What to think of Dumézil's tripartite approach of Indo-European cosmologies?

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the tripartite approach of Indo-European cosmologies once proposed by Georges Dumézil (1898–1986). The first part describes what Dumézil proposed, and then the second part tries to assess the relevancy and limitations of the tripartite approach. The Mittani-Aryan gods listed in Hittito-Hurrian treaties provided the prototype for Dumézil's theory in the late 1930s. Then the main figures of North Germanic and Zoroastrian pantheons can be arranged according to the same tripartite mold as Mittani-Aryan. Tripartition applies to neither Greek nor Hittite traditions. A major issue is that the North Germanic pantheon involves Odin (< *wat-*), a non-Indo-European shamanistic god of probable Caucasic origin. Another bone of contention is that the Zoroastrian reform downgraded the Indo-European *daevas* into demons and promoted Ahura Mazda (< *a-nćʷ-*), of probable Caucasic origin, as its most important god. The North Germanic and Zoroastrian pantheons are much less in support of tripartition than usually claimed. It can therefore be doubted that tripartition really is of Proto-Indo-European dating.

Keywords: Dumézil, Indo-European cosmology, Tripartite ideology, Comparative Mythology

Introduction

In a preceding paper,[1] I described the approach that Indo-Europeans had about cosmogony and the structure of the sky. The Indo-European cosmogony envisioned the sky as made up of three layers: the Upper-Sky, the Middle-Sky and the Lower-Sky.

In another paper,[2] I analyzed shamanic cosmology. It is un-Indo-European in its principles and typical of Siberian people. The paper showed that some key features of shamanism can be found outside Siberia, in particular among Caucasic, Greek and North Germanic people. Prometheus and, more importantly, the Germanic god Odin have clear shamanistic features.

With these prolegomena in mind, the paper will examine the tripartite approach of Indo-European cosmologies once proposed by the French scholar Georges Dumézil (1898–1986).

Dumézil was extremely productive[3] during his long intellectual life, sometimes at the cost of being contradictory or evolutive. For the sake of simplicity, references are made to the book[4] selected and compiled posthumously by Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, which is somehow an attempt at presenting an uptodate synthesis of Dumézil's eclectic thinking.

As a matter of fact, it is not easy to say where Dumézil exactly belongs: was he a linguist, a philologist, a (social) anthropologist, an historian of religions, a mythograph, etc.? Here, we have

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[1] Cf. (Fournet, 2019b).

[2] Cf. (Fournet, 2020).

[3] More than 500 titles, including about 50 books and 300 papers on a large array of topics and languages.

[4] (Dumézil, 1992).

chosen to describe him neutrally as a scholar. The same issue arises with his tripartite theory: is it a description of social facts or of cosmological or divine reality, an ideological pattern in people's heads or a heuristic tool? A bit of everything at the same time? How much of it pertains to the "real" world? This difficulty also explains why Dumézil's ideas appealed to numerous followers and continue to be attractive, because they are quite multi-faceted.

The paper first describes Dumézil's canonical approach of tripartition and, in the second part, tries to assess how much support North Germanic and Zoroastrian pantheons bring to the theory.

1. Dumézil's tripartite approach

Dumézil is famous for having suggested that many features of Indo-European peoples, be they cosmological, social, religious, ideological, sacrificial, etc, seem to fit into a fundamental tripartite mold of three so-called "functions". The first function deals with the rule of law, (cosmic) order and science (broadly speaking: "sovereignty"), the second function with war and strength, the third with riches, health and fertility. Besides, the first function includes two aspects: a positive and friendly one (law, order) and a darker one (magic, witchcraft). Littleton[5] in Dumézil provides a fairly detailed (and supportive) account of Dumézil's ideas:

> As presently formulated, the salient features of this model can be summarized as follows:
>
> The common Indo-European ideology, derived ultimately from one characteristic of the Proto-Indo-European community, was composed of three fundamental principles: (1) maintenance of cosmic and juridical order, (2) the exercise of physical prowess, and (3) the promotion of physical well-being. Each of these principles forms the basis for what Dumézil terms a *fonction*, or "function": that is, a complex whole that includes both the ideological principle itself and its numerous manifestations in the several ancient Indo-European social and supernatural systems? The first function was thus expressed in the presence of distinct priest classes (e.g, the Indic Brahmans), which inevitably stood at the apex of their respective social systems and which were collectively represented, in the Durkheimian sense, by a pair of sovereign gods, such as Mitra and Varuṇa in Vedic India, Jupiter and Dius Fidius at Rome, and Odin and Tyr in ancient Scandinavia. Moreover, there was a clear division of labor between these two cosovereigns: one, let us call him the "Varuṇa figure," had charge of cosmic matters, the other, who may be termed the "Mitra figure," was principally concerned with the maintenance of proper juridical relationships among men. Together they stood at the apex of the supernatural system, just as the priests were at the top of the social hierarchy.
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> The second function was reflected in the presence of a warrior-ruler class, such as the Indic Kṣatriyas, whose basic role was to exercise force in defense of the society (or to further its imperialistic ambitions), as well as in the collective representations of this class, such as the great Vedic warrior divinity Indra, the Roman god Mars, and the Norse war god Thor.
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> The third function was reflected by the mass of the society, the herders and cultivators upon whom the priests and warriors depended for their sustenance (e.g. the Indic Vaišyas); this principle was collectively represented by yet another stratum of divinities. In the majority of cases the principal occupants of this third divine stratum were conceived as a pair of closely related kinsmen, the most usual relationship being that of a set of twins (e.g, the Greek Dioscuri, the Vedic Aśvins). More rarely (e.g, the Norse figures Frey and Njord) the relationship was that of father and son. In other instances, notably at Rome, where the god Quirinus embodied the essence of the third function, a single divinity was the prime representative. Typically, but not universally, the third function also included a female divinity who was sometimes conceived as a close kinswoman (or bride) of the chief male representatives (or representative) of the function in question: for example, the Vedic goddess Sarasvatī, the Norse goddess Freya.[6] These interrelated triads of social classes

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[5] Covington Scott Littleton (1933–2010) was an American anthropologist and academic, whose main research areas at *Occidental College* (Los Angeles, California) from 1962 to 2002 were Indo-European mythology and folklore, *King Arthur* and the *Holy Grail*. His book (1973) on Dumézil is especially authoritative.

[6] Another example would be Latin *Ceres*, goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships, with typical attributes of the third function.

and divine beings served as the framework through which the ancient Indo-European speakers viewed the world. (Littleton, 1973, p. 11).

Apart from the tripartite scheme, for which he is most famous, Dumézil also wrote a few purely literary works like "Le moyne noir en gris dedans Varennes" [The gray-clad black monk inside Varennes] and, more seriously, contributed extensive studies on some North Caucasic languages, especially on Ubykh, a now extinct language, with an extremely high number of consonantal phonemes. In the 1930s, Dumézil's works on Caucasic led to bitter and ferocious polemics with Nicolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938), whom he derisively called 'le prince T.' [Prince T.], in response to a review by Trubetzkoy which he did not appreciate.

2. Dumézil's solution to aporia and despair

Historiographically, Dumézil's theory sprung out of a form of despair. As noted by Haudry, himself an Indo-Europeanist:

"A. Meillet en est venu à rejeter en bloc la mythologie comparée, concluant qu'on ne savait rien des dieux des Indo-Européens". (Haudry, 1987, p.4).

[Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) ended up rejecting comparative mythology as a whole, concluding that nothing was known of the gods of the Indo-Europeans.]

Meillet is indeed quite abruptly pessimistic:

Il est donc impossible de faire l'histoire ancienne des religions pour les peuples de langue indo-européenne. La linguistique n'a pas le moyen de remplacer l'histoire, et elle n'y prétend pas. (Meillet, 1921, p. 322).

[It is therefore impossible to write the ancient history of religions of Indo-European- speaking peoples. Linguistics cannot replace history, and it does not claim to do so.]

or, a bit more nuanced,

La grammaire comparée ne peut donc fournir sur l'état de civilisation du peuple supposé par la langue indo-européenne que des indications vagues, incomplètes et souvent douteuses ; on s'est longtemps fait à cet égard des illusions dont on est revenu aujourd'hui. (Meillet, 1921, p. 324).

[Comparative grammar can therefore only provide vague, incomplete and often questionable indications on the state of civilization of the people presupposed by the Pre-Indo-European language; we long had illusions in this regard from which we have come back today.]

One reason for despair is that naturalistic (or naturistic) approaches of the 19th century (sun worship or the like), promoted by Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), led about nowhere and fell into rejection. Then, onomastics and the study of theonyms were also desperately unfruitful. Even clear and undebatable phonetic equations like *Jupiter* (a Roman god) = Ζεύς (a Greek god) = *dyau* (an Old Indian word for 'sky') teach about nothing, as noted by Dumézil:

Les premiers comparatistes se sont donné pour tâche principale d'établir une nomenclature divine. [...] Or, les années passant, très peu de ces équations ont résisté à un examen phonétique plus exigeant [...] La plus incontestable s'est révélée décevante : dans le Dyau védique, le « ciel » est tout autrement orienté que dans le Zeus grec ou le Juppiter de Rome, et le rapprochement n'enseigne presque rien. (Dumézil, 1992, p.49–50).

[The first comparatists set themselves the main task of establishing a divine nomenclature. [...] However, over the years, very few of these equations have withstood a more demanding phonetic examination [...] The most indisputable has proved disappointing: in the Vedic Dyau, the "sky" is quite differently oriented than with the Greek Zeus or the Juppiter of Rome, and the comparison teaches almost nothing.]

But, still Dumézil was interested in studying the immaterial and sociopolitical aspects of the Indo-European culture, which Dumézil defines as follows:

C'est-à-dire pour les faits de civilisation non matérielle, pour les représentations collectives et les institutions, pour le culte, les légendes, la structure sociale des peuples indo-européens. (Dumézil, 1992, p. 16).

[That is to say for the facts of non-material civilization, for collective representations and institutions, for worship, legends, the social structure of the Indo-European peoples.]

A few years before WWII, he designed his tripartite mold of three "functions", with the lesser-known help of Emile Benveniste (1902–1976). This point is acknowledged by Sergent:

A ce titre, Benveniste est le coinventeur de la tripartition fonctionnelle. (Sergent, 1995, p. 333).
[In that respect, Benveniste is coinventor of the functional tripartition.]

or by Littleton in *Dumézil*: "Emile Benveniste, whose 1932 demonstration of the tripartite character of the ancient Iranian social structure had a profound influence on the development of Dumézil's ideas." (Littleton, 1973, p. 15). Benveniste begins with strong words indeed:

Autant il est certain que la division tripartite de la société avestique remonte à la communauté indo-iranienne, autant il est improbable que la « classe » iranienne et la « caste » indienne se répondent sous la forme où nous les reconnaissons l'une et l'autre historiquement fixées. D'un schème identique, l'évolution a fait sortir deux systèmes indépendants et deux séries de noms distincts. (Benveniste, 1932, p. 117).

[As much as it is certain that the tripartite division of the avestan society goes back to the Indo-Iranian community, as much it is improbable that the Iranian "class" and the Indian "caste" correspond to each other in the historically fixed forms which we know for both of them. From an identical scheme, evolution has brought out two independent systems and two sets of distinct names.]

Rather than equating cognate theonyms, which appeared to be a dead-end, Dumézil would compare the "functions" of the deities, in a kind of semi-structuralist methodology. For example, Mitra (Old Indian), Týr (North Germanic), Vohu Manah (Zoroastrism) are not cognate words, but they are supposed to fit in the same position in the Dumézilian matrix of "functions". Thanks to a radically innovative approach, Dumézil managed to overcome the naturistic aporia of the 19th century and the dead-end of isolated lexical comparisons: «Trained under the great French Indo-Europeanist Antoine Meillet, and thoroughly exposed to the sociology of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and others who in the early years of the twentieth century were shaping a functional approach to the study of primitive religion, Professor Dumézil has developed an approach to comparative mythology which is unique, to say the least. In adding a functionally oriented sociological and anthropological dimension to the traditional comparative study of the myths, epics, ritual, and folktales of the ancient Indo-European-speaking peoples, he has forged a wholly new conception of the relationship among language, myth, and social organization. As I see it, the conception has profound implications not only for social anthropo-logy, but also for the social sciences as a whole.» (Littleton, 1973, p. 1).

3. Dumézil at the crossroads

The three "functions" can be understood in several ways: as an actual description of society,[7] as an abstract mindset, an ideology (or *Weltanschauung*) embedded in the minds of speakers, as a heuristic tool for scholars, as a methodological sieve to sort out rather untidy collections of data, etc. Dumézil himself considered them to be the implicit overhanging ideology of the Proto-Indo-European culture, overhanging to the point of being supernatural.

In Dumézil's perspective, the recurrence of the tripartite pattern across the historical Indo-European cultures is supposed to guarantee that the phenomenon is inherited. This point of view will be challenged in the following paragraphs.

In a way, Dumézil extended the comparative method from the study of concrete words in languages (the Saussurian Signifier, « le signifiant ») to that of semantics and axiology in societies: the study of myths, beliefs and sociopolitical values (the Saussurian Signified, « le signifié »). Such was the conclusion of Haudry:

> Faut-il renoncer à reconstruire, ou conclure à de pures et simples innovations ? [...] Il faut alors chercher à mettre en évidence d'autres constantes que celles de la forme : des constantes sémantiques et syntaxiques. [...] On peut donc dire que la théorie trifonctionnelle (et déjà la reconstruction d'un système indo-iranien des castes) a inauguré la méthode de reconstruction à partir de la structure et du signifié. (Haudry, 1987, p. 5).

> [Should we give up reconstructions, or think of pure and simple innovations? [...] It is therefore necessary to find constants other than formal: semantic and syntactic constants. [...] We can therefore say that the trifunctional theory (and already the reconstruction of an Indo-Iranian caste system) inaugurated the method of reconstructing from the structure and the signified.]

To some extent, the tripartite mold of three "functions" is reminiscent of structuralism, which was extremely fashionable during most of the 20th century. But, as underlined by Littleton in *Dumézil*, a difference between Dumézil and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) is that: «While it is perhaps fair to refer to Dumézil as a "structuralist" in that he is as much concerned with the underlying patterns in myths as he is with their specific content, he does *not* suggest that the tripartite structure found among the ancient Indo-Europeans is a universal feature of the human psyche. Indeed, one of the fundamental axioms upon which his whole system rests is that, in the Old World, it is *uniquely Indo-European*.» (Littleton, 1973, p. 26).

It must be emphasized that Dumézil adamantly refused to be considered a structuralist: "je ne suis pas, je n'ai pas à être, ou à ne pas être, structuraliste" [I am not, do not have to be, or not to be, a structuralist]. To a large extent, Dumézil applies an inverted faux-structuralism. The units do not interplay to build a system, as in regular structuralism. In Dumézil's approach, the tripartite mold (or "system") preexists and the issue is to determine how data (or "units") fit the mold. This feature is, in our humble opinion, a weakness, as tripartition tends to behave as a bed of Procrust, which is the core issue that we shall survey in the next paragraphs.

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[7] The Indian sytem of castes or *varṇa* (color) played a role in the inception of the functions. But Dumézil rejected the strictly social interpretation of the functions in the 1950s, see (Sergent, 1988, p. 190) or (Dumézil, 1973, p. 10).

4. The canonical case of Mittani-Aryan[8]

What gave a definitive shape to Dumézil's intuitions is one of the most fascinating parts of the Mittani-Aryan corpora, found in the Mittani–Hittite treaty (KBo I 3) and the Hittite–Mittani treaty (KBo I 1 + duplicates) between Šattiwaza of Mittani and Šuppiluliuma I, the Hittite king. The treaty is dated to circa 1450 BCE by the British Museum:

KBo I 3 Vo 24
D.MEŠMi-it-ra-aš-ši-il D.MEŠA-ru-na-aš-ši-il DIn-da-ra D.MEŠNa-ša-at-ti-ia-an-na
D.MEŠ*Mitraššil* D.MEŠ*Arunaššil* D*Indara* D.MEŠ*Našattiyanna*

KBo I 1 Vo 55–56
D.MEŠMi-it-ra-aš-ši-il/-el D.MEŠÚ-ru-wa-na-aš-ši-il DIn-tar D.MEŠNa-ša-a[t-ti-ia-a]n-na
D.MEŠ*Mitraššil* D.MEŠ*Uruwanaššil* D*Indar* D.MEŠ*Našattiyanna*

The first mention by Dumézil of a trifunctional interpretation of the Mittani treaty goes back to 1941, and was further developed in 1945 (in *Naissance d'archanges*).

The parallel with five major Indo-Aryan deities: *Mitra*, *Varuṇa*, *Indra* and the *Nāsatyā*, precisely in that order, is credited to Dumézil (Thieme, 1960, p.303):

> If asked to cite them in their most common nominative forms, no Vedologist could possibly hesitate to put down the series: *Mitrā-Varuṇā*, *Indraḥ*, *Nāsatyā*.
> If further asked to name a Rigvedic verse in which these names appear side by side and in this order, he would have to quote RV 10.125.1bc:
>
>> *aham mitrā-varuṇā ubhā bibharmi*
>> *aham indrāgnī aham aśvinā ubhā*

Paul Thieme (1905–2001) did not adhere to Dumézilian tripartite theories and was even one of his strongest critics.[9] A major discrepancy between the Vedic and the Mittani-Aryan versions is the substitution of *Aśvinā* by their other name *Nāsatyā*. Another oddity is the name of *Varuṇa* as *Aruna* (possibly a Hurrian contamination) or even stranger *Uruwana*, for which there is no satisfactory explanation and which seems to come from **Ruwana*.

But, still, the canonical tripartite mold is thus:

1st function: sovereignty, law	Clear side: law *Mitrā*	Dark side: witchcraft *Varuṇā*
2nd function: war, strength	*Indra*	
3rd function: riches, healing	*Nāsatyā = Aśvinā*	

Canonical tripartite mold of Mittani-Aryan (Dumézil 1992:114)

As regards etymology, *Mitrā* means 'contract' (< PIE **mei-*[10]), *Nāsatyā* 'savior(s)' (< PIE **nes-*[11]). The origin of *Varuṇā* remains debated, and that of *Indra* is unclear. Nothing, though, is

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[8] See Fournet for a general survey of Mittani-Aryan data (Fournet, 2019a).

[9] See (Littleton, 1973, p.186).

[10] **mey-* 'common' (IEW 710): Gothic *gamains*, Old English *gemaene*, O.H.G *gimeini* 'common', Lithuanian *mainas*, Latvian *mains* 'exchange', Lithuanian *mainaũ*, -*ýti*, Latvian *maĩnît* 'to swap, vary, exchange', Old Bulgarian *měna* 'variation, change', *izměniti* 'διαμείβειν, διαλάττειν', Latin *comūnis* ([old] *comoin[em]*) 'common', Oscan *muínikad*

obviously borrowed. So, on the whole, it can plausibly be considered native. Here is what Littleton explains: «The inner natures of the gods are clearly contrasted with one another, being defined by the very name (for Mitra), or (for Varuṇa) by their distinctive attributes and celebrated myths. The word *Mitra* is formed by adding the suffix of instrumental nouns to a root that means "to exchange regularly, peacefully, amicably" [...], and means simply "contract." This, according to a classic article by A. Meillet,[12] is not a natural phenomenon but a social phenomenon that has been deified. More precisely, it is a deified type of juridical act with its effects, the state of mind and reality which it establishes among men. The name of *Varuṇa* is of uncertain etymology, but his character is sufficiently defined by his usual attributes. On the one hand, he is par excellence the master of *māyā*, the illusionistic magic, creator of forms. On the other hand, materially and symbolically, from the *Rig Veda* up to the epic, he is armed with knots and strings, with which he seizes the sinner – even were it his son Bhṛgu – instantly and without possible resistance. There are demonic affinities in him, whether one compares or separates his name from that of Vṛtra. At the risk of being arbitrary or simplistic, I have proposed a summing up of the information about them in these formulas: Mitra "sovereign god of law," Varuṇa "sovereign god of magic." (Littleton, 1973, p. 39).

5. Dumézil's approach of the North Germanic pantheon

Now that we have a canonical example of Dumézilian pantheon, represented by Mittani-Aryan, we can examine other pantheons, the North Germanic one, to start with. As will quickly appear, this pantheon is much less in support of Dumézil's theory than is usually claimed. The sore point is the god *Odin*.

		Clear side: law *Týr*	Dark side: witchcraft *Oðinn*
1st function:	sovereignty, law		
2nd function:	war, strength	*Thórr*	
3rd function:	riches, healing	*Freyr*	

Tripartite approach of the North Germanic pantheon (Dumézil, 1992, p.149)

On the surface, it would seem that everything fits well. But a first issue is that *Odin* is more than just a magician, as befits the dark side of the first function. He also has a number of features that are supposed to belong to the second function. Odin is thus also a war-god and described as such by Adam of Bremen, who visited a temple in Uppsala in the 11th century, at a time when Sweden was still pagan:

'communi'. Also Tocharian B *mäsk-* 'to exchange', Old Indian *máyatē* 'to exchange', *ni-maya-* m. 'exchange, barter', Latvian *míju, mît* 'to exchange' (Pokorny, 1959).

[11] **nes-* 'to return, to heal' (Rix et al, 2001, pp.454–55; Pokorny, 1959, pp.766–767): Old Indian *nas-* 'to approach, resort to, join', Greek νέο-μαι, Ionian νεῦ-μαι, νίσ(σ)ομαι 'to go, come, return', νόστος 'a return home', cf. Νέστωρ 'the returner', Asia (Ἀσία) (< **ṇsiya*) 'return, cure', Greek **νασ-ός* 'temple, shrine': Doric, νᾱός, Lak. νᾱος, Ionian νηός, Attic νεώς, 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'. As for the toponym *Neš ~ Ka-neš*, whence *nešili* 'Hittite', the morphological alternation looks Hattic, the substrate of Hittite, with a prefix-like Hattic morpheme *ka-* 'in(side)'.

[12] Meillet, A. 1907. La religion indo-européenne, *Revue des idées 4*, 689–698, reprinted in Meillet, A. 1921. *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*. 323–334.

Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos.

[Wodan, that is to say fury, governs war and provides man with force against enemies].

For that matter, Odin is not a pure god of the first function and fits into the Dumézilian mold only with the help of saw and hammer. An important section of his realm falls out of the scope of the first function.

Even worse, as noted in a preceding paper (Fournet, 2020), Norse mythology is significantly composite. A large section is Indo-European, like gods *Thórr* (< **þunr-* 'thunder'), *Týr* (< **tiw-az* 'day'), with regular and clean etymologies. Another section involves more-than-four-legged animals, like Odin's horse *Sleipnir*, a feature shared with Ugric and Old Indian. A third component has been noted about snakes lying at the bottom of the Cosmic Tree, which, in all cases whatever the origin might be, is not an Indo-European feature. Last but not least, a fourth component is shamanic: "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).

This shamanistic feature has been underlined by numerous people, for example by Demoule:

D'autres comportent de larges aspects non « indo-européens », tel le chamanisme, souligné par Dumézil lui-même, des Scythes et des Germains, par exemple dans les pouvoirs magiques d'Odin. (Demoule, 1991, p. 186).
[Others have broad non-Indo-European aspects, such as shamanism, under-lined by Dumézil himself, among Scythians and Germans, for example in the magical powers of Odin.]

He also notes that Greek mythology is completely at odds with what exists in the other Indo-European languages:

<…> certaines religions « indo-européennes » sont pour l'essentiel hors normes, la plus notable étant la grecque. (Demoule, 1991, p. 186).
[<…> some Indo-European religions are for the most part out of the ordinary, most notably the Greek one.]

What is more, the word *Odin* is probably of Caucasic origin, it has comparanda in Adyghe *wədə*, Kabardian *wəd*, Ubykh *wədǝ́* 'witch'.[13] The name *Ase* is also probably of Caucasic origin: NW Caucasic **(a)-nćᵂa* 'god' (Chirikba, 1996, p. 117).[14] The *a*-mobile prefix is definitely a non-Indo-European morpheme. This raises the question as to why some Indo-European

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[13] Comparanda: (1) **wet-* 'to see' (Rix et al, 2001, p. 694; Pokorny, 1959, p. 346): Old Irish *feth-id* 'to see' (**wet-it*), Old Indian *ápi vat-ati* 'to be familiar with, aware of'; (2) **wāt-* or **wōt-* 'shaman, seer, prophet': Germanic **Wōðana-z* 'Odin': Old Norse *Óðinn*, Old English *Wōden*, Old Saxon *Wōden*, Old High German *Wuotan*, Germanic **wōða-z* 'mad, possessed': Gothic *woþs* 'possessed', Old Norse *óðr* 'mad, frantic, furious', Old English *wōd* 'mad', Old Irish *fáith* 'seer, prophet' (< **wāt-i*), Old Irish *fáth* 'prophecy, prophetic wisdom' (< **wāt-u*), Latin *vātēs, -is* (possibly borrowed), Gaulish οὐᾱτεις (Nom. Plural) 'seer, prophet', 'poetry': Old Icelandic *ōðr* 'poetry', Old English *wōþ* 'song, poetry', Welsh *gwawd* 'poetry' (**wāt-u*).
[14] Comparanda: **(a)-nćᵂ-* 'god' (Pokorny, 1959, p. 48): (1) **ansu-* (< with Caucasic #*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', (2) **ņsu-* (< without Caucasic #*a*-): Old Indian *ásu-ra-*, Avestic *ahu-ra-* 'ruler, lord'.

subfamilies – only some, not all – have Caucasic-looking words. On the one hand we have the Indo-Iranian forms, without *a*-mobile prefix, while on the other hand the Germanic and Venetic forms have the *a*-mobile prefix. How should this situation be accounted for? These words suggest the existence of (para)-Caucasic speakers in and around Scandinavia, before the arrival of Proto-Germanic speakers. What is more, the extension of the non-Indo-European (para)-Caucasic substrate was possibly quite large, as it also involves Celtic, Venetic and Italic, which contain a number of such words as well. The Indo-Iranian forms, without *a*-mobile prefix, can be more easily explained as Indo-Iranian speakers have more obvious geographic links with the Caucasus than Germanic or Celtic speakers. Another interesting comparison is Old Indian *aś-* ‘to eat’, Modern Persian *āš* ‘food, soup’ (< **āsya-*) vs Tsezian **aç-* ‘to eat’, listed in Lubotzky, who lumps all adstratic or substratic Indo-Iranian words together into a single “substratum” (Carpelan, Parpola, Koskikallio, 2001, pp.301-307). It seems little probable that the words listed by Lubotzky all have the same origin.

Another etymology proposed for **(a)nsu-* ‘god’ is the root **H₂ens-* ‘to beget’, attested in Hittite *haš-* ‘to beget, create’, *haššu-* c. ‘king’ and Hieroglyphic Luvian *hašušara-* ‘queen’. This proposal is hardly acceptable. As a rule, the Indo-European culture draws a sharp divide between human beings, who are born and mortal, and gods, who are immortal (*n̥-mr̥-tó-*). Roots with the meaning ‘to beget, engender’ are usually used to coin words meaning ‘king’: typically **ǧen-(H)-* > Germanic **kuning-*, also **yebʰ-* > Hurrian *ebri* ‘lord, king’. The link between Hittite *haš-* ‘to beget, create’ and *haššu-* ‘king’ follows the same logic. These roots are not used to mean ‘god’. For that matter, a derivation **(a)nsu-* ‘god’ < **H₂ens-* ‘to beget’ is implausible and inconsistent with what is known of the regular Indo-European culture.

Beside, **(a)nsu-* ‘god’ has no particular connection with Asia, despite the Ynglinga saga, about a warrior named Odin: “[ChapterI] On the south side of the mountains which lie outside of all inhabited lands runs a river through Swithiod [? Russia], which is properly called by the name of Tanais [? Don river], but was formerly called Tanaquisl, or Vanaquisl, and which falls into the Black Sea. The country of the people on the Vanaquisl was called Vanaland, or Vanaheim, and the river separates the three parts of the world, of which the eastermost part is called Asia, and the westermost Europe. [ChapterII] The country east of the Tanaquisl in Asia was called Asaland, or Asaheim, and the chief city in that land was called Asgaard. In that city was a chief called Odin, and it was a great place for sacrifice.” This seems to be an artificial and learned attempt at thrusting the Æsir-Vanir dichotomy onto a geographic narrative. There is no reason to believe that the River names based on the root **danu*: Danube, Don, Dniepr, Dniestr, ever were called after the Vanir gods.

6. The Æsir-Vanir war: fact or myth?

At this point, to summarize the matter under discussion, we saw in the preceding paragraph that the North Germanic pantheon is much less supportive of the Dumézilian scheme than is sometimes enthusiastically claimed. If *Odin* is a god of non-Indo-European origin, then the slot for the dark side of sovereignty is empty and the whole scheme falls apart.

Another issue is the so-called Æsir-Vanir war. Does it belong to pure mythology or is there some historical or social basis in this war between Ases and Vanes?

Littleton in *Dumézil* describes it as a mythological theme, that can also be found in the Roman account of the Sabine war (Littleton, 1973, p. 23). Mallory speaks of a Proto-Indo-European ‘War of the Functions’, downplaying any historical basis:

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

The idea that there existed an historical reality behind the 'War of the Functions' is both highly speculative and unnecessary». (Mallory, 2005, p.139).

But the words Ase and Vane are respectively of (para)-Caucasic (< *a-$n\acute{c}^{w}$-) and Indo-European (< *wen-) origin. This would suggest that two different populations came into contact at some point in the prehistory of Germanic ethnogenesis and may have ultimately coalesced into one. The issue of a Pre-Germanic substrate was first proposed by Sigmund Feist (1865–1943) in Feist, 1932. Feist, himself a Jew, emphatically rejected the "dogma of the North European 'home' of the Indo-Europeans' [the conclusion of Feist's (1932) paper]. He also suggested that the so-called first Germanic mutation of the PIE consonants was linked to the Pre-Germanic substrate. There is – needless to say – a lot of (in)conscious political and ideological load at stake in Feist's proposal, especially for German or Germanic people, down to this day, about one century after Nazism. Our addition to Feist's original scheme is that this Pre-Germanic substrate may have affinities with present-day Caucasic, though located in Northern Europe. Of course, this topic needs much more extensive survey, than is alluded at in the present paper about Dumézil. And theories about the prehistory of Germanic ethnogenesis need to be prudently worded.

Whatever actually happened, it is difficult to believe that the Æsir-Vanir war is just a myth, a theme or a speculation. Interestingly, it can be noted that the (para)-Caucasic *Odin* is the highest ranking god, and that several Indo-European gods (Týr, Thórr, etc) have been transferred into the Æsir group of (para)-Caucasic origin.

7. The text of the *Völuspá*

At this point, one may wish to have a closer look at some paragraphs of the North Germanic *Völuspá*, 'Prophecy of the Seeress', first poem of the *Poetic Edda* as found in the *Codex Regius*. The manuscript dates from the 1270s, but most scholars agree that the poem was composed some time in the late 900s. Search in the website «Linguistics Research center» (provided by The university of Texas as Austin) for grammatical explanations.[15] Translation is our own.

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[15] https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/eieol/norol/90#glossed_text_gloss_105542 (accessed on 12 May 2020).

19	
Ask veit ek standa,	I know an ash standing *Yggdrasil*
heitir Yggdrasill	hight,
hár baðmr, ausinn	a lofty tree, laved
hvíta auri	with limpid water
þaðan koma döggvar	thence come the dews
þærs í dala falla	that fall into the dales
stendr æ yfir grœnn	it stands forever green
Urðar brunni.	over *Urð*'s fountain.

According to our analysis (Fournet, 2020), *Yggdrasil* is the cosmic tree, connecting sky, earth and netherworld, typical of the shamanistic world view. §19 is (para)-Caucasic.

20	
Þaðan koma meyjar	Thence come maidens,
margs vitandi	much knowing,
þrjár, ór þeim sal (var. sae)	three from the hall (var. sea),
er und þolli stendr	which under that tree stands
Urð hétu eina,	*Urð* [Past] hight the one,
aðra Verðandi,	the second *Verðandi* [Present]
- skáru á skíði -	- on a tablet they graved -
Skuld ina þriðju	*Skuld* [Future] the third
þær lög lögðu,	they established laws,
þær líf kuru	allotted life
alda börnum,	to the sons of men
örlög seggja.	pronounced destinies

This theme is attested in other Indo-European people and beyond, in Greece as Μοῖραι, in Rome as *Parcae*, in Hurrian as *Hudena* and *Hudellurra*, in Sumerian as GUL.MEŠ and MAH.MEŠ. §20 is probably Indo-European, though the theme is somehow universal.

21	
þat man hon fólkvíg	She remembers the war
fyrst í heimi,	the first on earth,
er Gullveig	when Gullveig was
geirum studdu	pierced with lances,
ok í höll Hárs	and in hoary [Odin]'s hall
hana brendu	was burnt,
þrysvar brendu	thrice burnt,
þrysvar borna,	thrice reborn,
opt, ósjaldan,	oft, repeatedly,
þó hon enn lifir	yet she still lives.

This is the alleged cause of the war: a woman, with an Indo-European name Gullveig, was molested (or possibly killed) in a place under the (para)-Caucasic god Odin's juridiction.

22	
Heiði hana hétu,	They called her *Heiði* (Bright),
hvars til húsa kom,	everywhere she came to houses,
völu velspá,	right-speaking seeress,
vitti hon ganda,	she conjured spirits
seið hon hvars hon kunni,	she prophesied, as much as she could,

seið hon hugleikin,	she prophesied entranced,
æ var hon angan	forever she was the delight
illrar brúðar.	of a wicked wife.

The woman named Gullveig has now become a shamaness, with a new name *Heiði* (Bright). §22 looks like a shamanic addition to the original war narrative.

23	
þá gengu regin öll	Then all the mighty went
á rökstóla,	to the council seats,
ginnheilug goð,	most sacred gods,
ok um þat gættuz	and deliberated on that,
hvárt skyldu æsir	whether the Aesir should
afráð gjalda,	repay [blood] compensation
eða skyldu goðin öll	or whether all the gods should
gildi eiga.	receive offerings.

§23 describes a war council about what to do. It can be noted that the sacred (Indo-European) gods: *ginnheilug goð* are not on the same side of the war as the (para)-Caucasic Ases: *aesir*.

24	
Fleygði Óðinn	Odin let loose
ok í fólk um skaut,	and shot among the people,
þat var enn fólkvíg	that was the first fight
fyrst í heimi	in the world
brotinn var borðveggr	broken was the board wall
borgar ása,	of the Aesir's barricade,
knáttu vanir vígspá	the death-proclaiming Vanir could
völlu sporna.	tread the field

War began against the (Indo-European) *fólk* (= *populus*). But the losing side is (para)-Caucasic (Aesir) and the winning side is Indo-European (Vanir).

In our opinion, the Æsir-Vanir war is more than just a mythological or cosmological theme. For the Greeks, the Trojan war is the moment when the sons of Zeus (the Indo-European Greeks), the sons of Poseidon (the autochthonous Pre-Greeks) and the sons of Apollon (the Indo-European Anatolians) began to coalesce to form historical Greece as we know it. In our opinion, the Æsir-Vanir war is a kind of Trojan war of North Germanic.

For all the reasons described in the preceding paragraphs, it therefore appears that the North Germanic pantheon certainly (not to say doubtless) cannot be a faithful reflex and continuation of the Indo-European original, whatever this latter may have been.

8. Dumézil's approach of the Zoroastrian pantheon

Another supposedly canonical example of Dumézilian pantheons, apart from Mittani-Aryan, Old Indian and North Germanic, is Zoroastrism. This religious reform has a number of features: (1) it promoted monotheism (*Ahura mazdā* 'the wise Lord'), (2) it opposes positive entities (*Aməša Spənta* 'immortal benevolences') to archdemons (that include *Indra* and the *Nāsatya*), (3) it is dualistic, involving a (cosmic) fight between *Aša* (Truth) and *Druj* (Lie).

1st function:	sovereignty, law	Clear side: law *Vohu manah* 'good thinking'	Dark side: witchcraft *Aša* (< *rta*) 'order'
2nd function:	war, strength	*Xšaθra* (< *kṣatra*) 'force'	
3rd function:	riches, healing	*Ārmaiti, Haurvatāt, Amərətāt* 'piety, health, immortality'	

Tripartite approach of the Zoroastrian pantheon (Dumézil, 1992, pp.115, 131)

As a first comment, it can be noted that there are six *yazata Aməša Spənta* 'adorable immortal benevolences', when the Dumézilian mold envisions only four cells. It also necessitates to put *Aša* 'order, righteousness', a positive quality, on the dark side of the first function, which is quite odd semantically. Besides, in Zoroastrian thinking, the six *Spənta* are only diverse aspects of *Ahura mazdā*, not separate gods, nor even gods in the first place. For these matters, there is something highly procrustean in forcing Zoroastrism into the canonical tripartition.

But, the worst is to come. The inherited Indo-Iranian gods: *Indra*, and the *Nāsatya* (known as phonetically evolved *Nāŋhaiθya*) are downgraded to the status of demons, on the negative side of the fight between Truth and Lie. Besides, the highest and sole god: *Ahura mazdā* 'the wise Lord' bears a name of probable Caucasic origin (*asura- < *(a)-nćʷ-*). Another point is that Mitra has disappeared, so has Varuṇa.

Obviously, Zoroastrism is a major breakaway from the inherited Indo-Iranian culture. The groundwork of the language of the Gātha remains Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, and can even be phonetically converted into Old Indian, word for word, clause for clause. But it promoted a non-Indo-European god and rejected the gods with the clearest Old Indian counterparts.

Incidentally, it has a prophet, allegedly Zarathustra, apparently an historical figure, a feature unknown to the ancient Indo-European religions. In that respect, Zoroastrism is reminiscent of Judaism and especially of Jesus and Christianity. It can be noted that Jesus was born and raised in Galilea, one of the most Hellenicized regions of Ancient Palestine. Still, contrary to seers, seeresses or bards, prophets are not a feature of the Indo-European culture.

To some extent, Zoroastrism is to Indo-Iranian what Islam is to Christianity and Judaism. On the one hand, it shares quite obvious similarities, but on the other hand it represents a serious disruption and departure from the original. This suggests that the early developments of Zoroastrism took place in a social or ethnic milieu that was not clearly Indo-Iranian, in contact with it but somehow distinct from it.

Interestingly, in a paragraph about the "Location of the Legendary Zarathustra", Grenet in Stausberg–Vevaina notes that :

Greek authors appear to have been acquainted with traditions according to which Zarathustra originated from Bactria (references gathered in Jackson, 1899, pp.154–157, 186–188; Boyce, 1992, pp.1–26). On the other hand, the traditions preserved in the Pahlavi books mention either Azerbaijan or the place "Rag," sometimes explicitly identified as Ray in Media [now a neighborhood of Greater Tehran], as his birthplace (Stausberg, Tessmann, Vevaina, 2015, p.22).

Jackson thus concludes his study of sources:

> Conclusion as to Zoroaster's Native Place. – Zoroaster arose in western Iran. Apparently he was born somewhere in Ādarbaijān [Atropatene]. The places specially mentioned are Urumiah, Shīz (Av. Caēcista, prob. anc. Urumiah) and the river Darej. His mother's family was connected with Raghā, which accounts for associating his name with that place ; but it is not clear that this was the Median Raī (Ῥάγαι of the Greeks) although it was in the west. The latter seems to have been a district as well as town, and is sometimes regarded as a part of ancient Ātūr-pāṯakān. Zoroaster's youth was also certainly passed in western Iran (Jackson, 1899, p.205).

A birthplace of Zarathustra close to (present-day) Azerbaijan, near the Caucasus, might explain why Ahura Mazda (< *$nć^w$-), of probable Caucasic origin, was preferred to the Indo-Iranian inherited gods (Mitra, Indra, Nāsatya).

As a general conclusion, it appears that the Zoroastrian pantheon is much less supportive of tripartition than Dumézil and his epigones have claimed. In fact, the discontinuity is greater and much worse than is the case for North Germanic.

9. Conclusion

The paper tried to assess the relevancy and limitations of the tripartite approach, originally proposed by Dumézil in the late 1930s. The Mittani-Aryan gods listed in Hittito-Hurrian treaties provided the prototype for the theory and the three so-called functions. The *varṇas* of India also provided a test case, but Dumézil gave up a purely social approach and, in the late 1950s, preferred to see the functions as an overarching ideology, not a concrete description of society.

The backbone of Dumézil's claim is that the same tripartite pattern is not just Old Indian or Mittani-Aryan. It can be found elsewhere, in particular in the North Germanic and Zoroastrian pantheons. For that matter, tripartition is claimed to be a cultural feature that must go back to the original Indo-European community. This is the entire logical construction of Dumézil's theory.

As a first point, it can be noted that tripartition hardly, if at all, applies to Greek or Hittite traditions. Of course, one may always hypothesize that Dumézil's tripartition was lost or is not attested in the available documentation. But it remains troublesome that nothing significantly in favor of tripartition appears in one of the best documented language, namely Greek, nor in one of the earliest attested language, namely Hittite. This lacuna casts a serious shadow of doubt on the existence of tripartition as far back as in the Proto-Indo-European speech community.

What is more, the North Germanic pantheon involves Odin, a non-Indo-European shamanistic god of probable (para)-Caucasic origin. Secondly, the war between the Caucasic Ases and the Indo-European Vanes can hardly be a mere literary or mythological theme or a speculation. The lexical and mythological evidence surveyed in the preceding paragraphs directly conflicts with Dumézil's theory that the North Germanic pantheon would be a faithful reflex and continuation of the Indo-European original, whatever this latter may have been. The (para)-Caucasic Odin is the highest ranking god, and several Indo-European gods (Týr, Thórr, etc) have been transferred into the Æsir group of probable (para)-Caucasic origin. For these matters, the North Germanic pantheon is only mildly supportive of tripartition.

Further, the linguistic evidence suggests that the Germanic ethnogenesis might have involved two different populations that came into contact at some point in prehistory and ultimately coalesced to form only one. Of course, the hypothesis tentatively proposed here needs to be

further investigated and substantiated by a larger body of data coming from other scientific fields: genetics, archeology, etc.

Yet worse is the Zoroastrian reform, which downgraded the Indo-European *daevas* into demons and promoted Ahura Mazdā (< *$n\acute{c}^w$*-) of probable Caucasic origin as its most important god. Quite obviously, Zoroastrism is a breakaway from the inherited Indo-Iranian culture. The Zoroastrian framework is much less supportive of tripartition than Dumézil and his epigones have claimed. In fact, the discontinuity is greater than is the case for North Germanic.

On the whole, there are very serious reasons to doubt that tripartition can be of Proto-Indo-European dating. It is about absent from Greek and Hittite traditions, and is much less supported by North Germanic and Zoroastrism than usually claimed.

As a general conclusion, a word of caution and prudence seems necessary. Not that the Dumézilian tripartite scheme would be obviously false or irrelevant, but concrete support from the individual branches of the Indo-European family is either lacking or is not as straightforward as usually thought.

Another issue is that the Dumézilian scheme requires complex and differentiated societies, the kind of which is only attested after the end of the 5th millennium BCE. Demoule makes insightful remarks on this issue:

> Dans sa variante dumézilienne, l'hypothèse réclame une société déjà différenciée, hiérarchisée, où la religion (partie prenante de la « première fonction ») est une activité spécialisée et la guerre (la « seconde fonction ») une activité prédominante. Or, de telles sociétés ne sont archéologique-ment pas attestées avant la fin du Néolithique. C'est en effet pendant la période dite « Chalco-lithique », vers la fin du Ve millénaire avant notre ère, que l'on voit apparaître les premiers bâtiments réservés au culte, les premières fortifications, accompagnées de traces de violences dans les villages ou sur les corps, les premières différences significatives parmi le mobilier funéraire déposé dans les tombes. (Demoule, 1991, pp.171–72).

> [In its Dumézilian variant, the hypothesis calls for an already differentiated, hierarchical society, where religion (part of the "first function") is a specialized activity and war (the "second function") a predominant activity. However, such societies were not archaeologically attested until the end of the Neolithic. Only during the so-called "Chalcolithic" period, towards the end of the 5th millennium before our era, do we see the first buildings reserved for worship, the first fortifications, accompanied by traces of violence in the villages or on the corpses, the first significant differences among the funerary furniture placed in the graves].

If we follow Demoule, it may even be claimed that the (near) absence of Dumézilian features in Anatolian or Greece suggests that the breakup of PIE unity predates the 5th millennium BC and happened when societies were still in a rather undifferentiated stage.

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