Linguistics 051:

Proto-Indo-European Language and Society

Tripartition of Functions

Rolf Noyer

Approaches to Comparative Mythology

- One can approach the study of comparative PIE mythology from several points of view

Linguistic
What etymological parallels exist between deities and mythological characters?

Universal
How do the earliest attested PIE belief systems reflect universals of human thought and experience?

Structuralist/Functional
Is there an internal structure which is replicated in the various early IE societies — despite the lack of precise etymological correspondences?

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In addition, they argued that this division was a basic conceptual one, transcending the organization of social classes. They observed reflections of the three-way division and organization in the structure of the **pantheon** and in the organization of various **rituals**.

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Indic	Iranian	
brahmán-	*āθravan*	priests
kṣattriya- (*rājanya*)	*raθaēšta*	kings
vaiśya-	*vāstrō fšuyant-*	producers
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Castes

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- Benveniste: the first 3 reflect a fundamental distinction in PIE society

  a **priestly** class: responsible for spiritual affairs
  a **warrior** class: responsible for ruling and fighting
  a **producer** class: effectively, everyone else

- The 'lowest' class in India, the *śūdra* class, was thought to be an Indian innovation. Its etymology is unknown, but does not appear IE.

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bráhman

bráhman   etymology has been enormously disputed

- the elusive Cosmic Totality; in the Vedas it refers to many things: mysterious metaphysical 'fluid' or magical or mystical 'powers'

- the derivatives noun *brahmán,* adj. *brāhmaṇa-* '(one) endowed with *bráhman*' is the general term for the priestly class

- appears to correspond to Old Persian *brazman-* > Middle Persian *brahm* 'form, (decent) appearance (in clothing or conduct)'

Thus probably, by a shift in accent that is independently observed:

> *$b^hlég^h$-men*   '(appropriate) ritual form'
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āθravan

• Normal word for 'priest' in the Avesta

• Corresponds to Vedic *atharvan* 'endowed with magical powers' (from the *Atharva Veda,* concerned with magic) — a rare word in the Vedas

• Attempts to link the word to Avestan *ātar* 'fire' are difficult because the Avestan *atharvan* is not specifically the fire-priest, but is responsible for religious ceremony

• *ātar* has no cognate in India — there fire is *agni* (cf. L *ignis*)

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kṣattriya and rāj

kṣattriya-   derived from *kṣattra-* 'power': the Power Class

rāj-   old word for 'king'

$< $ *h_3rēĝ-s 'king' $>$ L *rēx*

$< $ *$h_3$reĝ- 'to hold out one's hand, to direct with the hand'

hence: the Directing Class ($\sim$ executive)

- The executive or controlling class held this position in virtue of its capability as warriors

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raθaēštā (-ar)

- Probably $<$ *$ra\theta a\bar{e}$-štā*   '**he who stands
  up in a chariot**'
  $<$ *rotH-o-i* 'in a chariot' + *$steh_2$* 'stand'
- $=$ Ved. *ratheṣṭha* (an epithet of Indra)
- This etymology suggests that in PIE society
  the ruling class **drove chariots into battle**
  instead of riding on horseback
- Typically in the Iliad the warrior rides into battle on a chariot and then
  dismounts for one-on-one combat:

  Homeric *eph' híppōn baínō,* lit. 'to go upon horses' always means 'to
  mount a chariot', Latin *equō vēhī* 'to go on horseback' must have been
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vaiśya and vāstrō fšuyant-

Ved. *vaiśya* <   derivative of *viś* 'town, community'

  < *u̯iḱ- < *u̯oiḱ- 'village, clan'

  > Gk *oíkos* 'house' (economy)

  > OE *wiċ* > towns in *-wich*

The *vaiśya* correspond to the PIE class consisting of 'everyone else' — 'the clansmen, the community'

Av. *vāstrō fšuyant-*   a dvandva (additive) compound

  — vāstrō deriv. from vātra 'pasture' (also vāstar 'herdsman', or generically understood as 'the poor')

  — *fšuyant-* participle of *fšu-* 'raise animals' < *peḱu- 'livestock'

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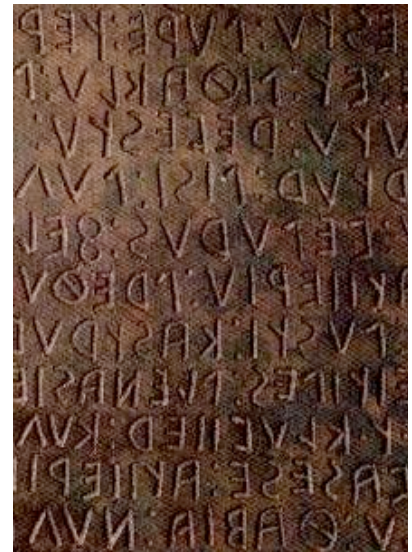Av. *vāstrō fšuyant-*   a dvandva (additive) compound

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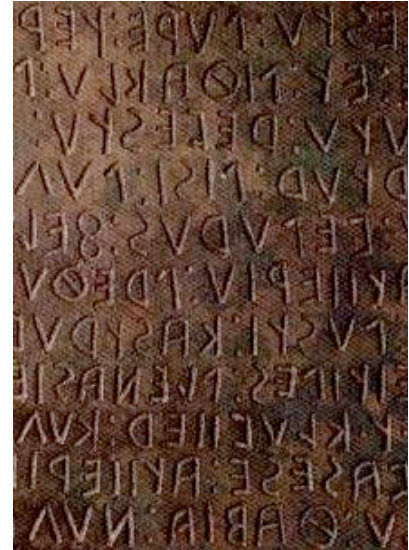
The Iguvine Tablets

- Bronze tablets written in Umbrian, an Italic language, were unearthed in Gubbio (formerly *Iguvium*) in 1444.
- They turned out to record the rites of a class of priests, the *Atiedian Brothers*.The oldest of them appears to be from the 3rd cent BCE
- They show the workings of a non-Roman Italic tradition in a form not yet been heavily influenced by Greek culture
- A number of researchers have noted a typical **tripartite** structuring of elements in the rites described.

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Urban Lustration

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- The priests had to walk around the entire city's territory in a procession
- At each entrance to the city, they had to recite various ritual formulae.
- Benveniste notes in particular a recurring phrase which calls for divine protection for six things:

chiefs	priests	producers	animals	earth	produce
nerf	*arsmo*	*ueiro*	*pequo*	*castruo*	*frif*
'warriors'	'rites'	'men'	'livestock'	'farmland'	'produce'
$*h_2$ner-	$*h_2$er-	$*ui$Hró-	$*pe\hat{k}u$-	L *castra*	L *frūctus*

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Other tripartite aspects of the lustration

- First, the auspices (bird oracles) were taken by the *adfertor*, the chief priest (possibly an archaic term for 'priest'

- **Pigs**, **oxen** and **sheep** were to be sacrificed

- Among other actions, the priest, stopping at various gates to the city, made sacrifices to:
  — Jupiter Grabovius: received the sacrifice of **three** oxen
    (then three pregnant sows to Trebus Jovius)
  — Mars Grabovius: received the sacrifice of **three** oxen
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Tripartite Cosmos

- We have already seen that the Vedas classify the gods in various ways, but one is according to their place in three cosmic domains

  — Sky, Heaven — Celestial — solar, lunar and astral gods
  — The 'middle air' — Atmospheric — storms, wind, rain, lightning
  — Earth — Terrestrial/Chthonic — agriculture, underworld, fire
- This partition also corresponds to the priest/warrior/producer partition

	Celestial	*Atmospheric*	*Terrestrial*
Vedic	Mitra-Varuṇa	Indra	Agni
Roman	Jupiter	Mars	Quirinus
Norse	Óðinn (Odin)	Þórr (Thor)	Freyr

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Ideology of the Three Functions

- Dumézil expanded greatly on the tripartition hypothesis, suggesting that it reflected a fundamental 'ideology of the three functions' that must have been shared in PIE times

1. **Sovreignty**   magical, juridical, maximally sacred

2. **Physical power and bravery**   victory in war: chariot 'specialists'

3. **Fertility and prosperity**   many and various gods are placed here

- Ritual formulae frequently allude to these three ideological elements, grouped together

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- Aside from the *śūdra* in India, other 'fourth' classes usually involve some kind of division of the third class into farmers vs. artisans
- The Avesta recognizes this fourth artisan class, as does the Greek legend of Ion

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Ion Legend

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- These classes appear connected with Ion's four sons, and ultimately with four different deities.
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Argádēs	*Hóplē(te)s*	*Geléōn*	*Aigikorẽs*	sons
cf. Argos	< *hópla* 'tools'	Zeus Geléōn	cf. aegis (*aigís*) of Athena	
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