

Indra's Flight and Affliction: Vedic Reminiscences of an Indo-European Myth

Per-Johan Norelius
Uppsala University

This paper explores the relationship between an Indic myth of Indra, who was afflicted by fever and went into hiding following his victory over the demon Vṛtra, and the parallel Italic, Irish, Armenian and Ossetic myths compared to it by Dumézil and some of his followers. The fever or internal heat afflicting Indra and other Indo-European heroes reflects, it is argued, an ancient warrior ideology in which a feverish battle-frenzy was thought to possess the warrior in combat. As especially the comparative evidence shows, this element was originally part of a myth of the slaying of a tricephalic monster (Indic Trisiras, Italic Cacus etc.), and only secondarily included in the Indra-Vṛtra myth. Hitherto neglected parallels – the Arthurian Ider/Yder saga, the Young Avestan tradition of Astuuatərəta and his blazing glory (*xʷarənah*), and the Indic myth of Kṛṣṇa's battle with the three-headed Jvara, "Fever" – are also discussed. It is further suggested that a conflation of a fiery god of war with the Proto-Indo-Iranian fire god has resulted in the mythemes of Indra's emerging from a lotus stalk and the Armenian Vahagn's birth from a reed.

The fleeing Indra in Vedic sources

In the penultimate stanza of the famous Ṛgvedic hymn 1.32 (st. 14), a panegyric relating the battle between the god Indra and the serpent (*áhi-*) Vṛtra, the poet seems to express his disbelief at the strange turn of events following Indra's victory:

What avenger of the serpent did you see, Indra, that fear went into your, his slayer's, heart and you crossed nine and ninety streams like a frightened falcon [crosses] the spaces?¹

The verse forms a remarkable digression from the overall tone not only of this particular hymn, but of all the Ṛgvedic

¹*áher yātāraṃ kām apaśya indra hṛdí yāt te jaghnūṣo bhīr ágachat / náva ca yān navatīm ca srāvantiḥ śyenó ná bhītó átaro rájāmsi //.*

hymns dedicated to the victorious exploits of the warrior god: nowhere else in the RV do we hear of this mysterious avenger, the mere sight of whom seems to have scared the god away. In the next and last stanza, however, the avenger is forgotten and the hymn resumes its general tone: Indra is the king of whatever moves or rests, over cattle and all the tribes.

While the tradition of Indra's flight following his victory has left no further trace in the RV, it appears frequently in Middle Vedic literature (cf. the materials in Buschardt 1945: 84-91) and in the epic. It has consequently been suggested that this is an ancient tradition that the Indra-worshipping poets of the RV felt was too embarrassing to include in their hymns, but which has survived in ritualistic and epic literature (Dumézil 1969: 66). While this explanation seems very plausible, one remark should be made: the tradition recorded in RV 1.32.14 is unique in that it mentions an "avenger" (for such is undoubtedly the meaning of *yātṛ*²) of Vṛtra as the cause of Indra's flight. Now, the texts are by no means unanimous as to *why* Indra fled when his opponent was already slain. Thus, some texts state that Indra wasn't sure that Vṛtra was dead: "As Indra struck forth with his bolt against Vṛtra, thinking himself the weaker one, fearing, 'I have not felled him', he hid himself; he went to the farthest distances."³ (ŚB 1.6.4.1; cf. 4.1.3.1ff, 7.4.1.13; AiB 3.15-16; PB 15.11.9; cf. JB 1.137, 2.152, 3.297.) Consequently the gods have to find Indra and tell him that Vṛtra is indeed slain (ŚB 4.3.1.2-4). Elsewhere we meet with the explanation that the slaying of Vṛtra constituted a sin or crime, though we are nowhere told why: "Indra, having slain Vṛtra, went to the farthest distance, thinking, 'I've committed a crime.'"⁴ (TS 2.5.3.6, 6.5.5.2; TB 1.6.7.4.) It is possible that this tradition has been derived from other tales of Indra's "misdeeds", which are current in Middle Vedic texts (Oertel

²The only differing interpretation I am aware of is by Güntert (1923: 133), who suggested the meaning "sorcerer" on analogy with *yātudhāna*- and related words. In fact, both *yātū*- "sorcery" and *yātṛ*- seem to be derived from a root *yā*-, "to injure, attack"; see Kuiper 1973: 179-190, who is followed by Mayrhofer 1996, s.v. *YĀ*.

³*indro ha yatra vṛtrāya vajram prajahāra so 'balīyān manyamāno nāstrṣītīva bibhyan nilayām cakre sa parāḥ parāvato jagāma.*

⁴*indro vṛtrāmi hatvā parām parāvātam agachad āpārādham iti mānyamānas.*

1898: 118-125); most famous are his slaying of the three-headed Triśiras (“Tricephal”) or Viśvarūpa (“Omniform”), son of the god Tvaṣṭṛ, which constituted an act of brahminicide, and his treacherously cutting the head off the demon Namuci, with whom he had concluded a peace treaty.

Finally, there is the tradition that Indra for some unspecified reason became sick or lost his strength after the serpent-slaying. The motif of a flight is sometimes missing in these versions; Indra is soon cured by some ritualistic means. Cf. e.g. PB 18.5.2: “Indra slew Vṛtra. His force left him on all sides. The gods sought an expiation for him. Nothing invigorated him; only the pungent soma invigorated him.”⁵ Sometimes the motif of transgression is combined with that of sickness; disease being seen as the result of sinful deeds, as in many ancient societies: “Indra, having slain Vṛtra, went to the farthest distance, thinking, ‘I’ve committed a crime.’ He became yellow. He saw these offerings to the Maruts for saving one’s self. He sacrificed with them. He saved his exhalation with the first one, his inhalation with the second one, his self with the third one.”⁶ (TS 6.5.5.2-3.) The confused text TS 2.5.3 combines two traditions of Indra’s sickness with that of his flight in an awkward manner: having slain Vṛtra, Indra is bereft of his strength and “the deities” (*devatāḥ*), but regains them by making a new-moon offering to Agni on twelve potsherds (2.5.3.1-2; cf. TB 1.6.1.7). Despite this, he then hastens to Prajāpati, complaining that his “strength and force” (*indriyaṃ vīryaṃ*)⁷ have entered the earth, plants and herbs as a result of his slaying Vṛtra (cf. MS 1.10.5; KS 36.1). They then recollect (*sam- nī-*) his strength and force by performing the Sāmnāyya milk offering at the night of the new moon.⁸ Then again we learn (2.5.3.6) that Indra fled to the “farthest distance”, thinking that he had committed a crime by slaying Vṛtra, and that the

⁵ *indro vṛtram ahan sa viṣvaṅ vīryeṇa vyārcchat. tasmai devāḥ prāyaścittim aicchaṃs taṃ na kiṃ canādhinot taṃ tivasoma evādhinot.*

⁶ *indro vṛtrāṃ hatvā pārāṃ parāvātām agachat / āpārādham iti mānyamānaḥ / sā hārito bhavat / sā etān marutvatīyān ātmaspāraṇān apaśyat, tān agrhṇita // prāṇām evā prathamēnāsprṇutāpānām dvitīyenātmānam ṛtīyena...*

⁷ Indra’s loss of these is also referred to in JB 2.234; ŚB 5.2.3.8.

⁸ On this version of the myth and its connection to the Sāmnāyya rite, see Wilden 2000: 79, 88ff.

gods had to search for him. ŚB 1.6.4.1-9 tells a similar story: having slain Vṛtra, Indra “went to the farthest distances” (*parāḥ parāvato jagāma*), thinking that he had not actually slain his opponent. Agni, sent by the gods, found Indra; an offering on twelve potsherds is then made to these two gods, but fails to reinvigorate Indra: “Indra said, ‘When I struck forth with my bolt against Vṛtra I became afraid; I am kind of weak. This [offering] does not invigorate me; do for me that which would invigorate me.’ ‘Yes,’ said the gods.”⁹ (1.6.4.4.) Again, it is the soma drink that restores Indra’s strength (5).

All this goes to show that there was an ancient tradition telling of Indra’s flight to distant regions,¹⁰ though the texts cannot agree as to the precise reasons for the flight: we never learn why the slaying of a drought-effecting demon was considered a sin, nor is it clear why Indra should have incurred sickness or loss of strength after his exploit.

The nature of the transgression is considerably more explicit in the story of Indra and Trisiras, which in many versions forms a sort of prelude to the battle with Vṛtra; and I will try to demonstrate that the notion of a sin resulting from the slaying of a demon originates in this story, being only secondarily, and not very successfully, transferred to the Vṛtra legend, as a result of which we have the inconsistencies outlined above.¹¹ The oldest statement that Indra’s slaying of Trisiras constituted brahminicide is found in TS 2.5.1; the account is too lengthy to be quoted here, but may be

⁹sa indro ‘bravīt / yatra vai vrtrāya vajram prāharam tad vyasmāye sa kṛṣa ivāsmi na vai medaṃ dhinoti yanmā dhinavat tan me kuruteti tatheti devā abruvan.

¹⁰The expression *parāḥ parāvataḥ*, “the farthest distances”, is typically used to designate the otherworld; cf. Bodewitz 2000, who also notes (109) that the hiding Indra in some texts is said to have been found by the ancestors (*pitaraḥ*). This may be another way of saying that Indra was in a death-like or liminal state; cf. below for the motif of Indra’s illness.

¹¹In AiB 7.28, both the slayings are included in a list of transgressions attributed to Indra: “The deities shunned Indra: ‘He has schemed against Viśvarūpa, Tvaṣṭṛ’s son; he has laid low Vṛtra; he has handed the Yatis over to the hyaenas; he has slain the Arurmaghas; he has lashed out (?) against Br̥haspati.’” (*yatreṇḍram devatāḥ paryavṛñjan, viśvarūpaṃ tvāṣṭram abhyamaṃsta vrtram aṣṭṛta yatīn sālāvṛkebhyaḥ prādād arurmaghān avadhīd br̥haspateḥ pratyavadhīd iti*.) Notably, Vṛtra’s slaying is not included in the otherwise identical list in JB 2.134, suggesting that it is a later addition.

summarized as follows: Viśvarūpa, the three-headed son of Tvaṣṭṛ, was the domestic priest (*purohita-*) of the gods; but being related, on his mother's side, to the demons (*asuras*), he secretly gave them a share of the sacrifice. When Indra found out, he struck off Viśvarūpa's heads with his bolt. Being now a brahmin-killer, he "took the brahminicide in his cupped hands and carried it for a year. Creatures called out to him, 'Brahmin-killer!'"¹² (2.) Indra then managed to persuade the earth, the trees, and women to assume one third, respectively, of his guilt, which became natural fissures in the ground, sap issuing from trees, and menstruation. But Indra's problems were not over yet: Tvaṣṭṛ performed a soma sacrifice and did not invite Indra, who had slain his son. Indra consequently showed up uninvited at the sacrifice and drank the soma. Intent on revenge, Tvaṣṭṛ offered the dregs of the soma in the fire, thereby creating Vṛtra, who grew to encompass (*vṛ-*) the entire world (2.5.2). A battle between the god and Vṛtra ensued. As Indra was about to smite his opponent with his bolt, Fire (Agni) and Soma – the deified essential elements of the sacrifice – called out from inside Vṛtra, imploring Indra not to strike as long as they were there. Creating cold and hot fever (*śītarūrau*) and making them enter Vṛtra, Indra caused him to gape (yawn?), thus letting Agni and Soma escape. He then slew his enemy with his bolt. After this, however, his force and the deities left him; and here follows the garbled episode 2.5.3, already outlined above.

In PB 17.5.1 we read: "Indra slew Triśiras, son of Tvaṣṭṛ. An inauspicious voice (*aślilā vāc-*) addressed him. He ran up to Agni. He saw this Agnistotra liturgy ..."¹³ (and by means of it, he made the voice go away). In Bṛhaddevatā 6.148-153, we learn that the voice accused him of being a brahmin-killer.

A different version dealing with the transference of guilt is found in ŚB 1.2.3.2-4: Indra, when about to slay Triśiras, was accompanied by the Āptya brothers, Ekata, Dvita and Trita (First, Second, Third). "When he (Indra) slew Viśvarūpa, the three-headed son of Tvaṣṭṛ, they too knew that he was going to

¹² *tāsyāñjalīnā brahmahatyām upāgrhṇāt tām samvatsarām abibhas tām bhūtāny abhy ākrośan brāhmahann iti.*

¹³ *indro vai triśirasam tvāṣṭram ahaṃ tam aślilā vāg abhyavadat so 'gnim upādāvat sa etad agnistotram apaśyat.*

be killed; immediately Trita, alone, slew him (Viśvarūpa). Indra was freed from that, for he was a god. People said: 'Let the sin come only to these ones, who knew that he was about to be killed!'"¹⁴ (2-3).¹⁵ The Āptyas, however, managed to pass on their guilt to anyone who performs a sacrifice without the *dakṣiṇā* gifts to the officiating priests (4). The figure of Trita Āptya, unlike his shadowy brothers, is of great interest.¹⁶ Being intimately associated with evil and its elimination, he was long ago dubbed the "scapegoat of the gods" by Bloomfield (1896: 430-437; cf. also Rönnow 1927: 28ff). Sins (RV 8.47.13; AV 6.113.1-3) or bad dreams (RV 8.47.16) are transferred to (or "wiped off" on) him; in the ritualistic Middle Vedic texts, the impurities associated with bloody (*krūra-*) sacrifices are passed on to Trita, which, as Dumézil argued (1969: 25), especially connects him with the sin of killing. But Trita also appears to have been the original slayer of the three-headed demon, as evinced from the RV and Avestan materials. In the RV, Trita, assisted by Indra, slays the tricephal (described as a serpent in 10.48.2) and drives off the cattle guarded by him (10.8.8-9, 99.6; cf. 2.11.19).

In the Avesta, the slayer of the tricephal is Thraētaona, son of Thrīta, of the Ἄθβιια (*Āptya) clan; why the deed has been transposed from Thrīta to his son is not clear. The demon killed by Thraētaona is described, in terms echoing those of RV 10.99.6 (six-eyed and three-headed, *ṣaḷakṣāṃ trīsīrṣāṇaṃ*), as three-mouthed, three-headed, and six-eyed (*ḍrīzafanəm ḍrikamərədəṃ xṣuuas.āṣīm*, Yasna 9.8); and his ophidian nature appears already from his name: Aži Dahāka, where the first part corresponds to Vedic *āhi-*. This monster is said to have guarded two maidens who were freed by Thraētaona and who, it has been argued, may have replaced cows in this role

¹⁴*sa yatra trīsīrṣāṇaṃ tvāṣṭraṃ viśvarūpaṃ jaghāna tasya haite 'pi badhyasya vidān cakruḥ śasvad dhainaṃ trita eva jaghānātyaha tad indro 'mucyata devo hi saḥ // ta u haita ūcuḥ / upaivema eno gachantu ye 'sya badhyasyāvedīṣur iti.*

¹⁵As Rönnow (1927: 41-42) observes, the text here introduces two reasons for Indra's freedom from guilt, none of which is very convincing. The statement that he could not be guilty of a crime because he was a god does not fit well into Brāhmaṇa mythology, where Indra's guilt of slaying Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra is a recurring theme. It seems that the Brāhmaṇa is here treating an old mythical motif that was no longer fully understood.

¹⁶Cf. now also Oberlies 1998: 195-199.

(Oldenberg 1923: 142; Lincoln 1981: 108-109). The antiquity of the Indo-Iranian myth is, by the way, further evidenced by the tale of Geryon, the three-headed guardian of a herd of cattle, who was slain by Herakles (Hesiod, *Theogony* 287-294) and who is sometimes described as having six arms or legs.¹⁷

Trita Āptya, then, was from Proto-Indo-Iranian times associated with the slaying of a three-headed serpent, and at least from Ṛgvedic times with sin or transgression. In the ŚB it is he, not Indra, who has to carry the guilt of killing the tricephal; conceivably, the theme of Indra's guilt has been transferred, like the feat of slaying the tricephal, to the god from the fading mythological figure of Trita.

The epic myth

We conclude this outline with a summary of the versions of the story of Triśiras' and Vṛtra's slaying told in the fifth and twelfth books of the Mahābhārata:¹⁸ Out of hatred of Indra, Tvaṣṭṛ – so the “ancient legend” (*itihāsam purātanam*, 5.9.2) goes – engendered a son, Viśvarūpa, with “three horrible mouths looking like sun, moon and fire” (*tribhir vadanair ghoraiḥ sūryenduivalanopamaiḥ*, 9.4). With one mouth he recited the Vedas, with the second he drank liquor, and with his third face he “looked at all the quarters of space as if drinking them” (*diśaḥ sarvāḥ pibann iva nirikṣate*, 9.5). Fearing his might, Indra tried to weaken him by having celestial nymphs (*apsaras-*) seduce him, but the ascetic tricephal resisted their advances. Seeing no other solution, Indra then hurled his bolt at Viśvarūpa and killed him. But even then, “the Lord of the Gods was scorched by his effulgence (*tejas-*) and found no peace; even when slain his splendor was so scorching that he looked as though alive”¹⁹ (9.24). Indra then turned to a woodcutter,

¹⁷Geryon is said to have had three torsos (Apolodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.10); Stesichorus seems to have attributed six (i.e., triple sets of) arms and legs to him (Watkins 1995: 466-467). On the epithet “tricephalic” of the monster in the Veda and Avesta, cf. now also Jamison & Brereton 2014: 1378.

¹⁸The Poona edition has been used. See van Buitenen 1978 for a complete translation of book 5; on the Indra- Vṛtra story in the epic, cf. also Hopkins 1915: 129-132; Hildebeitel 1990 [1976], chap. 9.

¹⁹*na śarma lebhe devendro dīpitas tasya tejasā / hato 'pi dīptatejāḥ sa jīvann iva ca dr̥ṣyate //*

asking him to cut off Viśvarūpa's heads.²⁰ The woodcutter, however, was afraid of the moral implications of such a "horrible act" (*ghorakarman-*, 9.28), "a deed condemned by good people" (*karma sadbhir vigarhitam*, 26); furthermore, he didn't think his ax sufficient for the task. Revealing his identity as the king of the gods, Indra told the woodcutter that he would make his ax like a thunderbolt, and granted him a boon. The woodcutter cut off the head, and from the severed necks flew three species of birds. "Then, as they had been lopped off, Maghavan (Indra) became free from fever (*vijvara-*)"²¹ (9.39).

But now Tvaṣṭṛ, enraged over the killing of his son, performed a sacrifice and produced an avenger, Vṛtra, from the oblations thrown in the fire. Finding himself, after a fierce fight, unable to slay Vṛtra, Indra turned to the god Viṣṇu for advice. On his suggestion, he formed a pact with his enemy, promising him friendship and vowing to slay him "neither with what is dry nor with what is wet, neither with stone nor with wood, neither with weapon nor with thunderbolt, neither by day nor by night"²² (10.29). Of course, he eventually found a way to kill him without violating any of these conditions: he slew Vṛtra in the morning twilight, his thunderbolt dipped in foam (neither wet nor dry) from the sea. But even as the gods and the whole world celebrated the death of Vṛtra, Indra "was overcome with guilt and utterly depressed, and he was since previously overcome with the brahminicide of the tricephal. He sought refuge at the end of the worlds, his consciousness destroyed, having lost his mind. The Lord of the Gods was aware of nothing, overcome by his own sins. He dwelt concealed in the water, writhing like a snake."²³ (10.42-43.)

The guilt resulting from Vṛtra's killing is presumably due to the broken pact of friendship and the treacherous way of

²⁰This detail is already found in Vedic texts: MS 2.4.1, KS 12.10, where, as Geldner (*ad RV* 10.8.8) notes, the woodcutter seems to have taken Trita's place in the myth.

²¹*tatas teṣu nīkṛteṣu vijvaro maghavān abhūt /*

²²*na śuṣkena na cārdreṇa nāśmanā na ca dāruṇā / na śastreṇa na vajreṇa na divā na tathā niśi //*

²³*anṛtenābhībhūto 'bhūc chakraḥ paramadurmanāḥ / traiśiṛṣayābhībhūtaś ca sa pūrvaṃ brahmahatyayā // so 'ntam āśritya lokānām naṣṭasamjño vicetanaḥ / na prājñāyata devendras tv abhībhūtaḥ svakalmaṣaiḥ / praticchanno vasaty apsu ceṣṭamāna ivoragaḥ //*

carrying out the deed. But this is not an original element of the Vṛtra cycle. The pact, with all its conditions, and the use of foam as a weapon, belong to the Middle Vedic story of Indra and Namuci (for which cf. Bloomfield 1893: 143-163); it is only in this late, epic version that we find it transferred to the Vṛtra legend. It looks as if the epic author needed a reason for Indra's feelings of guilt after slaying his enemy. The brahminicide is also mentioned as a reason for Indra's flight, but it is odd that its effects are making themselves known only now. This may support the theory, advanced above, that the motif of guilt belongs originally to the Triśiras story, being perhaps transferred as a result of the weaving together of the two tales, with the Vṛtra episode ending up as a continuation of the Triśiras tale.

As a consequence of Indra's absence, no rain fell and the earth dried up. The gods decided to appoint a new ruler; rainfall, in ancient India, being thought to depend on the presence and character of a king. They chose a mere mortal by the name of Nahuṣa, who, however, quickly turned into a lascivious despot and began to make sexual advances towards Indra's wife, Śacī. Wishing to depose the tyrant and restore her husband to power, Śacī employed the services of a seeress named Upaśruti ("rumor"), who led her beyond the Himalayas to an island in a sea, where they found Indra hiding, in a tiny form, inside a lotus stalk in a pond. Śacī explained the situation to him. Indra, being too weak to oppose Nahuṣa, nevertheless made up a plan whereby Śacī would get rid of him: upon returning to the world of the gods, she should suggest to the king that he approach her on a palanquin carried by the celestial sages. After Śacī's visit, a second search for Indra – seemingly pointless, as his whereabouts were by now already known – was carried out: Bṛhaspati, the guru of the gods, sent forth Agni to find him. Having assumed a "wondrous female form" (*strīveṣam adbhutam*), Agni searched the whole world but could not find Indra; he returned to Bṛhaspati, reporting that he had looked everywhere except for the waters, which he, as Fire, could not enter. Bṛhaspati, however, granted him the ability to enter water without being extinguished; and so he found Indra in the lotus stalk. He began to praise Indra, recounting his former exploits and imploring him to regain his strength (*balam*

āpnuhi, 16.18). “And being thus praised, he grew slowly, resumed his own form and became endowed with strength”²⁴ (16.18-19). By the time he was ready to return to heaven and reclaim his position, however, Indra found out that Nahuṣa had already fallen, in a quite literal sense, from power: having enthusiastically carried out Śacī’s instructions and forced the sages to carry his palanquin, he had then perfected this supreme act of hubris by touching one of them on the head with his foot. Bereft of his merit, his splendor and good fortune (*hatatejāḥ sa niḥśrikaś ca*, 17.12), the king had fallen to earth in the form of a snake, leaving the throne for Indra to take. A horse sacrifice was then performed in order to make Indra free from sin and “fever” (*vijvaraḥ pūtapāpmā*, 13.18).

Two more versions appear in the twelfth book (Śāntiparvan) of the epic. According to one, after slaying Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra, Indra was overcome by fear due to this “twofold brahminicide” (*dvaidhībhūtāyāṃ brahmavadhyāyāṃ*) and hid in a lake, where, “having become atom-sized by means of his powerful yoga, he entered a lotus filament” (*tatra caiśvaryayogād aṇumātro bhūtvā bisagranthiṃ praviveśa*, 12.329.28). The rest of the story is much the same as in book 5, except that the second search for Indra by Agni is left out. The notion that the killing of Vṛtra, too, constituted an act of brahminicide is not found anywhere else, except for the other version of the tale included in this book (12.272-273). In this variant, Indra is being terrorized by a personified Brahminicide (*brahmahatyā*), described as a demoness with gaping mouth, disheveled hair, a necklace of skulls etc., who has arisen from Vṛtra’s corpse; he hides from her in a lotus stalk. Brahmā, however, intervenes on Indra’s behalf, distributing Brahminicide among fire, trees and plants, women, and waters. This motif is recognized from the TS version cited above; another detail echoing that version can be seen in Indra’s transforming himself into “burning fever” (*tejojvaro*) and entering Vṛtra’s body during their battle, causing him to yawn and striking him in the mouth with his bolt, killing him (273.6). Triśiras/Viśvarūpa is completely absent from this epic version

²⁴ *evaṃ saṃstūyamānaś ca so 'vardhata śanaiḥ śanaiḥ // svaṃ caiva vapur āsthāya babhūva sa balānvitah /.*

of the story, and the guilt of brahminicide is wholly due to Vṛtra's slaying, despite the fact that he is nowhere in the literature referred to as a brahmin and cannot, as Viśvarūpa supposedly was, be one by descent, as he is not Tvaṣṭṛ's offspring but manufactured by him by magical means. The personified Brahminicide is the closest we get to the "avenger of the serpent" referred to in RV 1.32.14, but she appears only in this very late version.

The Armenian parallel

Common to all the epic variants of the tale is Indra's hiding, in a diminutive form, in a lotus stalk. As Dumézil demonstrated long ago (Dumézil 1938; cf. 1969: 112ff), this detail must be quite ancient, since its presence in para-Iranian mythology can be deduced from Armenian materials. The Armenian historian Moses of Chorene (5th cent. C.E.) quotes the following song about the birth of the god Vahagn (*History of Armenia* 1.31):

Heaven was in labour, earth was in labour, the purple sea was in labour. The labour in the sea seized a red reed. Along the reed stalk smoke ascended; along the reed stalk fire ascended. And out of the fire leapt a golden-haired boy. He had fiery hair and a fiery beard, and his eyes were little suns. (Tr. Russell 1987: 197.)

Moses goes on to tell us that this boy became a slayer of dragons (*višap-*), and that he was compared to Herakles. Vahagn's name is a loanword in Armenian, derived from the name of the ancient Iranian god of victory, *Vərəθraγna*, which in turn is related to the Vedic divine epithet *Vṛtrahan*, most commonly applied to Indra. While the Vedic designation was, from earliest times, interpreted to mean "slayer of Vṛtra", Benveniste and Renou were able to show, in their now classic study, that there is no evidence for a demon **Vṛtra-* in Proto-Indo-Iranian mythology; the term **vṛtra-* meant "obstacle, resistance", particularly in a martial context,²⁵ and was

²⁵The term seems to have referred originally to the human foes encountered by the advancing Aryans. Cf. also Dandekar 1979, who, however, goes too far in regarding Indra as a deified chieftain who led the Aryan migration into India.

personified as a demon only in Vedic times. *Vṛtrahan* was originally the “smasher of resistance”, an epithet applied to any bellicose god or hero. In India it came to be used exclusively for Indra, as referring to his victory over *Vṛtra*; in Iran the abstract concept “smashing of resistance” was personified as a god, who, however, is never associated with any similar feat.²⁶ This led Benveniste to reject the relevance of Moses’ information to Indo-Iranian mythology, concluding that the dragon-killing mentioned by him must have been either inspired by the deeds of Herakles, whom Moses mentions, or derived from Near Eastern monster-slaying myths (Benveniste & Renou 1934: 75-79). Vahagn was, in his opinion, “une figure sans attaches réelles avec son prototype iranien” (76); no correspondence to the myth of his birth from a reed could be found in Iranian mythology.

It was Dumézil who first pointed out the close parallel in the Indian epic tale. He concluded that this must be an ancient popular legend (*itihāsa-*) that had been passed over in silence by the Vedic literature, only to resurface in the much later epic. This is not completely true. While most Middle Vedic texts simply state that Indra fled to the “farthest distance/s”, ŚB 7.4.1.13 relates how he, fearing that he had not actually killed *Vṛtra*, “entered the waters”, whereupon

He said to them (i.e., the waters), ‘I am afraid: make ye a stronghold for me!’ Now, what essence of the waters there was, that they gathered upwards (on the surface), and made it a stronghold for him; and because they made (*kar*) a stronghold (*pūh*) for him, therefore it is ‘*pūṣkara*,’ ‘*pūṣkara*’ being what is mystically called ‘*puṣ-kara*’ (lotus-leaf), for the gods love the mystic.²⁷ (Tr. Eggeling.)

Eggeling’s rendering of the word *puṣkara-* as “lotus-leaf” may be due to the context: the tale forms part of an exegesis of the Agnicayana ritual, and provides the background to the lotus-

²⁶The Avestan demon *Indara* is related to Indra only in name and does not tell us anything of the Proto-Indo-Iranian conceptions of this god.

²⁷*tā abravīd bibhemi vai puram me kuruteti sa yo ‘pām rasa āsit tam ūrdhvaṃ samudauhaṃs tām asmai puram akurvaṃs tad yad asmai puram akurvaṃ stasmāt pūṣkaram pūṣkaram ha vai tat puṣkaram ity ācaksate paro ‘kṣam paro ‘kṣakāmā hi devas.*

leaf which is laid down under one of the bricks of the fire-altar. But *puṣkara-* actually means simply “(blue) lotus” (Böhtlingk & Roth 1855-75, s.v.), and the leaf laid down under the altar is typically called *puṣkarapaṇa-*, “*puṣkara*-leaf”. Indra, then, is hiding in a lotus, using it as a “stronghold”.

There are, however, undeniable differences between the Indic and Armenian myths. Most obviously, the latter tells of Vahagn's birth, while Indra in the Vṛtra myth is already a grown warrior. The fiery traits of Vahagn are also seemingly absent in Indra, although Dumézil suggested that Agni's entering the lotus stalk and finding Indra may be a reminiscence of an intimate association with fire (1938: 162). There is, however, a detail in the epic tale that may connect him to Vahagn even in this regard: the fever (*jvara-*, from the root *jvar-/jval-*, “to burn”) which seizes him after the slaying of either Triśiras or Vṛtra. The relevant instances have already been cited: looking at the slain Triśiras, Indra is “scorched” by his radiance (*tejas-*) and becomes “free from fever” only after the three heads have been cut off. After being purified from the sin of brahminicide by means of a horse sacrifice, he again becomes “free from fever”. In one variant in book 12, Indra assumes the form of a burning fever and enters Vṛtra's body; in the older version in TS, he produces the fever from himself. All this may seem a far cry from the epiphany of the flaming god in the Armenian song; but further comparative evidence may close the gap somewhat.

The detail of Indra's fever has recently been treated by Roger Woodard, who in two books (Woodard 2006, 2013) has expanded on Dumézil's famous comparisons between heroic legends among various Indo-European peoples, all of which include a three-headed or in some way threefold adversary of the hero. Moreover, (bodily) heat plays a significant part in some of these myths.

The warrior's illness in Indo-European mythologies

First, there is the Irish tale, from various recensions of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, of the young warrior CúChulainn and his fight with the three “sons of Nechta Scéne”, which he slew and whose heads he took as trophies. Dumézil recognized in these a rationalized form of the old three-headed monster of Indo-

Iranian and Greek mythology. Now, after his victory, CúChulainn's "warrior's fury", *ferg*, did not abate, and on his return to the capital, Emain Macha, he turned against his own people, challenging anyone to come out of the city and fight him. The king, Conchobar, decided to send a battalion of 150 naked women led by his queen to meet the warrior. As they flaunted their breasts before him, saying "These are the warriors who will meet you today!", he turned away his face,

whereupon the warriors of Ulaid seized him and thrust him into a vat of cold water. This vat burst, but the second vat into which he was thrust boiled up with fist-sized bubbles, and the third vat he merely heated to a moderate warmth. When he left the third vat, the queen, Mugain, placed about him a blue mantle with a silver brooch and a hooded tunic. He sat at Conchubur's knee, then, and that was his bed ever after. (*The Book of Leinster*, tr. Gantz 1984: 146.²⁸)

A close parallel to the cooling of CúChulainn exists in the Ossetic saga of the hero Batraz (or Batradz, Bataraz etc.). It is told of him that he was born through the union of a mortal man, Xæmyz, and a supernatural woman; as the result of his breaking a taboo, the pregnant mother left his father, but not until she had planted her fetus on him in an abscess on his back. The abscess grew until it was cut open by Satana, the mother of the heroes, who acted as a sort of midwife for Xæmyz, and the newborn child, bursting forth all ablaze, fell down in a vat full of water that Satana had placed under the abscess. The flaming child caused the water to boil until the vat burst; and the same happened to the next six vats in which he was plunged. The child still blazing and calling out for more water, Satana went out to search for more, but only came upon a spring guarded by a seven-headed dragon that forced her to have intercourse with him before granting her some water (Dumézil 1930: 52-53). Batraz is also said to have plunged into the Black Sea upon his birth, causing it to boil for seven days

²⁸Cf. also the translation by Kinsella 2002 [1970]: 87-92, which follows the texts of the *Lebor na hUidre* and the *Lebor Buide Lecáin*. This particular tale hardly differs in the different versions.

(Dumézil 1930: 53; cf. 54); the fiery Vahagn's birth in the sea immediately comes to mind.

According to the legends, Batraz's body had metallic qualities and became red-hot when engaged in battle. As a child he was hardened in fire by the smith Kurdalægon and became invulnerable to weapons (Dumézil 1930: 54; Sikojev 1985: 169-171). In one version, the young Batraz acts as a dragon-slayer: as the fire in Kurdalægon's smithy is not sufficient to harden him, he goes to a dragon-nest, slays its inhabitants, and has the blacksmith use their bodies as fuel for a much stronger fire (Sikojev 1985: 170-171). His metallic, red-hot body made Batraz invincible in battle; during the siege of a fortress, he was shot as a projectile into the stronghold, breaking through its walls and subduing the defenders (Dumézil 1930: 56-57; Sikojev 1985: 187-189). But his heat also became the cause of his demise, in some versions of his death-story: he had a weak spot on his body, either on his head or in his abdomen, that had not been hardened by the fire. When he, at one time, was seized by hubris and engaged in a war against the spirits of the sky and the earth, these complained to God, who caused the sun to shine as much during a single day as in one year; the heat caused all lakes and streams and even the ocean to dry up. Batraz needed to plunge into water to cool off after each combat; now, after a battle against the spirits, he could not find water anywhere, and his weak spot burst into flames and killed him (Sikojev 1985: 220-221; cf. Dumézil 1930: 70; 1978: 30-31).²⁹ Like CúChulainn, Batraz is also said to have turned against his own community, the Narts, in a violent rage following the killing of his father by one of them. None of the Narts being able to challenge the invulnerable warrior, they could only agree to pay the wergild demanded by him (Sikojev 1985: 107-119; Dumézil 1930: 61-65; 1978: 21-49; cf. Colarusso 2002: 143-149 for a Circassian version of the tale).

The tale of Batraz's birth shows, as will have been noticed, great similarities to Vahagn's birth-story, and they may both be assumed to go back to some lost para-Iranian prototype. Why the dragon-slayer in this myth is *born* ablaze, unlike

²⁹On the motif of the hero's weak spot in Caucasian folklore, and its parallel in the Achilles legend, cf. also Tuite 1998.

CúChulainn and the other mythical figures to be discussed here, is a problem to which we will return later on. The Ossetic epic does show, however, that this blaze was intimately connected with warlike exploits and, like the Irish hero's, had to be cooled off after combat. These myths also demonstrate that the battle-heat of a warrior was potentially harmful to himself or his own people, which might explain Indra's "fever".

It may be mentioned in passing that a clue to the common origin of Batraz's and Vahagn's birth-myths may be found in the undeniable similarities between some elements of the mythology around Batraz and the information handed down by Herodotus (4.62) on the Scythian cult of "Ares" (Dumézil 1968-73 I: 570-575; 1978: 21-49; cf. Woodard 2006: 154-157); the Scythians, too, being an Iranian people and related to the Ossetes. While Batraz himself is undeniably a mortal hero, not a god, he appears to have inherited many traits from the old Scythian god of war. The closest Iranian correspondence to such a god would, of course, be Vərəθraϥna. In the votive inscriptions to Graeco-Persian deities on monuments at Nemrud Dagh, raised by king Antiochus of Commagene around 60 B.C.E., "Artagnēs", i.e. Vərəθraϥna, is identified with Ares and Herakles (who, as we have seen, is also associated with Vahagn). While the Indo-Iranian dragon-slayer par excellence must have been *Trita, one Iranian tradition seems instead to have associated this feat with the god of victory.³⁰

Dumézil added another piece of evidence to these comparisons from Roman legends: the story of the fight between two groups of brothers, the three Roman Horatii and the three Alban Curatii, as related by Titus Livy (*Ab urbe condita* 1.25-26) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Antiquitates Romanae* 3.14-22) (Dumézil 1942; 1969: 19-33). After his two

³⁰Lincoln, who wants to show that the Indo-Iranian dragon-slaying hero *Trita hides behind the Vahagn of the hymn, stresses the human genealogy of Vahagn and the fact that he "is compared with a hero, Hercules, and not with a god. Although his name is derived from that of the warrior god, Vahagn is clearly a mortal" (1981: 107). One should, however, take into account the possibility that the Christian Moses has euhemerized Vahagn and downplayed his divine traits. The identification of Hercules is not decisive, as this is found already in the inscription at Nemrud Dagh, where Artagnēs is identified with the gods Ares and Herakles.

brothers had been slain, the third Horatius singlehandedly killed all the Curiatii. On his triumphal return to Rome, however, he came upon his weeping sister, Horatia, who had been engaged to one of the Curiatii. This enraged the “ferocious youth” (*feroci iuveni*, Livy 1.26.3), who drew his sword and slew Horatia. He was sentenced to death for this deed, but on the pleadings of his father, who wished to have one child left, the sentence was modified and he had to ignominiously pass “under the yoke” (*sub iugum*). Dumézil recognized in the tale the same transformation, found in the Irish saga, of a monstrous, three-headed adversary into a human group of three. Furthermore, Horatius’ crime, committed in a state of rage following the battle, can be compared both to the raging CúChulainn’s turning against his own community, and the guilt haunting Indra after his victory over Vṛtra. If these myths share a common prototype, it would seem that some sort of transgression was the outcome of the warrior’s uncontrollable battle-frenzy.

Another, closer, Italic parallel to the Irish and Indic myths is the story – especially as told by Propertius – of Hercules’ slaying of Cacus, who had stolen away the herd of cattle which the hero had won from Geryon, and which he was now driving through Italy.³¹ Like Geryon, Cacus is described as three-headed – “a robber from a dreadful cave, who made sounds through three separate mouths” (*metuendo raptor ab antro, per tria partitos qui dabat ora sonos*; Propertius, *Elegies* 4.9.9-10).³² When Hercules had tracked down the miscreant to his cave and smashed his heads with three strikes from his club, he was

³¹Cacus is said to have been the son of the smith-god Vulcanus, just like Viśvarūpa was the offspring of the divine artisan Tvaṣṭṛ, “Fashioner”: Oberlies 1998: 256-257; Woodard 2006: 197.

³²This detail, along with the motif of a fight over cattle and the legend’s explicit claim to be an epilogue to the Geryon tale, has induced some to see it as an Italic adaption of the Greek myth; Hercules himself being, of course, a Greek import to Roman myth. There are indications, however, that Hercules has replaced a local hero as the protagonist of the story. Woodard (2006: 188) has suggested that this may have been the deity Semo Sancus, who was identified with Hercules (so also by Propertius in his account of the Cacus episode). But there is also a variant of the myth, reported by the antiquarian Verrius Flaccus, in which the hero was a herdsman named Garanus (cf. West 2007: 261-262).

tormented by thirst and a dry palate (4.9.21), and went in search for water. Hearing the distant laughter of young women, he came upon a grove sacred to Bona Dea, where there was a sacred spring and where rites forbidden to men were performed. As he was about to enter the precinct to ask for a drink, the hero was told to leave by an old priestess:

Avert your eyes (*parce oculis*), guest, and turn away from
 this sacred grove;
 withdraw and leave its thresholds while it is safe to run!
 Forbidden to men it avenges itself by a dreadful law,
 which protects the altar in this remote house.
 At great cost did the seer Tiresias gaze upon Pallas
 as she washed her strong limbs, having put aside the aegis.
 May the gods grant you other springs; for maidens flows
 this water,
 a secluded stream of secret course.³³
 (4.9.53-60; my transl.)

As Woodard (2006: 201; 2013: 135) observes, it is implied that the maidens are bathing naked in the sacred stream.³⁴ This is made clear from the reference to Tiresias, who was cursed with blindness by Athena for watching her bathing in a stream. This element of female nudity, which is not to be seen by men, has a parallel in the tale of CúChulainn.³⁵

The story ends with a furious Hercules breaking through the door of the shrine, which cannot withstand his “raging thirst” (*iratom ... sitim*, 9.62), and drinking the stream dry,

³³*Parce oculis, hospes, lucoque abscede uerendo;
 cede agedum et tuta limina linque fuga.
 interdicta uiris metuenda lege piatur
 quae se summota uindicat ara casa.
 magno Tiresias aspexit Pallada uates,
 fortia dum posita Gorgone membra lauat.
 di tibi dent alios fontes: haec lympa puellis
 auia secreti limitis unda fluit.*

³⁴Cf. Woodard 2013: 173-174 on the obscene nature of the rites performed by Bona Dea’s priestesses.

³⁵As Woodard suggests (2013: 143), a reminiscence of something like the women who meet up with the hero in the Irish and Italic myths may be found in the epic account of Agni’s search for Indra, in which the fire god, for no apparent reason, assumes the form of a beautiful woman.

whereupon he takes revenge for the inhospitality shown to him: he declares the sanctuary forbidden to maidens and their worship. Like CúChulainn and Batraz, Hercules needs water in order to cool off after his battle; of course, the feverish Indra hiding in water also comes to mind.

A rather obscure British parallel to these myths deserves mention. Attention was called to it by Grisward (1978), who briefly pointed out its relevance to Dumézil's studies of the myths of the tricephal; Grisward's failure to carry out a systematic comparison, however, and the relative obscurity of his study, have caused it to be passed over in later studies of the subject. The tale under discussion is the legend of Ider or Yder, one of king Arthur's knights, as preserved in two medieval sources: the *De antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie* by William of Malmesbury, a chronicle over Glastonbury Abbey; and the French *Romanz du reis Yder*.³⁶ William of Malmesbury's version is by far the most concise and may be quoted in full:

We read in the chronicles of the most illustrious king Arthur, that he, at a certain Christmas at Caerleon, had adorned a very strong young man, namely the son of king Nuth, called Ider, with the knightly insignia, and, for the sake of testing him, led him to the Mountain of the Frogs, now called Brent Knoll, to fight against three giants famed for their misdeeds who he had learnt were there; this young recruit went ahead of Arthur and his companions without their knowing it, and valiantly attacking the said giants, he killed them in a terrific massacre. When they had been destroyed, Arthur, arriving and finding the said Ider wasted from the excessive effort and collapsed in unconsciousness, completely helpless, mourned him together with his companions as though he was deceased. As he returned to his kingdom with unspeakable sadness, he thus left behind the body, which he assumed to be dead, until he sent a cart to bring it back from there. When he first arrived at Glastonbury, still considering himself to be the cause of his death, since he had arrived too late to aid him, he established eighty monks there for the care of his (Ider's) soul, bestowing possessions and territories for their sustenance, gold, silver, chalices and other churchly

³⁶Ed. and tr. by Adams 1983.

adornments in abundance.³⁷ (*De antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie* 34, ed. Scott 1981; my transl.)

William recounts this tale only for its relevance to the history of the abbey, and it all leads up to the royal bestowal of riches and land on the monastery. What happened to Ider, who we learn was not really dead but only seemed so, is not mentioned.

Grisward observes that the three giants echo the threefold opponent(s) found in the myths examined by Dumézil. Ider's total exhaustion and deathlike state after the battle also connects him with the heroes of these myths. The version in the *Romanz du reis Yder* adds some details that further strengthen the comparison, although the number of giants is here reduced to two. After slaying the giants and meeting up with Arthur and his retainers, Yder is seized by a great thirst (*A Yder prist une grant sei*, v. 5707), and the knight Kei offers to go in search of water. Secretly hating Yder, he brings him water from a spring he knows to be poisoned; and when Yder has quenched his thirst, he not only falls down as though dead, but his limbs and features disappear, so that he no longer looks like a human being (*Neis semblant de forme d'ome*, v. 5762). Arthur and his knights leave him lying on the ground, believing him to be dead. But soon afterwards, two Irish knights happen to arrive at the spot and find the body, barely recognizable as human. They have in their possession some healing herbs from their fatherland, which they now mix with water from another spring, preparing a potion with which they make Yder vomit up

³⁷ *Legitur in gestis illustrissimi regis Arturi, quod cum in quadam festiuitate Natalis Domini apud Karlium strenuissimum adolescentem, filium scilicet regis Nuth, dictum Ider, insigniis militaribus decorasset, et eundem experiendi causa in montem Ranarum, nunc dictum Brentecno, ubi tres gigantes malefactis famosissimos esse didicerat, contra eosdem dimicaturum duxisset, idem tiro Arturum et suos comites ignorantes precedens, dictos gigantes fortiter aggressus mira cede trucidauit. Quibus peremptis, Arturus adueniens dictum Ider nimio labore deficientem et sui omnino inpotem in exstasi collapsum inueniens, eundem quasi defunctum cum suis lamentabatur. Rediens ergo ad sua cum ineffabili tristitia, corpus quod exanime existimabat, ibidem reliquit, donec uehiculum ad illud reportandum illuc destinasset. Sese eciam necis eius causam reputans quia tardius ad auxilium eius uenerat, cum demum Glastoniam adueniret, ibidem quater uiginti monachos pro anima eiusdem instituit, possessiones et territoria ad eorum sustentacionem, aurum et argentum, calices et alia ornamenta ecclesiastica largiens abundanter.*

the poison and return to life.

This version differs from William of Malmesbury's in that Yder's lifeless state is not immediately caused by his exhaustion, but through poisoning. Unlike William, however, the romance mentions the knight's parching *thirst*. And while the water here is not the cure, but the cause of Yder's illness, it is also a potion prepared from spring-water that eventually heals him.

Fire and internal heat in the Veda

The afflictions befalling the heroes of these myths may vary in form: from the violent battle-frenzy of CúChulainn to the death-like sickness of Ider/Yder and Indra. Recurring elements are uncontrollable rage (CúChulainn, Horatius, Batraz), heat (CúChulainn, Batraz) or burning fever (Indra), and thirst (Hercules, Ider); in the cases of CúChulainn, Batraz, and Indra, the hero is plunged into water. Of course, exhaustion or sickness and active rage are not mutually exclusive states, the one often following on the other; Dumézil (1969: 112) rightly pointed to the proverbial battle-fury of the Norse berserker, who were said to lie down in complete exhaustion after combat. While the Indic materials make no mention of a violent battle-fury on Indra's side, describing only his weakened state after the fight, this may conceivably be due to the brahmanical tradition, which typically frowned on the more violent *kṣatriya* practices. The notion of internal heat is, in fact, well known from ancient India (cf. e.g. Knipe 1975), though it is typically associated with brahmins and recluses whose ascetically generated ardor (*tapas-*) is the source of their magic powers, including the ability to turn their enemies to ashes. But *kṣatriyas*, too, are associated with heat or radiance, typically designated by the word *tejas-*. And as Blair's (1961) investigations into the early Vedic connotations of the root *táp-* have made clear, heat must have been originally associated more with warriors than with brahmins: martial deities like Indra and Agni are in the RV said to destroy their enemies by means of heat, *tápus-*. A comparison with the Avestan evidence (cf. the discussion of *xvarənah* below) may suggest that the notion of heat or fieriness associated with warriors and men of power goes back to Indo-Iranian times, although linguistic

correspondences are missing.

In Dumézil's interpretation, the myths discussed above are reminiscences of an initiation rite for young warriors. After a mock-battle in which the warrior worked up a savage fury, he was thrust into water and "cooled off" before he could be let back into society. To support his theory, Dumézil pointed to a Kwakiutl initiation into the "society of cannibals", as reported by Boas (1897: 437-446) and Frazer (1910: 521-526). Here the novice, after spending months in the wilderness and returning to the village in a mad, feral state, attacking and biting people around him, is seized and plunged four times into a tank full of salt water, whereupon he returns home, now calm and even weakened, vomiting up water (Dumézil 1969: 123). Recently Woodard (2013: 132-133) has questioned Dumézil's interpretation, pointing out that heroes like Hercules and CúChulainn are in the middle, not the beginning, of their careers. In his view, the state described by these tales is post-traumatic stress syndrome, a condition often befalling soldiers and not infrequently turning them into dysfunctional, even dangerous individuals. The elements of descent into water and female nudity may instead, he suggests, go back to an Indo-European ritual for "rehabilitating" traumatized warriors and making them fit to return to society and a settled life.

Leaving the question open, I will turn to another problem: the fact that the Ossetic and Armenian heroes are *born* in the kind of fiery state which the other traditions associate only with a warrior's battle-rage. Dumézil (1969: 120) put forth an ingenious explanation to this dilemma: the Iranian Vərəθraγna (the prototype of Vahagn and probably of Batraz) is, unlike Indra and the other Indo-European heroes, a victor without an opponent: he is not the "slayer of Vṛtra" but the "smasher of resistance", a personification of an abstraction. While Indra becomes *Vṛtrahan* only after his victory over the serpent, Vərəθraγna's role as "smasher of resistance" is not dependent on any particular exploit, but is, in fact, the god's very nature: he could thus be said to have been born as *Vərəθraγna*, and the fiery epiphany takes place at the time of his birth instead of after some demon-slaying feat.

As interesting as this theory is, I think another explanation is more likely: what we see in Vahagn's and,

probably, Batraz's birth-myths is a conflation of the mythology around the old Iranian god of war with that of the Indo-Iranian fire god – Vedic *Agni*, Avestan *Ātar*. While the imagery of the “birth” of fire is best preserved in the abundant Vedic lore around *Agni*, it is likely to go back to Indo-Iranian and perhaps even Proto-Indo-European times. *Agni*, whose “birth” is repeatedly referred to in the Vedic hymns, was thought to have his first birth in heaven, and to descend to earth as lightning or in the rain; now residing in the waters in a latent state, he entered the trees and plants which grew from the water; he was then made to blaze forth from his latent state, kindled (“born”) from the wood (Macdonell 1897: 91-95). As the “son” of the water-born plants, the fire-god was called the “Scion of the Waters” (Vedic *Apām Napāt*, Avestan *Apam Napāt*), an epithet referring not, as had been suggested especially by 19th century nature mythologists, to the sun rising from the sea or the lightning born in the “cloud-ocean”, but to the conception of fire dormant in water (Oldenberg 1923: 117-120).³⁸ *Apām Napāt* has a hymn in the RV dedicated to him, where he is described as a youth (*yuvān-*) or a child (*śiśu-*), all golden in appearance, clothing himself in lightning (v. 9), and being nursed by the “young women”, the Waters (*āpah*, feminine). The close similarities to the new-born *Vahagn* have already been observed by others (Güntert 1923: 290 n. 1; Russell 1987: 197; Watkins 1995: 254).

Interestingly, *Agni* is often said, like *Indra*, to have been born from a lotus: “Atharvan churned you out from a lotus, *Agni*”, declares already RV 6.16.13 (*tvām agne puṣkarād ādhy ātharvā nīr amanthata*), and in the ritualistic texts (especially in the expositions on the *Agnicayana* rite, where a lotus leaf representing the waters is laid down under the altar), the lotus or lotus leaf is said to be *Agni*'s womb or birth-place (*yoni-*; e.g. TS 5.1.4.2; ŚB 7.4.1.8). Moreover, there is a myth relating how *Agni* once ran away from the gods, which closely resembles that of *Indra*'s disappearance.³⁹ It is found already in RV (e.g.

³⁸On *Apām Napāt*, see also Findly 1979.

³⁹I don't know of any systematic comparison between the two myths. Feller (2004: 104-105), in a study of the *Agni* myth, tentatively suggests that this may be a “multiform” of the *Indra* tale, leaving the question open as to the chronological precedence of any myth.

10.51), though a reason for his flight is given only in Middle Vedic texts, where we learn that he feared the office of *hotṛ* priest of the gods after his brothers – presumably previous fires – had perished while performing that duty. Now, common to many versions of the myth is that Agni seeks refuge either in the waters (*apsu*) or in the plants (*oṣadhīṣu*), or both.⁴⁰ So already in the RV, where he is said to have “entered the waters and the plants” (*práviṣtam ... apsv oṣadhīṣu*, 10.51.3). In KS 25.7 and KKS 39.5, the fleeing Agni is said to have “entered the ocean”, where he was, however, discovered and betrayed by a fish; he then entered a reed (*naḍa-*). KS 19.1 similarly tells us that Agni, running away from the gods, “entered a bamboo cane (*venu-*)” and burnt its inside, which is why the spotted bamboo is hollow and has black spots.

It seems natural enough that a god closely associated with heat or fire would have absorbed traits from the actual fire god. The famed birth of fire from plants and waters has thus inspired the birth-stories of Vahagn and Batraz; and while Indra is not “born” from a lotus, his emergence from this aquatic plant (presumably an Indianized form of an older, Indo-Iranian reed) is clearly inherited from the ancient god of fire. (Possibly the Indra mythology has also influenced the lore surrounding Agni, as appears from the myth of Agni’s flight.)

Possible Iranian parallels: *Astuuat.ərətā* and the fiery glory

If, as everything indicates, ancient Iranian mythology is what ultimately connects the Armenian and Ossetic myths with the Indic one, it may be asked what has happened to the missing link here – why is there no extant Iranian myth that resembles them? The answer, I think, is that there is such a myth, although its relevance to these other traditions has not, to my knowledge, been previously recognized.

Yašt 19 of the Avesta (the *Zamyād Yašt*) constitutes a laudation of the *xʼarənah*, the “glory” or nimbus that adheres to successful kings and heroes and brings them good fortune.⁴¹

⁴⁰The Vedic texts dealing with Agni’s flight have been conveniently translated by Krick (1982: 546-562), and will not be discussed at length here; cf. also Feller 2004, chap. 1, who includes a discussion of the epic versions.

⁴¹A “Glücksglanz”: Lommel 1927; Hintze 1994.

Whatever the origin and etymology of the word,⁴² it is now generally recognized that *xʷarənah* (Middle Persian *xʷarrah*) was conceived of as a force that could manifest itself as light or fire (Duchesne-Guillemin 1963; Gnoli 1999; Hintze 1994: 15-33; Oettinger 2009). Its close associations with water and with the deity Apam Napāt suggest that its origin may at least partly be found in the Indo-European concept of (divine) fire in water (Dumézil 1968-73 III: 21-89; Puhvel 1987: 277-283; West 2007: 270-272); unlike deities like the “Scion of the Waters” and Agni, however, the *xʷarənah* is an impersonal force.⁴³ Now, the seventh *karde* of this Yašt relates how the *xʷarənah* – which is here repeatedly denoted by the hapax *axʷarəta*⁴⁴ – once became the object of a struggle between the fire god Ātar and the three-headed dragon Aži Dahāka, who were fighting as the representatives of, respectively, the spirits of good (Spənta Mainyu) and evil (Aŋra Mainyu). None of them succeeded in seizing the *xʷarənah*, as neither dared to turn his back on the other. Finally, the *xʷarənah* departed from them both:

Then that Glory swelled forward / into the Vourukaša sea.
 / Then Apam Napāt of swift horses / reached for it, / and
 in doing so, / Apam Napāt of swift horses urgently wishes:
 / “I want to gain hold of this Glory / which is

⁴²The old etymology connecting it with *huuar-*, Vedic *svār-*, “sun(light)” (accepted e.g. by Duchesne-Guillemin 1963 and Boyce 1982: 17 n. 23), runs into difficulties as the metre in its one Gathic occurrence shows *xʷarənah* to be bisyllabic; it was criticized by Bailey (1971: 1-51), whose rationalist interpretation of the concept as simply “good fortune” has, however, not gained widespread acceptance. The old etymology has, however, been linguistically defended by Gnoli and, more recently, Nikolaev (2012-13: 220-223). Another possible derivation is from PIE **suel-* “to glow” (Hintze 1994: 31-32).

⁴³On the relationship between the *xʷarənah* and Apam Napāt, cf. Oettinger 2009, who is of the opinion that the former conception has arisen through “Funktionsspaltung” as a hypostasis of Apam Napāt’s attributes.

⁴⁴Often rendered, on semantic grounds, as “unobtainable” or something similar (“unfassbar, unnahbar”, Bartholomae 1904 s.v.; cf. e.g. the translations in Wolff 1910, Malandra 1983; connected to *xʷar-* “to take [food etc.]” by Bailey). Lommel’s (1978: 77-85; cf. his translation in Lommel 1927: 180-181) interpretation “lichtlos” has recently been revived by Nikolaev (2012-13: 216-228), who suggests that the designation may refer to the *xʷarənah*’s location on the sunless bottom of the sea.

unappropriated, / (lying) at the bottom of the abyssal sea, / at the bottom of the deep lakes.”⁴⁵ (Yt 19.51, tr. Humbach & Ichaporia 1998: 131.)

We see here, again, the fight between a literally fiery hero and a tricephal, where it may be assumed that the *x^varənah* has replaced the original cattle-herd as the object over whose possession they fight. In this tale, however, the battle ends with no victor, and instead of the flaming hero, it is the fiery *x^varənah* that flees and seeks refuge in water – in the mythical sea Vouru.kaša, where it is henceforth guarded by another fiery deity. But like Indra, the *x^varənah* will reemerge from its watery abode: the last part of the Yašt tells how it will accompany the *saošiiant* or future savior who will redeem the world at the final battle between good and evil (19.89). Significantly perhaps, this savior is designated with the heroic epithet *vərəθrajan-*, Vedic *vṛtrahan-* (see also Vidēvdāt 19.5).⁴⁶

Now, according to the tradition, the Saošiiant (whose proper name is *Astuuat.ərəta*, “Of Embodied Righteousness”) will be born from a lake. After mentioning his union with the *x^varənah*, Yašt 19 goes on to describe his emergence from the water:

... when (Saošiiant) *Astuuat.ərəta* will rise / from the Kāsaōiia sea⁴⁷, / the messenger of Ahura Mazdā, / the son of Vīspa.tauruuairī, / brandishing the triumphant mace, / which brave Θraētaona wielded / when Aži Dahāka was slain (by him);
(the mace) which Fraṅrasiian, the Tura, wielded / when deceitful Zainigu was slain (by him) ... with that very (mace Saošiiant) will, then, expel deceit / from the world of truth.⁴⁸ (92-93, tr. Humbach & Ichaporia 1998: 165, 167.)

⁴⁵ (*ā*)taṭ xvarənō frapīnuu(ata) / auui zraiiō vouru.kašəm / ā.dim haθra haṅgəuruuuiiat / apqm napā auruuat.aspō / tadaca iziieiti / apqm napā auruuat.aspō / aētaṭ x^varənō haṅgrəfšāne / yaṭ ax^varətəm / bun(e) zraiiānhō gufrahe / bune jafranqm vairiianqm /.

⁴⁶ This epithet is closely associated with the Saošiiant; see Hintze 1994: 366.

⁴⁷ Literally “water”.

⁴⁸ yaṭ astuuat.ərətō fraxštāite / haca apaṭ ksaōiīat / aštō mazdā ahurahe / vīspa.tauruua(ir)iiā puθrō / va(zr)əm vaējō yim vərəθrayn(i)m / yim barat taxmō θraētaonō / yaṭ ažiš dahākō jaini / yim barat fraṅrase tūrō / yaṭ druuā zainigāuš jaini / ... tā auuada drujəm

The lake Kašaoiia – the Hamun in Sistān – has been seen as a multiform of Vouru.kaša (Davidson 1985: 9; cf. Dumézil 1968-73 III: 26). In support of this view it has been pointed out that the Haētumant river is said to empty into the Kašaoiia (19.66); in the same Yašt, this river is said to have been created when the Turanian Fraŋrasiian dived thrice into the Vouru.kaša in an attempt to seize the *x^varənah*, which eluded him, breaking through the boundaries of the sea and creating three outlets (19.56-64). The two waters are also conflated in later tradition (Hintze 1994: 42). If they were in fact identified, or connected through the waters of the Haētumant, this would explain how Astuuā.ərəta could unite with the *x^varənah* before his emergence from the Kašaoiia. In any event, it is clear that the hero rising from the lake is already *united with the fiery glory*.

Middle Persian traditions would seem to lend further support to the interpretation put forth here. The Bundahišn (33.36, ed. B. T. Anklesaria) has a version of the Saošiiant's birth story, in which he is one of three posthumous sons of Zarathushtra himself, born from the prophet's *xvarrah* which had been deposited on the bottom of the Kašaoiia. The luminosity of the *x^varrah* appears from the statement that the three brothers, awaiting their birth at the end of times, can be seen at night as three lights shining on the bottom of the lake.⁴⁹ The same text mentions, in another context, that Frētōn's (= Thraētaona) *x^varrah* had settled *on the root of a reed* in the sea Frāxkard (= Vouru.kaša) (35.38),⁵⁰ whence it entered a maiden through the milk of a cow which had been fed on reeds. In view of this evidence, Benveniste's conclusion that Vahagn's birth-story resembles nothing in Iranian mythology (Benveniste & Renou 1934: 75) will require some modification.

It is perhaps significant, too, that the newborn Saošiiant is described as carrying the dragon-slaying weapon of Thraētaona, the bane of the tricephal.⁵¹ If the myth, in some

nizbarāt / ašahe haca gaēḡābiio /

⁴⁹In this version, however, the savior does not arise out of the lake, but is born of a maiden who had drunk its water and been impregnated.

⁵⁰Pointed out by Dumézil 1969: 120 n. 2.

⁵¹This weapon is denoted by the hapax *vaēḡa-*, emended to *vazra-* (= Vedic *vajra-*, the characteristic weapon of Indra) by Humbach and Ichaporia; indeed,

earlier version, ever had a protagonist, he has been disposed of and replaced with the impersonal *xʷarənah*; it is this force, rather than a god or hero, that escapes after the battle between Fire and the tricephal, hides in the sea, and finally reemerges with the Saošiiant. A good candidate for an “original” hero of the tale would, it might be suggested, be Thraētaona, the slayer of Aži Dahāka.

It should be pointed out, finally, that while the *xʷarənah* is best known for its associations with kingship, it also attaches, like the Indic *tejas*, to warriors and heroes. Thus the warrior god Vərəθraϥna holds the exclusive epithet *barō.xʷarəna-*, “carrying the *xʷarənah*” (cf. Benveniste & Renou 1934: 7, 31, 49-51), and Thraētaona’s *xʷarənah*, the subject of the Bundahišn tale referred to above, is mentioned already in the Avesta (Yt 19.36). It is possible, then, that the concept has inherited something of the old Indo-European notion of internal heat or fire, though the Mazdayasnan religion, with its intense dislike of the ecstatic and violent practices of the warrior bands – to the extent that the concept of frenzied battle-rage, *aēšma-*, was personified as a demon – may have downplayed the martial aspects of the fiery glory.

Kṛṣṇa battling Fever

I would like to finish these comparisons by citing another Indic myth that, so far, has not been noticed in discussions of the mythical pattern outlined above. It comes from a somewhat late and unexpected source: the *Harivaṃśa*, an appendix to the *Mahābhārata* dealing with the life and times of the god incarnation Kṛṣṇa.⁵² (Later and more concise versions appear in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 5.33, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10.63.) While this, unlike the epic, is not a text that has been frequently probed for ancient Indo-European materials, the Kṛṣṇa legend as related in the *Harivaṃśa* does share some traits with the stories of other Eurasian heroes; for instance, Kṛṣṇa’s birth-story has long been recognized as an example of the possibly Indo-European “birth of the hero” myth-pattern described by

as they point out, Faridūn’s (Thraētaona’s) mace in the Persian Book of Kings is called *gurz* (< *vazra*-).

⁵²The Poona critical edition has been used.

Otto Rank and Lord Raglan,⁵³ and among the many demons slain by the god-hero we find a many-headed serpent, Kāliya.⁵⁴ The original heroic character of Kṛṣṇa⁵⁵ (which does not necessarily exclude a divine nature) appears also from sources like the Buddhist Ghaṭa Jātaka and from his probable identity with the Indian "Herakles" mentioned by Megasthenes. It may be pointed out, too, that the tribe of the god Kṛṣṇa/Vāsudeva, the Yadus, has been considered as inheritors of the ancient Indo-Iranian "sodalities" or warrior bands (Bollée 1981: 183; cf. Widengren 1969: 19); they also seem to have belonged to a different wave of migration from the one that brought the Vedic Aryans to India,⁵⁶ thus, conceivably, preserving Aryan traditions not handed down by the brahmanic Vedic tradition.

The episode to be discussed is the tale of Kṛṣṇa's fight with the demon Bāṇa and his companions.⁵⁷ This demon, who had a thousand arms, has imprisoned Kṛṣṇa's son Aniruddha, who has been secretly courting Bāṇa's daughter. When hearing about this, Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by his brother Balarāma and riding on the eagle Garuḍa, immediately departs for Bāṇa's city, Śoṇitapura ("City of Blood"), to release his son. Before he leaves, however, he is asked by one of his wives to bring back with him Bāṇa's magic cows, "drinking whose milk the great demons do not age" (*yāsāṃ pītvā kila kṣīraṃ na jīryanti mahāsuraḥ*, 113.9). On reaching Śoṇitapura, they are met by Bāṇa and his army, and a fierce battle ensues. Among Bāṇa's warriors it is only one who is a match for the god: he is described as three-legged and three-headed (*tripādas triśīrās*, 110.56) and having "three snake-like arms" (*bhujagākārair bāhubhis tu tribhis*, 110.70), and is thus characterized by the same *tripleness* as the foes in the other heroic tales discussed

⁵³ See Preciado-Solis 1984: 50-60 for a detailed discussion.

⁵⁴ *Kālika* in Ṛgveda Khila 2.14.

⁵⁵ Preciado-Solis (1984) has tried to demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa fits into a pattern of "traditional heroes", adducing many parallels to themes in his legend from comparative myth and folklore.

⁵⁶ The Yadus are one of the Aryan tribes mentioned in the RV as opposing the immigrating, and ultimately victorious, Bharatas.

⁵⁷ The episode has been compared to the tale of Herakles and Geryon by Preciado-Solis (1984: 98-99, 103), who is of the opinion that the similarities can only be explained by "direct contact", perhaps via the Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms. The possibility of a common origin is not taken into consideration.

here. His name, interestingly, is Jvara, “fever”, and he is a personification of feverish heat, throwing glowing ashes about him in the battle. Hit by Jvara’s ashes, Balarāma falls to the ground, aglow (*pradipta-*), in a state of physical and mental ruin,

sighing and yawning repeatedly, his body weary,
and his eyes repeatedly falling into unsteadiness, flickering
then;
his body-hairs standing on end, his eyes wearied, hissing
as if he’d lost his mind,
the maddened Ploughshare-Wielder (Balarāma), his
consciousness gone, then said to Kṛṣṇa:
“Kṛṣṇa, big-armed, safe-making Kṛṣṇa! I’m aglow!
I’m burning all over, my friend! How can I find relief?”⁵⁸
(110.63-65.)

Having “freed him from the burning”, an enraged Kṛṣṇa faces Jvara. After a hard fight in which neither is able to overcome the other, Jvara enters Kṛṣṇa’s body and causes him to fall to the ground in fever, overwhelmed by weariness (111.1-4). But the god – an avatar of Viṣṇu – solves the matter by creating, from out of himself, a “Viṣṇuite fever” (*vaiṣṇava-jvara-*) that faces off with the “Śivaite” (*māheśvara-*) Fever – Jvara being said to have issued forth from the god Śiva’s body, and Śiva himself being Bāṇa’s protector. The Viṣṇuite Jvara overcomes his opponent and drags him before Kṛṣṇa, who is freed from his sickness. A “disembodied voice from the sky” (*aśarīrā ... vāṇī ... antarikṣagā*) tells him, however, to spare Jvara; and the defeated demon then expresses his gratefulness through a litany, lauding Kṛṣṇa as the oldest of the gods, the lord of the universe etc.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *niḥśvasaṅ jṛmbhamāṅś ca nidrānvitatanur muhuḥ // netrayor ākulatvaṃ ca muhuḥ kurvan bhramāṃś tadā / saṃhr̥ṣṭalomā glānākṣaḥ kṣiptacitta iva śvasan // tato haladharo mattaḥ kṛṣṇam āha vicetanaḥ / kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahābāho pradipto 'smy abhayaṅkara / dahyāmi sarvatas tāta katham śāntir bhaven mama //*

⁵⁹ The story of Jvara’s birth from Śiva is actually found in the Mbh (12.274.4ff; a background story of the fever used by Indra to overpower Vṛtra, for which see above), where Fever is said to have arisen from a drop of sweat from his forehead, as the god became hot with rage over his not being invited to a sacrifice of the gods. Nothing is said here, however, of Jvara’s having three heads, legs, or arms; he is described as dark-complexioned and clothed in red

After these sectarian digressions, the narration proceeds with Kṛṣṇa battling Bāṇa and overpowering him. As the god raises his discus-weapon (*cakra*-) to finish off the defeated demon, however, the goddess Koṭavī – perhaps identical with Bāṇa's protector's, Śiva's, spouse⁶⁰ – appears on the battlefield to try to save the demon's life by unconventional means.

Seeing the Lord in the battle-tumult with the discus raised
in his hand,
Koṭavī stood before Vāsudeva clad in air (i.e., naked⁶¹).
Having stepped in between and shed her garments
for the sake of protecting Bāṇa, she then stood in the way
of [Kṛṣṇa's] victory.
Her eyes copper-red with rage, standing unclothed in the
battle,
intent on preserving Bāṇa, she repeatedly spoke these
words:
“It does not befit you, a god, to slay in combat Bāṇa, who
is not your match!”⁶²
(112.97-99.)

Kṛṣṇa replies by chiding Bāṇa for unmanliness; then, “his eyes closed” (*nimīlitākṣa*-, 102), he throws his discus at the demon, but does not kill him; he merely lops off his thousand arms.⁶³

(274.39), which is the standard look of demons and ghouls in the epic (cf. Hopkins 1915: 38-39, 113). The conception of Fever as a tricephalic triped clearly belongs to the Kṛṣṇa legend.

⁶⁰According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, she was Bāṇa's mother.

⁶¹That is the meaning of this common Sanskrit figure of speech; cf. the Jaina sect of naked ascetics, the *Digambaras*.

⁶²*cakrodyatakaraṃ dr̥ṣṭvā bhagavantam rañājire / pramukhe vāsudevasya digvāsāḥ koṭavī sthītā / antarghānam upāgamyā tyaktvā sā vāsasi punaḥ / paritrāṇāya bāṇasya vijayādhiṣṭhitā tataḥ / bhūyaḥ sāmāratāmrākṣī vivastrāvasthitā raṇe // bāṇasamrakṣaṇaparā vākyam etad uvāca ha / nārhasse deva hantum vai bāṇam apratimaṃ raṇe //*

⁶³Cf. the more concise version of the myth in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, where Wilson (1840) has the following translation: “The destroyer of the demon host therefore took up his discus Sudarśana, blazing with the radiance of a hundred suns. As he was in the act of casting it, the mystical goddess Koṭavī, the magic lore of the demons, stood naked before him. Seeing her before him, Kṛṣṇa, with unclosed eyes, cast Sudarśana, to cut off the arms of Bāṇa.” (5.33.36.) While Wilson translates “unclosed”, the extant text has *mīlitākṣaḥ*, “with eyes closed”, and this reading is of course supported by the Harivaṃśa text, as well as Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.63.20-21 (*tiryāṅ-mukho nagnām*

The reason that Kṛṣṇa merely wounds his enemy is apparently that his closed eyes don't allow him to aim properly. As he again raises his weapon to slay Bāṇa, Śiva himself appears on the scene and pleads with him to spare his protégé, to which Kṛṣṇa finally accedes.

Before departing with Aniruddha and Bāṇa's daughter, Kṛṣṇa first makes an excursion to fetch the demon's famed cows, which he had promised his wife. The cows, it turns out, are guarded by the sea-god Varuṇa in his underwater dwelling. Diving there, mounted on Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa engages Varuṇa's forces in combat and sets them all on fire with his blazing disc, overpowering the god of the ocean, but ultimately sparing his life. He then returns to his city, Dvārakā, with his son and Bāṇa's cows.

The elements in common with the other myths discussed here are obvious: the hero's fight with a tricephal; the role of fever, here both afflicting the hero and used by him as a weapon; female nudity as a means of debilitating the hero and mitigating his violence; the motif of a fight over cattle; and, perhaps, the hero's descent into water. The triple heads and limbs of Jvara are of particular interest; it has been pointed out (Lincoln 1981: 107-115) that the antagonist in these Indo-European warrior myths is frequently characterized by the number three, not only by being a tricephal: Geryon is variously pictured as having three bodies joined to one waist, triple sets of arms and legs, or three arms (Watkins 1995: 466-467), and in the tales of CúChulainn and Horatius – to which we may now add the one of Ider – the hero even has to face a group of three.⁶⁴

The double-edged role played by fever in the tale is also of interest: here, too, fever or feverish heat is both used by the hero against his enemy (cf. the battle-rage of CúChulainn, etc.), and afflicting himself. The idea of a hypostasis of the hero's internal heat, acting outside himself, may have developed at an early stage of Indic mythology; according to TS 2.5.2.3 Indra

anirikṣan). As the word preceding *militākṣaḥ* – *drṣṭvā* – ends with a long *ā*, it is possible that the words have been close enough to look as if joined together by sandhi, and have been dissolved by Wilson into *drṣṭvā amilitākṣaḥ*.

⁶⁴Even Geryon is turned, as Lincoln notes (1981: 107), into three brothers by Diodorus Siculus, 4.17.2.

“produced cold and hot fever *from himself* (*ātmanah*)” in order to overpower Vṛtra, while Kṛṣṇa similarly “emitted” (*srj-*) Fever to combat the hostile Fever (111.5).

Concluding remarks

Summing up the results of this study, we may conclude that the theme of the monster-slayer's flight and illness has very ancient, in all likelihood Proto-Indo-European, roots, and that the view of Dumézil and Woodard, that the motif can be explained in the light of the berserker-like rage that was thought, in many Indo-European and other ancient societies, to seize or possess warriors, can be substantiated by considerable evidence. This rage was conceived of as an internal heat or ardor, a “fever” that ultimately threatened to destroy the warrior himself, or could turn him against his compatriots in blind battle-frenzy. Thus, the mythical hero sometimes becomes guilty of some form of crime that has to be expiated.

The Proto-Indo-Iranian dragon-slayer was no doubt *Trita, though his mythology has largely become absorbed by other, newer god-heroes: Indra in India, Vərəθraϥna in the Iranian cultural sphere. Now, in the light of what we have seen about the recurring Indo-Iranian motif of the god or hero who is born from water or an aquatic plant, it may be worthwhile to bring up, again, the old question of the meaning of the family-name *Āptya*. As it appears to be derived from *ap-* “water”, it was long held that Trita had some sort of intimate connection with water, though the exact nature of this connection has never been established: he has been seen as a god of rainfall or storms (Dandekar 1979: 149-152), or a water-deity presiding over lustrations and purifying from sins (Rönnow 1927). Again, some have stressed Trita's nature as a human hero (a “Kulturheros”, Oberlies 1998: 196), whose last name “seems simply to be the name of a family of heroes and contrary to the generally accepted opinion has nothing whatever to do with water” (Lincoln 1981: 104). The Brāhmaṇas have two stories dealing with the origin of the *Āptyas* and their name. One of them appears in the context of Agni's flight: as Agni was hiding in the waters, the gods spotted him and pulled him out; he then spat on the waters, which had not been able to give him refuge, and from the spit arose the three *Āptyas*, whose origin, then, is

in the waters (ŚB 1.2.3.1). In the other myth, the gods, having performed a sacrifice, were looking for someone to “wipe off” their impurities on. Agni threw three pieces of charcoal in the water, and from them were born the Āptyas; “because they were born from the waters” (*yad adbhyo ’jāyanta*) they were called *Āpya* (TB 3.2.8.9-11). The Brāhmaṇas being notoriously unreliable in their “etymologies” and *ad hoc* origin tales, the value of these two, mutually contradictory, myths may be reasonably doubted. They do, however, agree in some details, most notably in Agni’s role. The birth of the Āptyas from water and fire actually forms a rather neat parallel to the birth-stories of the Saošiiant, Vahagn, and Batraz; the first two of which, it may be noted, are also said to have been the third in a set of brothers (Moses of Chorene 1.31; Bundahišn 33.36).⁶⁵ This being said, Indic mythology has preserved only faint reminiscences of the fieriness associated with the old dragon-slayer.

Abbreviations

AiB: Aitareya Brāhmaṇa

AV: Atharvaveda (Śaunaka)

JB: Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa

KKS: Kapiṣṭhala-Kaṭha Saṃhitā

KS: Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā

Mbh: Mahābhārata

MS: Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā

PB: Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa

RV: Rgveda

ŚB: Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina)

TB: Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa

TS: Taittirīya Saṃhitā

Yt: Yašt

⁶⁵This is so common a motif in myths and folklore that it could easily be dismissed as coincidental. Note, however, that Dumézil (1969: 19-33) compared the three Āptyas in ŚB 1.2.3.2-4 to the Horatii, pointing out that in both cases, the sin of killing accrues to only one of the brothers. And while I am skeptical of Lincoln’s (1981) reconstruction of a Proto-Indo-European *Trito, “Third” – whose name has survived only in Indo-Iranian – I do think he is right that the slayer of the tricephal or threefold adversary is himself frequently associated with the number three, often as the third member of a triad.

Bibliography

- Adams, Alison
1983 *The Romance of Yder*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Anklesaria, B. T.
1956 *Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahishn*. Bombay: Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha.
- Bailey, H. W.
1971 *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*. (2nd edn.)
Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bartholomae, Christian
1904 *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*. Stuttgart: Karl J. Trübner.
- Benveniste, Émile, and Louis Renou
1934 *Vṛtra et Vṛθragna: Étude de mythologie indo-iranienne*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale.
- Blair, Chauncey J.
1961 *Heat in the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda*. New Haven: American Oriental Society.
- Bloomfield, Maurice
1893 Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15, 143-188.
1896 Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda: Seventh Series. *American Journal of Philology* 17(4): 399-437.
- Boas, Franz
1897 *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- Bodewitz, H. W.
2000 Distance and death in the Veda. *Asiatische Studien* 54: 103-117.
- Böhtlingk, Otto, and Rudolph Roth
1855-75 *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. I-VII. St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Bollée, Willem B.
1981 The Indo-European sodalities in ancient India. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131: 172-191.

- Boyce, Mary
1982 *A History of Zoroastrianism. II: Under the Achaemenians.* Leiden: Brill.
- Buschardt, Leo
1945 *Vrtra: Det rituelle Dæmondrab i den vediske Somakult.* Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard.
- Colarusso, John
2002 *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Dandekar, R. N.
1979 Vrtrahā Indra. In: *Selected Writings I: Vedic Mythological Tracts*, 141-198. Delhi: Atlanta Publications. [First publ. 1951.]
- Davidson, Olga M.
1985 The Crown-Bestower in the Iranian Book of Kings. In: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce (Acta Iranica 24)*, 61-148. Leiden: Brill.
- Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques
1963 Le x^{ar}ənah. *AION Linguistica* 5: 19-31.
- Dumézil, Georges
1930 *Légendes sur les Nartes.* Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré Champion.
1938 Vahagn. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 117: 152-170.
1942 *Horace et les Curiaces.* Paris: Gallimard.
1968-73 *Mythe et épopée.* I-III. Paris: Gallimard.
1969 *Heur et malheur du guerrier: Aspects mythiques de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
1978 *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour.* Paris: Payot.
- Eggeling, Julius
1882-1900 *The Satapatha-Brâhmana According to the Text of the Mâdhyandina School.* I-V. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Feller, Danielle
2004 *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Findly, Ellison Banks
1979 The 'Child of the Waters': A reevaluation of Vedic Apām Napāt. *Numen* 26: 164-184.
- Frazer, James G.
1910 *Totemism and Exogamy.* III. London: Macmillan.

- Gantz, Jeffrey
1984 *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Geldner, Karl F.
1951-57 *Der Rig-Veda: Aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*. I-III. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gnoli, Gherardo
1999 Farr(ah). In: Yarshater, E. (ed.), *Encyclopædia Iranica* 9, 312-319. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Grisward, Joël P.
1978 Ider et le tricéphale: d'une «aventure» arthurienne à un mythe indien. *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 33(2): 279-293.
- Güntert, Hermann
1923 *Der arische Weltkönig und Heiland*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf
1990 [1976] *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Hintze, Almut
1994 *Die Zamyād-Yašt: Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Hopkins, Edward Washburn
1915 *Epic Mythology*. Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner.
- Humbach, Helmut, and Pallan R. Ichaporia
1998 *Zamyād Yasht: Yasht 19 of the Younger Avesta. Text, Translation, Commentary*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Jamison, Stephanie W., and Joel P. Brereton
2014 *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. I-III. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kinsella, Thomas
2002 [1970] *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Knipe, David M.
1975 *In the Image of Fire: Vedic Experiences of Heat*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Krick, Hertha
1982 *Das Ritual der Feuergründung (Agnýādheya)*. (Ed. G. Oberhammer.) Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

- Kuiper, F. B. J.
1973 Four word studies. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 15: 179-204.
- Lincoln, Bruce
1976 The Indo-European cattle-raiding myth. *History of Religions* 16: 42-65.
1981 *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Lommel, Herman
1927 *Die Yāšt's des Avesta*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
1978 *Kleine Schriften*. (Ed. K. L. Janert.) Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.
- Macdonell, Arthur A.
1897 *Vedic Mythology*. Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner.
- Malandra, William W.
1983 *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and the Achaemenid Inscriptions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mayrhofer, Manfred
1986-96 *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*. I-III. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.
- Nikolaev, Alexander
2012-13 Homeric ἀάατος: Etymology and poetics. *Die Sprache* 50(2): 182-239.
- Oberlies, Thomas
1998 *Die Religion des Rgveda. I. Das religiöse System des Rgveda*. Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien.
- Oertel, Hanns
1898 Contributions from the Jāiminiya Brāhmaṇa to the history of the Brāhmaṇa literature. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 19: 97-125.
- Oettinger, Norbert
2009 Zum Verhältnis von *Apqm Napāt-* und *𐬨𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀* im Avesta. In: Pirart, Éric, and Xavier Tremblay (eds.), *Zarathushtra entre l'Inde et l'Iran: Études indo-iraniennes et indo-européennes offertes à Jean Kellens à l'occasion de son 65e anniversaire, 189-196*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Oldenberg, Herman
1923 *Die Religion des Veda*. Stuttgart & Berlin: J. G. Cotta.

- Preciado-Solis, Benjamin
1984 *The Kṛṣṇa Cycle in the Purāṇas*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Puhvel, Jaan
1987 *Comparative Mythology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rönnow, Kasten
1927 *Trita Āptya: Eine vedische Gottheit*. Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln.
- Russell, James R.
1987 *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Scott, John
1981 *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation and Study of William of Malmesbury's De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie*. Woodbridge & Totowa: Boydell Press.
- Sikojev, André
1985 *Die Narten, Söhne der Sonne: Mythen und Heldensagen der Skythen, Sarmaten und Osseten*. Cologne: Eugen Diederichs Verlag.
- Tuite, Kevin
1998 Achilles and the Caucasus. *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 26(3-4): 289-343.
- van Buitenen, J. A. B.
1978 *Mahābhārata: 4. The Book of Virāṭa; 5. The Book of the Effort*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Watkins, Calvert
1995 *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- West, Martin L.
2007 *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Widengren, Geo
1969 *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran: Männerbund, Gefolgswesen, Feudalismus in der iranischen Gesellschaft im Hinblick auf die indogermanischen Verhältnisse*. Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Wilden, Eva
2000 *Der Kreislauf der Opfertgaben im Veda*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

Wilson, H. H.

1840 *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition.*
London: John Murray.

Wolff, Fritz

1910 *Avesta: Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen.* Strassburg: Trübner.

Woodard, Roger D.

2006 *Indo-European Sacred Space: Vedic and Roman Cult.* Urbana and
Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

2013 *Myth, Ritual, and the Warrior in Roman and Indo-European
Antiquity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.