



Shamanism in Indo-European Mythologies

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Abstract

The paper analyzes shamanic cosmology. It is un-Indo-European in its principles and rather typical of Siberian people. The first part describes the ecstatic trances and the cosmological World Tree or Axis mundi, the combination of which is typical of true shamanism. The second part shows that some key features of shamanism can be found outside Siberia, among Caucasian, Greek and North Germanic people. It is shown that Prometheus and Odin have clear shamanistic features.

Keywords: Shamanism, Comparative Mythology, Germanic, Greek, Caucasian

Introduction

In a preceding paper,¹ I described the approach that Indo-Europeans had about cosmogony and the structure of the sky. I showed that the Indo-European cosmogony envisioned the sky as three layers: the Upper-Sky, the Middle-Sky and the Lower-Sky. The gods and celestial bodies in each sky are different and have specific roles, names, colors and attributes.

In this paper, a completely different cosmology is analyzed: the shamanic conception. It is un-Indo-European in its principles and is (or – should we say – was³) rather typical of Siberia, but, as will appear in the paper, traces of shamanism can also be found in Europe.

In his famous and ground-breaking book on shamanism, Eliade describes the typical features of the shamanic practices and the cosmological *Weltanschauung* of shamanism *stricto sensu*.

The first part of the paper describes the ecstatic trances and the cosmological World Tree or *Axis mundi*, the combination of which is typical of true shamanism. This means that the paper will stick to a restrictive definition of shamanism, as per Mircea Eliade (1907–86). Other books, like *Shamanism* of encyclopedic nature with more than 180 contributors, though interesting, have an extremely extensive approach of "shamanism". In particular, *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC) does not distinguish ecstasy from possession, which appears methodologically troublesome.²

The second part shows that some key features of true shamanism can be found outside Siberia, among Caucasian, Greek and North Germanic people. In particular, Prometheus and Odin have clear shamanistic features.

One of the greatest merits of Eliade's epoch-making book was also to dismiss the previously prevailing idea that shamanism was a kind of mental illness³, and to separate shamanism from witchcraft and sorcery.

¹ Cf. (Fournet. 2019). <http://aaatec.org/documents/article/fournetar1.pdf>

² It can also be noted that *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC) does not include an entry "Cosmology" as a general theme.

³ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC) and 'Psychopathology and shamanism' in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, pp.211–217).

Naturally, shamanism is a complex religious phenomenon, it would be naive to claim that it has remained unchanged for centuries, if not millennia, since the dawn of mankind. It is doubtless possible to peel the different layers that led to Siberian shamanism as it was practiced synchronically in recent times. As a matter of fact, the European traces of shamanism differ in a number of interesting points, certainly informative of the original and oldest core of shamanism.

1. Canonical features of shamanic ecstasy

The fundamental power of the shaman is ecstasy, that is to say the ability of the shaman's soul to (admittedly) move out of the shaman's body (without causing death...) and then wander in the whole world, including the sky and the netherworld, for different purposes, especially healing and divination, and also guiding the souls of the dead toward the netherworld.

The following quotes from Eliade (Eliade, 1972) document shamanism and will be useful when some sections of Caucasian, Greek and North Germanic mythologies are examined. Whenever possible, Eliade's (Eliade, 1972) quotes will be compared with quotes from *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC).

"A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*." (Eliade, 1972, p.4) [the first definitive feature of shamanism]

"The shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld." (Eliade, 1972, p.5) [defines ecstasy]⁴

"Shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia." (Eliade, 1972, p.4) [a geographic, though not exclusive, criterion]

"The principal function of the shaman in Central and North Asia is magical healing. Several conceptions of the cause of illness are found in the area, but that of the "rape of the soul" is by far the most widespread. Disease is attributed to the soul's having strayed away or been stolen, and treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume its place in the patient's body." (Eliade, 1972, p.215) [the shamanic conception of sickness and healing]⁵

"A shaman differs from a "possessed" person, for example; the shaman controls his "spirits," in the sense that he, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, "demons," and "nature spirits," without thereby becoming their instrument." (Eliade, 1972, p.5) [shamanism is not possession]

"We consider it advantageous to restrict the use of the words "shaman" and "shamanism," precisely to avoid misunderstandings and to cast a clearer light on the history of "magic" and "sorcery." For, of course, **the shaman is also a magician and medicine man**; he is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians, whether primitive or modern. But beyond this, he is a **psychopomp, and he may also be priest, mystic, and poet**." (Eliade, 1972, pp.3–4) [emphasis mine]

"Divination and clairvoyance are part of the shaman's mystical techniques." (Eliade, 1972, p.185)

⁴ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.217): "The shaman's role as psychopomp is a direct extension of the shaman's power to walk between the worlds."

⁵ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.500): "Among the northern peoples, the dominant explanation of illness was that it was the result of the loss of the soul, with both spiritual and somatic symptoms. The shaman's objective was to restore the soul to the individual, and at the same time revitalize the life powers that form the foundation of spiritual and physical integrity. The conception of illness as the loss of one's soul entailed the belief that the soul had been stolen by the spirits of the dead. To recover it, the shaman had to undertake a spiritual journey to the other side."

2. Shamans and fire

“Magic and magicians are to be found more or less all over the world, whereas shamanism exhibits a particular magical specialty, on which we shall later dwell at length: **"mastery over fire," "magical flight,"** and so on. By virtue of this fact, though the shaman is, among other things, a magician, not every magician can properly be termed a shaman. The same distinction must be applied in regard to **shamanic healing**; every medicine man is a healer, but the shaman employs a method that is his and his alone.” (Eliade, 1972, p.4) [emphasis mine]

“The idea that fire ensures a celestial destiny after death is also confirmed by the belief that those who are struck by lightning fly up to the sky. "Fire," of whatever kind, transforms man into "spirit"; this is why **shamans are held to be "masters over fire"** and become insensitive to the touch of hot coals. "Mastery over fire" or being burned are in a manner equivalent to an initiation.” (Eliade, 1972, p.206) [emphasis mine]⁶

3. Eagles and renewal of organs

“The content of these first ecstatic experiences, although comparatively rich, almost always includes one or more of the following themes: **dismemberment of the body, followed by a renewal of the internal organs and viscera**; ascent to the sky and dialogue with the gods or spirits; descent to the underworld and conversations with spirits and the souls of dead shamans.” (Eliade, 1972, p.34) [emphasis mine]⁷

“The Yakut Gavril Alekseyev states that **each shaman has a Bird-of-Prey-Mother**, which is like a great bird with an iron beak, hooked claws, and a long tail. This mythical bird shows itself only twice: at the shaman's spiritual birth, and at his death. It takes his soul, carries it to the underworld, and leaves it to ripen on a branch of a pitch pine. When the soul has reached maturity the bird carries it back to earth, cuts the candidate's body into bits, and distributes them among the evil spirits of disease and death. **Each spirit devours the part of the body that is his share**; this gives the future shaman power to cure the corresponding diseases. After devouring the whole body the evil spirits depart. The Bird-Mother restores the bones to their places and the candidate wakes as from a deep sleep.” (Eliade, 1972, p.37) [emphasis mine]

“In all these examples we find the central theme of an initiation ceremony: dismemberment of the neophyte's body and **renewal of his organs**; ritual death followed by resurrection. We may also note the motif of **the giant bird** that hatches shamans in the branches of **the World Tree**; it has wide application in North Asian mythologies, especially in shamanic mythology.” (Eliade, 1972, p.39) [emphasis mine]⁸

“According to the Yenisei Ostyak [=Ket], the Teleut, the Orochon, and other Siberian peoples, the "first shaman" was born of an eagle or, at least, was taught his art by the eagle. We may also recall the role played by the eagle in the stories of shamanic initiation and the ornithomorphic elements in

⁶ Cf. ‘Fire’ in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, pp.127–28): “The power to handle fire is considered proof of individual shamanic and personal power.”

⁷ Cf. ‘Initiation’ in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.153): “The initial blow – sickness, dreams, fainting fits, fright, or lightning strike – constitutes a physical and psychological ordeal that sends the soul of the candidate on a journey. Recurrently, this spiritual crisis portends a drama of death and dismemberment of the physical body before renewal of the vital organs and rebirth.”

⁸ Cf. ‘Initiation’ in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.154): “The narratives tell of souls from Siberia to South America carried off by great birds of prey – eagles, vultures or mythical bird-spirits. Their magical flight lands on a giant tree where souls may nest and ripen – such as the great fir tree of the Yakut – or undergo ordeals, as with the Tree of Trials of the Mataco.”

the shamanic costume, which **magically transform the shamans into eagles.**" (Eliade, 1972, pp.70–71) [emphasis mine]

"We must also consider the **mythical relations that exist between the eagle and the shaman.** The eagle, it will be remembered, is held to be the father of the first shaman, plays a considerable role in the shaman's initiation, and, finally, is at the center of **a mythical complex that includes the World Tree and the shaman's ecstatic journey.**" (Eliade, 1972, pp.157–58)

4. Helping figures: wives, wolves, etc.

"It is in such a mythical horizon that we must place the relations of shamans with their "celestial wives"; it is not they who, properly speaking, consecrate the shaman; they help him either in his instruction or in his ecstatic experience." (Eliade, 1972, p.79)

"We must note that **the majority of these familiar and helping spirits have animal forms.** Thus among the Siberians and the Altaians they can appear in the form of bears, wolves, stags, hares, all kinds of birds (especially the goose, eagle, owl, crow, etc.)." (Eliade, 1972, p.89) [emphasis mine]⁹

5. The World Tree or *Axis mundi*

The shamanistic cosmological conception (as per Eliade) also includes a gigantic tree that connects the Earth and the Sky. The World Tree is, so to speak, the second pillar of shamanism, together with ecstatic trances. It is sometimes replaced or associated with a Cosmic Mountain.

Shamanism (2004-SEWBPAC, p.19), though acknowledging "Mircea Eliade is one of the most influential figures in academic studies of shamanism", has a one-eyed approach of his work: "Eliade's contribution was to provide insight into shamanism as an ecstatic technique used to contact the world of spirits." This completely ignores the cosmological dimension that Eliade considers essential. Even more surprisingly, *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.21) credits Joan Halifax with the restrictive definition proposed by Eliade: "[she] narrowed the definition somewhat by including in her definition of shamanism various features such as an initiatory crisis; a vision quest, an ordeal, or an experience of dismemberment and regeneration; the sacred tree or *axis mundi* and the spirit flight associated with it; and the role of the shaman as a healer, in addition to the ability to enter shamanic trance". Exactly what Eliade himself originally wrote.

"The Cosmic Tree is essential to the shaman. From its wood he makes his drum; climbing the ritual birch, he effectually reaches the summit of the Cosmic Tree; in front of his yurt and inside it are replicas of the Tree, and he depicts it on his drum¹⁰." Cosmologically, the World Tree rises at the center of the earth, the place of earth's "umbilicus"." (Eliade, 1972, p.270)¹¹

⁹ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.500): "In northern [Eurasian] shamanic practice, the most characteristic tool of the ecstatic trance technique was the drum, by means of which the shaman entered into a trance and gained access to spirit helpers, who took animal form."

¹⁰ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.501): "The drum, whose surface membrane was divided into three parts corresponding to the shamanistic cosmology, was generally described as a means of transport, for instance a horse or a boat."

¹¹ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.263): "A common motif is the Tree of Life, the axis mundi, or "world pole," whose roots are deep in the earth and whose branches disappear into the sky. This idea could be reflected in the tent or yurt pole that supports a house as the world tree supports the world. The World Tree is a representation of reality, located at a point considered to be the center of the world, as well as the connection between worlds in many traditional legends."

“Another mythical image of the "Center of the World" that makes connection between earth and sky possible is that of the Cosmic Mountain.” (Eliade, 1972, p.266)

“It is such a Cosmic Mountain that the future shaman climbs in dream during his initiatory illness and that he later visits on his ecstatic journeys. Ascending a mountain always signifies a journey to the "Center of the World.” (Eliade, 1972, p.269)

“The symbolism of the World Tree is complementary to that of the Central Mountain. Sometimes the two symbols coincide; usually they complete each other. But both are merely more developed mythical formulations of the Cosmic Axis (World Pillar, etc.).” (Eliade, 1972, p.269)

“The pre-eminently shamanic technique is the passage from one cosmic region to another – from earth to the sky or from earth to the underworld. The shaman knows the mystery of the breakthrough in plane. This communication among the cosmic zones is made possible by the very structure of the universe. As we shall see presently, the universe in general is conceived as having three levels – sky, earth, underworld – connected by a central axis.” (Eliade, 1972, p.259)¹²

The World Tree is somehow imagined as pointing toward the Polar Star, especially among boreal and arctic people.

“In the middle of the sky shines the Pole Star, holding the celestial tent like a stake. The Samoyed call it the "Sky Nail"; the Chukchee and the Koryak the "Nail Star." The same image and terminology are found among the Lapps, the Finns, and the Estonians. The Turko-Altaians conceive the Pole Star as a pillar; it is the "Golden Pillar" of the Mongols, the Kalmyk, the Buryat, the "Iron Pillar" of the Kirgiz, the Bashkir, the Siberian Tatars, the "Solar Pillar" of the Teleut, and so on. A complementary mythical image is that of the stars as invisibly linked to the Pole Star. The Buryat picture the stars as a herd of horses, and the Pole Star (the "Pillar of the World") is the stake to which they are tethered.” (Eliade, 1972, pp.260–261)¹³

6. Secondary symbols: fertility, snake

“In a number of archaic traditions the Cosmic Tree, expressing the sacrality of the world, its fertility and perennality, is related to the ideas of creation, fecundity, and initiation, and finally to the idea of absolute reality and immortality. Thus the World Tree becomes a Tree of Life and Immortality as well.” (Eliade, 1972, p.271)

“The cosmological schema Tree-Bird (=Eagle), or Tree with a Bird at its top and a Snake at its roots, although typical of the peoples of Central Asia and the ancient Germans, is presumably of Oriental origin.” (Eliade, 1972, p.273)

This cosmological theme most probably belongs to a different tradition than shamanism.

¹² Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.165): “The shamanic worldview often presupposes a multileveled cosmos, with the heavens, and often an Underworld, complementing the mundane world of everyday existence. Shamans move between these worlds in the exercise of their calling. Mystical flight is integrally connected in most versions of shamanism with two other themes: curing soul loss and interaction with spirit beings. It is the task of a shaman to travel to one or another cosmic realm to retrieve the soul of the sick person and thus to restore the sick person to health.”

¹³ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.502): “The [Finnish] Sampo has been interpreted as a human-made replica of the mythical world pillar, represented in a sacrificial context in a community cult. This supposition was based on the evidence of shamanistic practices not only among the peoples of northern Eurasia, but also among the ancient Germanic and Saami tribes. According to the established scholarly view, prehistoric peoples needed the symbolic representation of the mythical world pillar, supporting the heavens by the north Star.” The word *sampo* is possibly borrowed from Indo-Iranian *skambhá-* ‘pillar, column, Axis mundi’, attested in Atharva-Veda X 8–9. The exact nature of the artefact called *sampo* remains debated.

7. World Pillars

The concept of World Pillar is attested in a number of places, but it involves sacrifices and a Supreme Being. It seems to represent a phenomenon significantly different from shamanism. It is attested over a very large geographic distribution in several continents. The system (World Pillar, sacrifice, Supreme Being) can coexist with shamanism, but is not directly related.

“In the archaic cultures, communication between sky and earth is ordinarily used to send offerings to the celestial gods and not for a concrete and personal ascent; the latter remains the prerogative of shamans.” (Eliade, 1972, p.265)

“As we should expect, this cosmology has found an exact replica in the microcosm inhabited by mankind. The Axis of the World has been concretely represented, either by the pillars that support the house, or in the form of isolated stakes, called "World Pillars." For the Eskimo, for example, the Pillar of the Sky is identical with the pole at the center of their dwellings.” (Eliade, 1972, p.269)

“The central pillar is a characteristic element in the dwellings of the primitive peoples of the Arctic and North America; it is found among the Samoyed and the Ainu, among the tribes of Northern and Central California (Maidu, Eastern Pomo, Patwin) and among the Algonkin. Sacrifice and prayer are conducted at the foot of the pillar, for it opens the road to the celestial Supreme Being.” (Eliade, 1972, p.262) [It would be interesting to see if this shared mythological theme is correlated with inherited linguistic features.]

“The World Pillar is sometimes represented apart from the house – as among the ancient Germans (*Irmingsûl*, an image of which Charlemagne destroyed in 772),¹⁴ the Lapps, the Ugrian peoples.” (Eliade, 1972, p.263)

“The *Irmingsûl* of the Saxons is termed by Rudolf of Fulda: "universalis columna, quasi sustinens omnia."¹⁵ The Lapps of Scandinavia received this idea from the ancient Germans; they call the Pole Star the "Pillar of the Sky" or "Pillar of the World." The *Irmingsûl* has been compared to the pillars of Jupiter. Similar ideas still survive in Southeast European folklore; cf., for example, *Coloana Ceriului* (the Sky Pillar) of the Romanians.” (Eliade, 1972, p.261)

“The symbolism of the World Pillar is also familiar to more developed cultures – Egypt, India, China, Greece, Mesopotamia. Among the Babylonians, for example, the link between heaven and earth – a link symbolized by a Cosmic Mountain or its replicas (ziggurat, temple, royal city, palace) – was sometimes imagined as a celestial column.” (Eliade, 1972, p.264)

8. Traceable evolutions of shamanism

As noted before, there is no reason to think that shamanism would be immune to changes and external influences. Eliade himself identifies a number of such influences.

¹⁴ Cf. (Torsten, 1998, pp.135–136): [translated from German] “During the first year of the war, the Frankish army coming from Worms conquered the fortress of Eresburg, located in the upper course of the Deimel river, and established a permanent garnison. Afterwards, the *Irmingsûl*, a cultural column worshipped in the whole country, was destroyed, which certainly had a devastating impact.” The *Irmingsûl* was in the vicinity of present-day Paderborn (Niedersachsen).

¹⁵ In Chapter 3 of *De miraculis sancti Alexandri* by Rudolf of Fulda: “Truncum quoque ligni non parvae magnitudinis in altum erectum sub divo colebant, patria eum lingua Irmingsul appellantes, quod Latine dicitur universalis columna, quasi sustinens omnia.” [The Saxons also worship a tree trunk, of no small size, erected in open air, called *Irmingsul* in their language, which in Latin is Pillar of the Universe, supporting about everything.]

“But the ancient traditions of the peoples of Central and North Asia – who doubtless knew the image of a "Center of the World" and of the Cosmic Axis – were modified by the continual influx of Oriental religious ideas, whether Mesopotamian in origin (and disseminated through Iran) or Indian (disseminated through Lamaism).” (Eliade, 1972, p.266)

“The problem of the origin and dissemination of the shamanic drum in North Asia is extremely complex and far from being solved. Several things point to its having been originally disseminated from South Asia.” (Eliade, 1972, p.176)¹⁶

“It is highly probable that Tungus shamanism, at least in its present form, has been strongly influenced by Sino-Lamaist ideas and techniques.” (Eliade, 1972, p.237)¹⁷

9. Shamanism versus witchcraft and sorcery

Eliade tends to hold shamanism as a universal and archaic phenomenon, hence the title and subtitle of his book,¹⁸ but it must be underlined that the fairly rich documentation of rites and myths in Anatolia (Hittite or Hurrian) does not provide anything reminiscent of shamanism.

Winkelman proposes an interesting evolutionist pattern:

“Although the ability to engage in what is considered to be sorcery is part of the practice of shamans, shamans’ principal characteristics, associated with healing, divination, hunting, and group leadership, are not typically found in the sorcerer/witch. Shamans are also found in societies quite distinct from those of sorcerers/witches. Cross-cultural data shows that shamans are found in hunter-gatherer, pastoral, and incipient agricultural societies, whereas sorcerer/witch practitioners are found in societies with agricultural subsistence patterns, political hierarchies, and social stratification.” (2004-SEWBPAC, p.272)

10. Prometheus, a Pre-Greek shaman

Now that key features of shamanism are at hand, we can tackle the issue of traces in Ancient Greece. Eliade himself (Eliade, 1972, pp.386–394) raises this question, somewhat inconclusively, but does not mention Prometheus, who is quite certainly an excellent candidate for being a shaman.

The chapter dedicated to “Classical world shamanism (Ancient Greece and Rome)” in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, pp.478–84) does not mention Prometheus as a possible shaman. So it would seem that our analysis is absolutely novel.

As a rule, Greek Mythology is complex and intimidating. Each Indo-European people has a specific tendency as regards mythology. For example, Greeks tend to transform myths into moralistic satyres, Romans rewrote some sections of their mythology as the early history of Rome, as Dumézil proposed to analyze, Celts tend to transform mythology into fairy tales.

¹⁶ Cf. ‘Shamanic drums: form and structure’ in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.101–05).

¹⁷ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.60): “Lama-shamans of Tibet and China, where shamanism has long been incorporated into the Buddhist religion, wore especially elaborately decorated priestly vestments, and items like protective face-covering fringes or flaps, breast mirror disks, and bell belts. Many of these ensembles also had an unexplained feature borrowed from Chinese theater.” (2004-SEWBPAC, p.176) “The Adolf Dattan collection of the Orochi and Nanai people of the Amur River region offers remarkable examples of artifacts connected with shamanistic practice from people living along the southern Pacific coast of Siberia. The shamanistic artifacts in this collection illustrate the confluence of Siberian, Chinese, and Tungus-Manchu cultures.” (2004-SEWBPAC, pp.564–65) “As can be well delineated, especially from historical documents following the activities of a missionary lama from Tibet, Neyici Toyin Lama (1557–1653), in Mongolia in the seventeenth century, Buddhism overcame shamanism, the final result being a kind of lamaized shamanism. [...] The old religion of shamanism did not become extinct, but rather was camouflaged under a mantle of Lamaism.”

¹⁸ Cf. *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.25): “shamanism may well be the oldest religion of hunter-gatherers”.

Prometheus (Προμηθεύς ‘forethought’) is a son of Iapetus (Ίαπετός), who is also father of Atlas (Ἄτλας), Epimetheus (Ἐπιμηθεύς ‘hindsight’) and Menoetius (Μενοίτιος, Μενοίτης ‘vital fate’). The mother of Prometheus is said to be Clymene (Κλυμένη), according to Hesiod, or Asia (Ἀσία) according to Apollodorus.

Our approach of Prometheus is that the backbone of the myth is shamanic. To it was added Zeus and his overhanging interventions. In other words, the narrative contains a shamanic subtext, involving Prometheus, and a moralistic supertext, involving Zeus.

In addition, the “figures” that appear in the narrative have in fact logical connections and not familial relationships. Atlas can be understood as the World Tree (§5), in human disguise. The name Atlas itself has a striking similarity with PIE **tel-* ‘to carry, to support’, but the prefix *a-* belongs to Caucasian morphology. Asia might mean ‘return, cure’ (< **nsiya*). The three names Prometheus, Epimetheus and Menoetius are Greek. Only Prometheus, the shaman, is a real human being. Iapetus is not Greek, and can be tentatively compared with Caucasian Avar *epel* ‘cover, lid’ and Inkhokvari *apar* ‘pole (for planking the ceiling)’. Iapetus possibly means ‘sky vault’ and combines the Caucasian class-prefix *i-*, the root *√ap-* and the Pre-Greek suffix *-et-*. Erebus ‘the dark netherworld’ (< **H₁reg^w-*) is a Greek word.

So, the basic components of the shamanic cosmology are present: Prometheus ‘the shaman’, Iapetus ‘the sky vault’, Erebus ‘the dark netherworld’, Atlas ‘the World Tree’ and Asia ‘return, cure’. Now, let us comment Hesiod’s *Theogony* in more details :

κούρην δ’ Ίαπετός καλλίσφυρον Ὠκεανίνην : ἠγάγετο Κλυμένην καὶ ὁμόν λέχος εἰσανέβαινεν :
ἦ δέ οἱ Ἄτλαντα κρατερόφρονα γείνατο παῖδα : 510 τίκτε δ’ ὑπερκύδαντα Μενοίτιον ἠδὲ
Προμηθεά : ποικίλον αἰολόμητιν, ἀμαρτινόον τ’ Ἐπιμηθεά : ὄς κακὸν ἐξ ἀρχῆς γένετ’ ἀνδράσιν
ἀλφειστῆσιν : πρῶτος γάρ ῥα Διὸς πλαστὴν ὑπέδεκτο γυναῖκα : παρθένον.

“[Hesiod, *Theogony* verse 507]¹⁹ Now Iapetus took to wife the neat-ankled maid Clymene, daughter of Ocean, and went up with her into one bed. And she bare him a stout-hearted son, Atlas: [510] also she bare very glorious Menoetius and clever Prometheus, full of various wiles, and scatter-brained Epimetheus who from the first was a mischief to men who eat bread; for it was he who first took of Zeus the woman, the maiden whom he had formed.” [describes the key components of shamanism]

ὑβριστὴν δὲ Μενοίτιον εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς [515] εἰς Ἔρεβος κατέπεμψε βαλὼν ψολόεντι κεραυνῷ :
εἶνεκ’ ἀτασθαλίας τε καὶ ἠγορέης ὑπερόπλου.

“But Menoetius was outrageous, and farseeing Zeus [515] struck him with a lurid thunderbolt and sent him down to Erebus because of his mad presumption and exceeding pride.” [Vital force was sent to the Netherworld, this amounts to sickness. Cf. §1]

Ἄτλας δ’ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχει κρατερῆς ὑπ’ ἀνάγκης : πείρασιν ἐν γαίης, πρόπαρ Ἑσπερίδων
λιγυφώνων, ἐστηῶς κεφαλῇ τε καὶ ἀκαμάτησι χέρεσσι [520] ταύτην γάρ οἱ μοῖραν ἐδάσσατο
μητίετα Ζεὺς.

“And Atlas through hard constraint upholds the wide heaven with unwearying head and arms, standing at the borders of the earth before the clear-voiced Hesperides; [520] for this lot wise Zeus assigned to him.” [describes the World Tree that connects sky, earth and netherworld]

¹⁹ Here and further the text of Ancient Greek poem is quoted by the second edition of Evelyn-White, Cambridge; Harvard: London, William Heinemann Ltd (Evelyn-White, 1920), this is the only edition used. Also, see the reprint at Perseus project for the constructions analysis, literary scholarship and mythological reminiscences of this text: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D1>

δῆσε δ' ἀλυκτοπέδησι Προμηθεά ποικιλόβουλον : δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι μέσον διὰ κίον' ἐλάσας : καί οἱ ἐπ' αἰετὸν ὄρσε τανύπτερον: αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἦπαρ : ἦσθιεν ἀθάνατον, τὸ δ' ἀέξετο Ἴσον ἀπάντη [525] νυκτός ὅσον πρόπαν ἦμαρ ἔδοι τανυσίπτερος ὄρνις.

“And ready-witted Prometheus he bound with inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver, but by night the liver grew [525] as much again every way as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day.” [Cf. §3. Eagles and renewal of organs, and shamanic initiation]

τὸν μὲν ἄρ' Ἀλκμήνης καλλισφύρου ἄλκιμος υἱός : Ἡρακλῆς ἔκτεινε, κακὴν δ' ἀπὸ νοῦσον ἄλαλκεν : Ἰαπετιονίδη καὶ ἐλύσατο δυσφοροσυνάων : οὐκ ἀέκητι Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου ὑψιμέδοντος, [530] ὄφρ' Ἡρακλῆος Θηβαγενέος κλέος εἶη : πλεῖον ἔτ' ἢ τὸ πάροιθεν ἐπὶ χθόνα πουλυβότειραν : ταῦτ' ἄρα ἀζόμενος τίμα ἀριδείκετον υἱόν : καὶ περ χωόμενος παύθη χόλου, ὄν πρὶν ἔχεσκεν, οὐνεκ' ἐρίζετο βουλάς ὑπερμενεί Κρονίωνι.

“That bird Heracles, the valiant son of shapely-ankled Alcmena, slew, and delivered the son of Iapetus from the cruel plague, and released him from his affliction – not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, [530] that the glory of Heracles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before over the plenteous earth. This, then, he regarded, and honored his famous son, though he was angry, he ceased from the wrath which he had before because Prometheus matched himself in wit with the almighty son of Cronos.” [this is certainly a graft on the original narrative]

[535] καὶ γὰρ ὅτ' ἐκρίνοντο θεοὶ θνητοὶ τ' ἄνθρωποι : Μηκώνη, τότε ἔπειτα μέγαν βοῦν πρόφρονι θυμῷ : δασσάμενος προέθηκε, Διὸς νόον ἐξαπαφίσκων : τοῖς μὲν γὰρ σάρκας τε καὶ ἔγκατα πίονα δημῷ : ἐν ῥινῷ κατέθηκε καλύψας γαστρί βοεῖη, [540] τῷ δ' αὐτ' ὅστέα λευκὰ βοὸς δολίη ἐπὶ τέχνῃ : εὐθετίσας κατέθηκε καλύψας ἀργέτι δημῷ : δὴ τότε μιν προσέειπε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε :

Ἰαπετιονίδη, πάντων ἀριδείκετ' ἀνάκτων, ὃ πέπον, ὡς ἑτεροζήλως διεδάσσαο μοίρας.

“[535] For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute at Mecone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to befool the mind of Zeus. Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch, [540] but for Zeus he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat. Then the father of men and of gods said to him: “Son of Iapetus, most glorious of all lords, good sir, how unfairly you have divided the portions!”.” [Cf. §3. Eagles and renewal of organs. The shamanic exchange of organs, associated with shamanic initiation, is here described as a trick used by Prometheus to deceive Zeus.]

[545] ὧς φάτο κερτομέων Ζεὺς ἄφθιτα μῆδεα εἰδῶς : τὸν δ' αὐτε προσέειπε Προμηθεὺς ἀγκυλομήτης : ἦκ' ἐπιμειδήσας, δολίης δ' οὐ λήθετο τέχνης : ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε θεῶν αἰειγενετῶν : τῶν δ' ἔλε', ὅποτ' ἔρην σε ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θυμὸς ἀνώγει [550] Φῆ ῥα δολοφρονέων : Ζεὺς δ' ἄφθιτα μῆδεα εἰδῶς : γνῶ ῥ' οὐδ' ἠγνοίησε δόλον: κακὰ δ' ὄσσετο θυμῷ : θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, τὰ καὶ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλεν : χερσὶ δ' ὃ γ' ἀμφοτέρησιν ἀνεῖλετο λευκὸν ἄλειφαρ : χῶσατο δὲ φρένας ἀμφί, χόλος δὲ μιν ἴκετο θυμὸν [555] ὡς ἴδεν ὅστέα λευκὰ βοὸς δολίη ἐπὶ τέχνῃ : ἐκ τοῦ δ' ἀθανάτοισιν ἐπὶ χθονὶ φῶλ' ἀνθρώπων : καίουσ' ὅστέα λευκὰ θυθέντων ἐπὶ βωμῶν : τὸν δὲ μέγ' ὀχθήσας προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς : Ἰαπετιονίδη, πάντων πέρι μῆδεα εἰδῶς [560] ὃ πέπον, οὐκ ἄρα πω δολίης ἐπιλήθεο τέχνης : ὧς φάτο χωόμενος Ζεὺς ἄφθιτα μῆδεα εἰδῶς : ἐκ τούτου δὴ ἔπειτα δόλου μεμνημένος αἰεὶ : οὐκ ἐδίδου Μελίησι πυρὸς μένος ἀκαμάτιοι : θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οἱ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσιν.

“[545] So said Zeus whose wisdom is everlasting, rebuking him. But wily Prometheus answered him, smiling softly and not forgetting his cunning trick: “Zeus, most glorious and greatest of the eternal gods, take which ever of these portions your heart within you bids.” [550] So he said, thinking trickery. But Zeus, whose wisdom is everlasting, saw and failed not to perceive the trick, and in his heart he thought mischief against mortal men which also was to be fulfilled. With both hands he took up the white fat and was angry at heart, and wrath came to his spirit [555] when he saw the white ox-bones craftily tricked out: and because of this the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars. But Zeus who drives the clouds was greatly vexed and said to him: “Son of Iapetus, clever above all! [560] So, sir, you have not yet forgotten your cunning arts!” So spake Zeus in anger, whose wisdom is everlasting, and from that time he was always mindful of the trick, and would not give the power of unwearying fire to the Melian²⁰ race of mortal men who live on the earth.” [a moralistic development, involving punishment]

ἀλλά μιν ἐξαπάτησεν ἐὺς πάϊς Ἰαπετοῖο : κλέψας ἀκαμάτοιο πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον. αὐγὴν : ἐν κοῖλῳ νάρθηκι: δάκεν δέ ἐ νειόθι θυμόν,

“[565] But the noble son of Iapetus outwitted him and stole the far-seen gleam of unwearying fire in a hollow fennel stalk.” [The shaman Prometheus takes hold of fire. Cf. §2]

Ζῆν’ ὑπιβρεμέτην, ἐχόλωσε δέ μιν φίλον ἦτορ : ὡς ἴδ’ ἐν ἀνθρώποισι πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον αὐγὴν. [570] αὐτίκα δ’ ἀντὶ πυρὸς τεῦξεν κακὸν ἀνθρώποισιν : γαίης γὰρ σύμπλασσε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις : παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον Κρονίδεω διὰ βουλᾶς : ζῶσε δέ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη : ἀργυρέῃ ἐσθῆτι: κατὰ κρήθεν δὲ καλύπτρην [575] δαιδαλέην χεῖρεςσι κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ιδέσθαι : ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ στεφάνους, νεοθηλέος ἄνθεα ποίης : ἱμερτοὺς περίθηκε καρήατι Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη : ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ στεφάνην χρυσεῖν κεφαλῆφιν ἔθηκε : τὴν αὐτὸς ποίησε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις [580] ἀσκήσας παλάμησι, χαριζόμενος Διὶ πατρί : τῇ δ’ ἐνὶ δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχματο, θαῦμα ιδέσθαι : κνώδαλ’, ὅσ’ ἤπειρος πολλὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα : τῶν ὅ γε πόλλ’ ἐνέθηκε, – χάρις δ’ ἀπελάμπετο πολλή, – θαυμάσια, ζῴοισιν εὐκότα φωνήεσσιν.

“And Zeus who thunders on high was stung in spirit, and his dear heart was angered when he saw amongst men the far-seen ray of fire. [570] Forthwith he made an evil thing for men as the price of fire, for the very famous Limping God formed of earth the likeness of a shy maiden as the son of Cronos willed. And the goddess bright-eyed Athene girded and clothed her with silvery raiment, and down from her head [575] she spread with her hands an embroidered veil, a wonder to see, and she, Pallas Athene, put about her head lovely garlands, flowers of new-grown herbs. Also she put upon her head a crown of gold which the very famous Limping God made himself [580] and worked with his own hands as a favor to Zeus his father. On it was much curious work, wonderful to see, for of the many creatures which the land and sea rear up, he put most upon it, wonderful things, like living beings with voices: and great beauty shone out from it.” [Pallas Athena appears to be a helping figure of Prometheus. Cf. §4]

[585] αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τεῦξε καλὸν κακὸν ἀντ’ ἀγαθοῖο : ἐξάγαγ’, ἔνθα περ ἄλλοι ἔσαν θεοὶ ἢδ’ ἄνθρωποι : κόσμῳ ἀγαλλομένην γλαυκῶπιδος ὀβριμοπάτρης : θαῦμα δ’ ἔχ’ ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητοὺς τ’ ἀνθρώπους : ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπὺν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν.

“[585] But when he had made the beautiful evil to be the price for the blessing, he brought her out, delighting in the finery which the bright-eyed daughter of a mighty father had given her, to the place where the other gods and men were. And wonder took hold of the deathless gods and mortal

²⁰ It can be noted that Greek μελία means ‘ash-tree (Fraxinus ornus)’. Cf. §15.

men when they saw that which was sheer guile, not to be withstood by men.” [somehow demonizes shamanism as “sheer guile”]

If our approach is correct, Prometheus therefore appears to be a shamanic narrative. It contains a shamanic subtext, involving Prometheus, and a moralistic supertext, involving Zeus.

11. Prometheus in the Caucasus: Chechen Пхъармат, Пхъари

Greek Prometheus has a clear comparandum among Caucasian people. The Chechen narrative bears striking similarities with the Greek one.

Originally Nart people had no fire. Because the thunder-god Sela [=Zeus] was keeping it for himself. One day, the hero P̄armat undertook to steal it. He mounted his horse Turpal and began his journey [The addition of a horse is probably a graft]. The goddess Sata [=the helping figure, Pallas Athena] took bird's form and flew to the mountain's summit. She spoke to P̄armat: “O powerful Nart, you have not reached the summit of Bashlam by chance. You have come to fetch Fire.” P̄armat answered: “People are in need of heat and light. I shall only return to bring back Fire!” Sata [Pallas Athena] promised to help him in his quest for Fire. P̄armat managed to seize a burning piece of wood. Sela [=Zeus] was angered that a Nart acted against his will and tried to catch him. P̄armat overcame obstacles and struggled to the great cave where all Narts were gathered for protection from cold, storm and darkness. He then said: “Here is Fire for you! Multiply and become a great tribe. Warm yourselves, illuminate your homes, cook, prepare food from now on. Rejoice!” After that Sela [=Zeus] sent his servant Uya to punish the unfaithful P̄armat. Uya chained P̄armat to the peak of Mount Bashlam with chains of bronze. The falcon Ida comes to P̄armat every morning. According to the will of Sela [=Zeus], it sits upon P̄armat's knees and tears at his liver with his beak.

The Chechen narrative appears to combine a shamanic subtext, similar to the Greek one, with a myth of origins, involving the thunder-god Sela [=Zeus]. Shamanic elements are rearranged and the renewal of organs by a bird of prey is at the end of the narrative, as a final punishment imposed by Sela [=Zeus] upon P̄armat [= Пхъармат Prometheus].

There is no particular reason to think the narratives are borrowed in one or the other direction. They are independent creations from the same shamanic core subtext. The Greek narrative is a moralistic narrative, while the Chechen one is rather a myth of origins. The shamanic features of the Greek narrative are definitely clearer than in the Chechen myth of origins.

As a final word, it can be noted that P̄armat or P̄ari is strikingly similar to the PIE name for ‘fire’ **peH₂-wr* (> ? **p̄har-*).

12. Odin, a Pre-Indo-European shaman

In the chapter dedicated to shamanism among the Indo-European peoples, Eliade first restates what shamanism properly said is about:

“Our role is limited solely to discovering to what extent the various Indo-European peoples preserve vestiges of an ideology and technique that are shamanic in the strict sense of the term, that is, which exhibit one of its essential features: ascent to heaven, descent to the underworld to bring back the patient's soul or to escort the dead, evocation and incarnation of the "spirits" in order to undertake the ecstatic journey, "mastery over fire," and so on.” (Eliade, 1972, p.376)

Our knowledge of Ancient Germanic mythology is for the most part based on the North Germanic one, under the pen of Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241).

It remains an open question to which extent Norse mythology can be considered fully representative of Germanic mythology as a whole. Still, with these reservations in mind, Norse mythology is our best and richest source of data on the topic.

Another point is that Norse mythology appears to be significantly composite. A large section is Indo-European, like gods Thor (< **þunr*- ‘thunder’), Tyr (< **tiw-az* ‘day’). Another section involves more-than-four-legged animals, like Odin’s horse Sleipnir, a feature shared with Ugric and Old Indian (see §14). A third component has been noted in §6 about snakes lying at the bottom of the Cosmic Tree.

Last but not least, a fourth component is shamanic, involving Odin:

“In the religion and mythology of the ancient Germans some details are comparable to the conceptions and techniques of North Asian shamanism. We will cite the most striking instances. The figure and the myth of Odin – the Terrible Sovereign and Great Magician – display several strangely "shamanic" features. To acquire the occult knowledge of runes, Odin spends nine days and nights hanging in a tree. Some Germanists have seen an initiation rite in this; Otto Höfler even compares it to the initiatory tree-climbing of Siberian shamans.” (Eliade, 1972, pp. 379–80)

A number of features of Odin are typically shamanic:

“[Odin’s] body lay as though he were asleep or dead, and he then became a bird or a beast, a fish or a dragon, and went in an instant to far-off lands. This ecstatic journey of Odin in animal forms may properly be compared to the transformations of shamans into animals.” (Eliade, 1972, p.381)

“Other Scandinavian beliefs tell of helping spirits in the shape of animals visible only to the shamans, which is even more clearly reminiscent of shamanic ideas. Indeed, we may ask if Odin’s two crows, *Huginn* ("Thought") and *Muninn* ("Memory") do not represent, in highly mythicized form, two helping spirits in the shape of birds, which the Great Magician sent (in true shamanic fashion!) to the four corners of the world.” (Eliade, 1972, p.381)

“In the *Gylfaginning* (Prose Edda), Snorri recounts how Hermóðr, riding Odin’s steed Sleipnir, descends to Hel [the Netherworld] to bring back Balder’s soul. This type of infernal descent is definitely shamanic.” (Eliade, 1972, p.383)

Adding to the general shamanic picture, Odin also has two other companions, the wolves Geri and Freki. Odin has a “wife” Frigg (< **friyyō*- ‘the beloved’), praised for her foreknowledge of fate, probably another helping figure of the shaman-god Odin. In the *Gylfaginning*, written by Snorri Sturluson, Odin is the greatest and oldest of the Æsir.

13. Mummified (talking) heads

Eliade also mentions a feature of Germanic mythology, which he quite boldly compares with similar features of Yukaghir necromantic practices.

“Odin is also the institutor of necromancy. On his horse Sleipnir, he enters Hel [the Netherworld] and bids a long-dead prophetess rise from the grave to answer his questions. Others later practiced this kind of necromancy, which, of course, is not shamanism in the strict sense but belongs to a horizon that is extremely close to it. The scene of divination with the mummified head of Mimir

should also be mentioned, suggesting, as it does, the Yukaghir method of divination by the skulls of ancestral shamans.” (Eliade, 1972, p.382)

Eliade alludes at the work of Waldemar Jochelson (1855–1937) on Yukaghir people.

“Our ancient people, when a shaman died, used to separate the flesh of the corpse from the bones. [...] Then they divided the bones of the corpse, and after having dried them, they clothed them. They worshipped the skull of the shaman. They made a trunk of wood and set on it the skull. Then they made for it (for the idol) a jacket and caps (two caps, - a winter and a summer one). They embroidered the coat all over. For its face they made a mask, with openings for eyes and mouth. Over the embroidered coat they put a coat of fawnskins; and over that, a blanket of soft reindeer-skins.

Then they placed the figure in the front corner of the house. Whenever they were going to eat something good, they first threw a piece of it in the fire, and held the figure over the smoke. This they did at every meal; and thus they fed the figure, which they worshipped like a god.” (Jochelson, 1924, p.163)

“When travelling the figure with the shaman’s skull [= *xoil*] was carried in a wooden box. In some districts, for instance, on the Omolon, the *xoil* was placed in a small wooden compartment and kept on poles or trees, after the manner of elevated graves of beloved relatives. Before a trip, a hunt, or a war expedition, the mummy was taken out of its wooden receptacle and smoked over the fire, into which fat was thrown. It was prayed to for help, and it was asked to decide whether the proposed undertaking should be carried out. Then the figure was placed on the ground and lifted three times. If it was easily lifted, the success of the enterprise was assured. If, on the contrary, the figure proved so heavy that it could not be lifted, so relate the Yukaghir, the project was given up. On some occasions the omen pointed towards partial success, that is, the *xoil* proved not altogether light or could not be lifted at once in the three prescribed attempts. Then the old men held council and decided what to do.

The skull of the dead shaman with the figure was kept by his own children who were recognized as the priests of the ancestral cult.” (Jochelson, 1924, p.164)

It is unclear if this practice of Yukaghir people can be found among other peoples.²¹ In all cases, this mixture of ancestor cult and necromancy does not belong to the realm of shamanism, properly said, as Eliade himself acknowledged.

14. More-than-four-legged animals

Odin has a horse, which helps him travel across space. It can be noted that P̄harmat also has a horse (Turpal), but this theme does not appear in Prometheus. The Greek version presumably is the bare core of shamanism, without later additions like animals, drums or horses.

“Odin’s steed, Sleipnir, has eight hooves, and it is he who carries his master, and even other gods (e.g., Hermódhr), to the underworld. Now, the eight-hoofed horse is the shamanic horse par excellence; it is found among the Siberians, as well as elsewhere (e.g., the Muria), always in connection with the shaman's ecstatic experience.” (Eliade, 1972, p.380)

Eight-legged horse *Sleipnir* (s_l_p) has the same consonantic skeleton as the Vedic mythical eight-legged deer *śarabhá-* (ś_r_bh) and the Ob-Ugric word for ‘(male) elk’: Vogul-Manśi

²¹ There seems to be no indication of such a practice in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC).

**śōrpi*, Ostyak-Khanty **śārpī* (ś_r_p). Ob-Ugric cannot be an inherited Proto-Uralic word. It seems probable that Sleipnir was originally an elk, but was “upgraded” to a horse, after horses were domesticated. A connection with PIE **ķer-* ‘horn’ seems reasonable. The giver-language would then be some Indo-Iranian dialect. Ugric people have a mythical six-legged elk, whose two extra hind-legs were cut off by a hunter and thrown into the sky to form the Ursa Major constellation.

Interestingly, the Vedic word *śarabhā-* is mentioned in relationship with difficult passages and reaching heaven, in a kind of shamanic flight through space:

“Go midst the pious who have paid their worship, and parted, dwell on the third cope of heaven, Rise to that world, O Goat, where dwell the righteous: pass, like a Śarabha veiled, all difficult places.” Atharva-Veda IX, 5. 8–9 [about a sacrificial goat]

It is unclear which people (Ob-Ugric, Indo-Iranian, some other unknown people ?) invented more-than-four-legged deers.²² In all cases, it is certainly a graft onto Odin’s original mythology.

Note that the Indian twin healers *Nāsatyau* (< **nes-* ‘to return, heal’) are also called *Aśvin* (< **eķw-* ‘horse’). The synonymy is a feature of Siberian shamanism, which associates healing with horses.

A possible explanation for Siberian elements in Germanic mythology is amber trade:

“Elements of Siberian shamanism as well as European folk and mythological motifs, especially European ideas of animism, are found in Finno-Ugric shamanism. One explanation might be that these cultural traits spread along the trade routes of Baltic amber.” (2004-SEWBPAC, p.486)

15. About Yggdrasil

Apart from the shaman-god Odin and his eight-legged horse Sleipnir, another component of North Germanic shamanism is the Cosmic Tree Yggdrasil (Old Norse *Yggdrasill*). It is supposed to be a gigantic ash-tree, that connects the sky with the netherworld.

An obvious etymology of the word is *Ygg(r)* ‘one of the names of Odin’ and *drasill* ‘horse’, though one would expect the unattested genitival **Yggsdrasil*. A smarter analysis is ‘yew pillar’, combining *yggia* (< **ig^wya*) ‘yew-tree’ and *drasill* (< **d^her-*) ‘support, pillar’. In that respect, it is interesting to note that yews are associated with cemeteries in most of Europe. This is possibly a preservation of archaic beliefs that have survived Christianization.

16. Conclusion

The first part of the paper lists and discusses the features of shamanic practices and the cosmological *Weltanschauung* of shamanism *stricto sensu*, which Eliade described in his famous and ground-breaking book on shamanism.

The second part showed that some Indo-European languages, especially the western group with Greek Prometheus and Germanic Odin, contain genuine shamanic mythological and lexical material. Besides, Greek Prometheus has a Caucasian equivalent, Chechen Пхъармат, Пхъари.

²² Cf. ‘Horses’ in *Shamanism* (2004-SEWBPAC, p.502): “Sleipnir of ancient Nordic culture, Mohammed’s horse Alborak, and many others reflect the mystical connotations associated with horses. The winged horse symbolized the ability to fly into heaven, or to the Underworld, and horses with multiple sets of legs mirrored the number of pallbearers’ legs as they carried the coffin to the grave.”

Appendix – The cluster of shamanic roots

Several semantically related roots need a special focus: **ansu-*, **nes-*, **weik-*, **wel-*, **wet-*, **wāt-*. They are related to shamanism and, for the most part, attested in Western Indo-European languages (Celtic, Italic, Germanic, Greek) and, to a lesser extent, in Indo-Iranian. These roots are conspicuously absent from Anatolian and also Balto-Slavic and Armenian.

What is more, they have Caucasian morphology, in particular class-prefix #*a-* and #*i-*. Some of them are attested in present-day Caucasian languages.

It is now established that Basque is fundamentally a Caucasian language. So it would appear that a Caucasian substrate used to exist in Pre-Indo-European Europe.

**nes-* ‘to return, to heal’ (2001-LIV, pp.454–55), (1959-IEW, pp.766–67)

Western Indo-European languages

- ↳ Greek *νέο-μαι*, Ionian *νεῦ-μαι*, *νίσ(σ)ομαι* ‘to go, come, return’, *νόστος* ‘a return home’, cf. *Νέστωρ* ‘the returner’, Asia (Ἀσία) (< **ḡsiya*) ‘return, cure’
- ↳ Greek **νασ-ός* ‘temple, shrine’: Doric, *νᾶός*, Lak. *νᾶος*, Ionian *νηός*, Attic *νεός*
- ↳ Albanian *knel-em* (< **k-nes-lo-*) ‘to recover, be living again’
- ↳ Gothic *ga-nisan*, O.H.G. O.S. *gi-nesan*, ‘to recover, be saved’, Old English *ge-nesan* ‘to be saved, survive’, Gothic *ga-nists*, O.H.G. O.S. *ginist* ‘health, salvation’, Gothic *nasjan* ‘to make fit, healthy’, O.H.G. *nerian*, *nerren* ‘to save, heal, cure’
- ↳ Swedish dial. *nöra* ‘to light fire’, Old Icelandic *aldr-nari* ‘(= life-saver) fire’

Eastern Indo-European languages

- ↳ Old Indian *nas-* ‘to approach, resort to, join’

Caucasian languages

- ↳ (?) NW Caucasian: **a-nas-t-qa-ra*, **(a)-nas-k^ya-ra* ‘to move, step aside’, Chirikba (1996-DCA, p.116), who analyzes the verbs as compounds involving **na-* ‘thither’

**(a)-nču-* ‘god’ (1959-IEW, p.48)

Western Indo-European languages **ansu-* (< with Caucasian #*a-*)

- ↳ Germanic **ansu-z*, Pl. **ansiw-iz* ‘god, ase god’: Old Icelandic *āss*, *ōss*, Runic *a[n]su-*, Old English *ōs* ‘ase god’, Gothic *ans-es* (Latin Acc. Pl) ‘demigods’
- ↳ Venetic *ahsu-* (= *āsu-*) ‘cult effigy, cult figure’

Eastern Indo-European languages **ḡsu-* (< without Caucasian #*a-*)

- ↳ **ḡsu-*: Old Indian *āsu-ra-*, Avestic *ahura-* ‘ruler, lord’

Caucasian languages

- ↳ NW Caucasian: **(a)-nč^wa* ‘god’ (1996-DCA, p.117)

**wet-* ‘to see’ (2001-LIV, p.694), (1959-IEW, p.346)

Western Indo-European languages

- ↳ Old Irish *feth-id* ‘to see’ (**wet-it*)

Eastern Indo-European languages

- ↳ Old Indian *āpi vat-ati* ‘to be familiar with, aware of’

**wāt-* or **wōt-* ‘shaman, seer, prophet’ (derived from **wet-* ‘to see’)

Western Indo-European languages

- ↳ Germanic **Wōðana-z* ‘Odin’: Old Norse *Óðinn*, Old English *Wōden*, Old Saxon *Wōden*, Old High German *Wuotan*

- ↳ Germanic **wōðā-z* ‘mad, possessed’: Gothic *wōps* ‘possessed’, Old Norse *óðr* ‘mad, frantic, furious’, Old English *wōd* ‘mad’²³
- ↳ Old Irish *fáith* ‘seer, prophet’ (< **wāt-i*), Old Irish *fáth* ‘prophecy, prophetic wisdom’ (< **wāt-u*)
- ↳ Latin *vātēs, -is* (possibly borrowed), Gaulish *ovāt̃at̃is* (Nom. Plural) ‘seer, prophet’
- ↳ also ‘poetry’: Old Icelandic *ōðr* ‘poetry’, Old English *wōþ* ‘song, poetry’, Welsh *gwawd* ‘poetry’ (**wāt-u*)

Caucasic languages

- ↳ NW Caucasic: Adyghe *wədə*, Kabardian *wəd*, Ubykh *wədə́* ‘witch’

Watkins (Watkins, 1995, p.117) holds that “the terminology of poetry and poetics in Irish is native and old”, but this cannot be true of all the words listed by Watkins, who considers **wōt-* to be the lengthened grade of **wet-*. But, if we add Southern French dialectal words like *badòc*, *badaluc* ‘stupid, simple’ or *fadat*, *fadolàs*, *fadurla* ‘stupid, crazy’, then the vowel is rather **wāt-*. In all cases, the alternation *e ~ ā/ō* does not look Indo-European.

**(H₃)wel-* ‘to see’ (2001-LIV, p.675), (1959-IEW, pp.1136–1137)

Western Indo-European languages **wel-*

- ↳ Old Irish *fili* (Pl. *filid*) (< **welēt-*) ‘learned poet, seer’, medieval Welsh *gwelet* ‘to see’, Breton *gweled* ‘sight’
- ↳ Old Norse *Vili* ‘a “brother” of Odin’: possibly ‘ecstatic vision’²⁴

Caucasic languages **H₃wel-*

- ↳ Lezghian, Dargwa **^hwil*, **^hul* ‘eye’

**wł-tu-* ‘(beautiful) sight’

Western Indo-European languages

- ↳ Gothic *wulþus* ‘glory, magnificence’, *wulþags* = ἔνδοξος ‘glorious’, Old Icelandic *Ullr* (< **wulþuz*) ‘a theonym’, Old English *wuldor* ‘glory’
- ↳ Latin *voltus*, *vultus* (< **wł-tu-*) ‘face, shape’ (< **wł-tu-*)

The suffix *-ēt-* of Old Irish *fili* (< **welēt-*) is the lengthened variant of *-et-* as in *Iapetus* (Ἰαπετός, cf. §9). Beekes (Beekes, 2014) lists a number of Pre-Greek words with this suffix: *καιετός*, *καίπετος*, *μάσπετον*, *véπετος*.

**weik-* ‘holy, magical’ (1959-IEW, pp.1128)

Western Indo-European languages

- ↳ (?) Latin *victima* ‘sacrificial animal, oblation’
- ↳ Germanic **weih-* ‘holy’: Gothic *weihs*, Old Saxon *wīh-*, O.H.G. *wīh*, *wīhi*
- ↳ Germanic **weih-*: Old Saxon *wīh* ‘temple’, Old English *wēoh*, *wīg* ‘image of a god’
- ↳ Old English **wikk-an-*: *wicca* ‘magician’, *wicce* ‘witch’
- ↳ Germanic **wig-*: Old English *wiglian* ‘to practice divination’, *wicce* ‘witch’
- ↳ Old Norse *Vé* ‘a “brother” of Odin’: ‘shrine’

²³ Cf. (Watkins, 1995, p.118): “**wōt-ó-* ‘having **wōt(o)-* ‘shamanic [sic] wisdom.’”

²⁴ *Vili* is usually held to be derived from **wil-* ‘will, desire’, but the connection with **wel-* ‘to see’ is better.

**d^h_s-* ‘divine’ (1959-IEW, p.1128), (2008-NIV, p.102 reconstructs **d^heH₁-s-*)

Anatolian languages

↳ **dhās-*: Hieroglyphic Luvian *tasan* ‘votive stela’

Western Indo-European languages

↳ **dhās-*: Latin *fānum* ‘shrine’, *fascinus* ‘curse, amulet’

↳ **dhēs-*: Greek θεός, Mycenaean *te-o* ‘god’

↳ **dhēs-* or **dhīs-*: Armenian *di-k^h* ‘gods’

↳ **dhēs-*: Latin *fēstus* ‘festive, pertaining to holidays (*fēria*)’

↳ **dhīs-*: Old Norse *dís* ‘fate goddess’

↳ **i-dhīsi-*: Old Saxon *idis*, Old High German *itis*, Anglo-Saxon *ides* ‘goddess, lady’

The root is exceptionally attested in Anatolian languages, which supports inheritance of this particular root. In general, the Germanic words are left unexplained and the other words are integrated into a plausible root **d^heH₁s-*. But, if Germanic words are added to the picture, then the root is either not Indo-European or is a cognate between Caucasian and PIE. In spite of the Caucasian-looking morphology (**dhīs-* ~ **i-dhīsi-*), the root does not seem to be reflected in present-day Caucasian languages.

It is worth underlining that several of these roots combine with *vé* ‘shrine’ to form toponyms. Are attested in combination with *vé*: *dīs*, *Odin*, *Ullr*. Indo-European words combining with *vé* to form a toponym are *Freyja* and *Thor*. So this criterion is not definitive in determining which words are Caucasoid.

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