ‘twin’. In Norse mythology, mankind is formed from the remains of a giant whose name, Ymir, has also been derived by some from the Proto-Indo-European word for twin. Furthermore, Tacitus relates how the early Germans were the descendants of Mannus and Tuisto, the latter of which again means twin. Among the Celts we have the tale relating the foundation of Emhain Macha, the ancient capital of Ulster, which was explained by recourse to a myth in which Macha gave birth to emuin ‘twins’, again derived from Proto-Indo-European *yem-.

Analysis of all these tales indicates that the Proto-Indo-Europeans believed that the progenitors of mankind were *Man (Indic Manu, German Mannus) and *Twin, the latter of which was sacrificed and carved up by his brother to produce mankind. To this Bruce Lincoln adds the coincidental sacrifice of a bovine integral to this myth in India, Iran, and among the Norse and Irish.

We can go beyond the dualism expressed by twins to outright binary opposition as one of the underlying structures of Indo-European ideology. The most familiar example can be seen in how the Indo-Europeans treated the basic directions. As we have seen, the opposition between the Proto-Indo-European words for right and left also presents a systematic opposition between the concepts of propitious, healthy, strong, dexterous (Latin dexter, Sanskrit daksina, Avestan dasina-, Lithuanian desine, Old Church Slavonic desn, Greek dexios, Old Irish dess, Albanian djaithë, and so on, from Proto-Indo-European *deks-), and the left which is unfavourable, unsound, weak, or, to use the Latin again, sinister. This opposition is also sexual since the right side or right hand is regularly associated with males and the left with females. Furthermore, the opposition also carries into the cardinal directions: the propitious south lay to the right (the Sanskrit and Irish words for right also mean south), while to the left lay the malevolent north, thus demonstrating that Proto-Indo-Europeans faced east to orient themselves. This right—left polarity is naturally not confined to the Indo-Europeans but can be found throughout the world. Nevertheless, securing this polarity to Proto-Indo-European society does provide the archaeologist examining the position and orientation of burials with another clue for tracking the course of the Indo-Europeans.
The analysis of Indo-European ideological structure in terms of binary opposition is hardly removed from the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss who proposes a universal tendency to mediate between opposites. Bruce Lincoln has viewed the organization of Indo-Iranian ideology in a similar light, offering it as an alternative tool for understanding Indo-Iranian social theory. Here, for example, the *arya are contrasted with the aboriginal (and, from the Aryan perspective, inferior) *dase. In turn, the *arya are subdivided into upper classes versus commoners, a system which Lincoln also finds in Caesar’s account of early Celtic society. The upper classes are subdivided between sovereigns and warriors, while the sovereigns are composed of a binary opposition between priests and kings. In a somewhat similar vein, Einar Haugen has examined Norse ideology in terms of minimal oppositions.

Some have sought an explanation for the ideological dualism in the social structure of Proto-Indo-European society. Tomas Gamkrelidze and Vyachislav Ivanov, following the work of other linguists, propose that the Proto-Indo-European system of marriage involved the exchange of women between two opposing moieties. This fundamental division of Proto-Indo-European society into two ‘halves’ could not help but engender an ideological response in Indo-European religion. Harkening back to earlier approaches to the mythological evidence, they propose an opposition between the two primary Indo-European deities: *dyecus pater, the god of the clear sky, charged with the maintenance of religious order, versus *perkuno – the god of storm, thunder and patron of war. More interestingly, they emphasize dual political leadership among the early Indo-Europeans. Citing Homer’s account of the Achaian forces in the Iliad, they note how frequently the tribes listed are led by two rulers, while the dual kingship of ancient Sparta continued this tradition. Other evidence such as Horsa and Hengist leading the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain has already been mentioned. But is this meant to suggest dual kingship among the Proto-Indo-Europeans? We can no longer avoid the central problem of employing the evidence of comparative mythology to construct a picture of Proto-Indo-European society.

Mythology and Reality

Some of the critics of the ‘new comparative mythology’ harbour suspicions regarding how its proponents seem to tease out of any Indo-European document some evidence for tripartition. Others suggest that the three divisions of society proposed by Dumézil for the Indo-Europeans are so ‘natural’ and generic to any society that they cannot be usefully employed as a diacritic for marking Indo-European culture. Some scholars engaged in the analysis of myth do not criticize Dumézil and his school; they simply ignore it as an irrelevancy to their own approach to the mythology of individual Indo-European peoples. But if one embraces the concept of tripartition, then it seems to offer unparalleled information for the archaeologist who wishes to correlate the concept of Indo-European with the archaeological record.
The prehistorian is provided with a capsule description of Proto-Indo-European society divided into three major classes – priests, warriors and herder-cultivators. We may expect to see these classes marked by colour, totem, animal or any other form of culture-loaded symbolism. We may expect to discover the remains of animal sacrifices, especially that of the horse, or its ritual dismemberment. Triads of animals may occur in burials or other sacrificial contexts. Burials of males and females may exhibit variations in position and orientation similar to that indicated by the linguistic evidence. The most optimistic may even imagine that the Indo-European ‘War of the Functions’ underlies an historical reality, and search the archaeological record for the incorporation of an agricultural society into that of non-agriculturalists. How likely are we to be disappointed?

There can be little doubt that the links between the reconstructed ideology and their expressions in material culture or behaviour of a prehistoric people may be far less than we hoped for in the last paragraph. Durézil himself has insisted that his Indo-European civilization is one ‘of the spirit’, and that it need not be tied down to the real Proto-Indo-European world. Ideal worlds of myths, one may argue, are just that, and although they may be an expression of social realities, these need never take the corporeal forms required by the archaeologist. Squeezing priest burials out of the archaeological record of most Indo-European peoples, for example, has been a nearly impossible task. Any archaeologist examining the burial remains of the Celts in a La Tène cemetery may well wonder whatever happened to the facile generalizations concerning their social structure derived from myth and early ethnographers such as Caesar. The isolation of clear-cut classes or ‘functions’ is very difficult in Iron Age contexts when one might be more hopeful of discerning occupational classes than in the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. Perhaps most ironic is the fact that, even if archaeologists find it impossible to demonstrate the social structures predicted by mythologists, it will have absolutely no effect whatsoever on their continued publication of yet further examples of social tripartition and other aspects of Indo-European religion and ideology.

If we must accept these difficulties then we must be honest about the utility of the new comparative mythology in elucidating Proto-Indo-European culture. Many of its practitioners would admit that the society which lies behind their reconstructions is an idealized one that need not be reflected in the cultural record, nor can it ever be effectively tested. Such an untestable hypothesis is, of course, no hypothesis at all, and its utility as an explanatory device is far better left to comparative mythologists who can play by different rules. They are not speaking the same language as the prehistorian. But how can we use arguments about the mythic reinforcement of social realities without assuming a relationship between social structure and myth? Here the resolution of this contradiction, perhaps more intuitive than logical, will be to hold the mythological evidence out for examination against the archaeological record, yet not make demands for proof higher than its own practitioners would willingly admit.