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The Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myth

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Bruce Lincoln

THE INDO-EUROPEAN  
CATTLE-RAIDING  
MYTH

In an earlier paper entitled "The Indo-European Myth of Creation,"<sup>1</sup> I attempted to trace out a myth of Indo-European provenance that detailed the events which were believed to have been crucial in the establishment of the world as the Proto-Indo-Europeans knew it. There I argued that this myth told of two brothers, \*Manu- "Man" (Sanskrit *Manu*, Avestan \**Manuš*, Germanic *Mannus* being linguistic correspondences; Old Norse *Oðinn* and Latin *Rōmulus* being structurally related) and \*Yemo- "Twin" (Sanskrit *Yama*, Avestan *Yima*, Old Norse *Ymir*, and Latin *Remus* being linguistic matches; Germanic *Tuisco* being a semantic match; Sanskrit *Manāvi* and *Puruṣa*, Pahlavi *Gayōmart* being structurally related). Originally, this myth told of how \*Manu, a priest, sacrificed \*Yemo, a king, together with a bovine animal, and then created the world from their respective bodies: the physical world and the three I-E social classes (sovereigns, warriors, and commoners)<sup>2</sup> coming from the body of the sacrificed

<sup>1</sup> *History of Religions* 15, no. 2 (November 1975): 121-45. See also the article of Jaan Puhvel, "Remus et Frater," in the same issue, which supports and extends the argument.

<sup>2</sup> These classes have been well established by the work of Georges Dumézil. For a convenient summary of his views, see his *L'Idéologie tri-partie des indo-européens* (Brussels: Collection Latomus, 1958); or C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). I do differ with Dumézil on the nature of the so-called Third Function and regard it as something of a catchall class for anyone not belonging to the upper classes. Thus, I prefer the term "Commoners" to any of his designations.

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king, while the animal and vegetable species came from the sacrificed bovine.

In this myth I felt that we could see something of the mythic "charter"<sup>3</sup> which the Proto-Indo-Europeans established for themselves: the differentiation of priests and kings as differing types of the sovereign; the priest's role as ritual specialist, the king's as that of complete man; the separation of the three social classes; the unique position of cattle as the intimate companion of man *ab origine* and source of all good things; and, last, the crucial importance of sacrifice in the creation and preservation of the world order.

This myth of creation seemed to me to be of fundamental importance for I-E society. What I did not recognize while preparing that earlier article was the fact that the myth of \*Manu and \*Yemo focused almost exclusively upon the twin figures of sovereignty: priest and king, whom Dumézil has grouped together in his "first function."<sup>4</sup> It is thus with a sense of some excitement that I feel I can now point to another myth which seems to "complete" the cosmogony: a myth which deals primarily with the nature of the warrior function.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the very name of the hero in this myth—\*Trito- "Third"—is extremely suggestive of an old I-E mythic cycle which grouped together these three primordial heroes, "Man," "Twin," and "Third," each of whom served as the mythic model for a different social group.

Actually, the myth with which we will be dealing is one which has long been familiar to scholars.<sup>6</sup> In truth, it combines two of the best known mythic themes: that of slaying a serpent or monster, and that of stealing a neighbor's cattle. The former is almost

<sup>3</sup> Used in the sense proposed by Malinowski in his essay "Myth in Primitive Psychology," in his *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1948), esp. pp. 107-8.

<sup>4</sup> See Dumézil's *Mitra-Varuna*, 4th ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 23-26, and "Le Rex et les Flamines Maiores," in *La Regalia Sacra* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), pp. 407-17. While Dumézil has on occasion shown hesitation on including kingship in the sovereign class, as in "Religion indo-européenne: Examen de quelques critiques récents," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 152 (1957): 15-16; the argument advanced by Emile Benveniste, "Traditions Indo-Iraniennes sur les classes sociales," *Journal Asiatique* 230 (1938): 534-35 is most convincing.

<sup>5</sup> On the warrior class, see especially Stig Wikander, *Der arische Männerbund* (Lund: Gleerupska Universitet Bokhandeln, 1938); Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, trans. Alf Hiltebeitel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Among the earliest treatments were Rudolf von Roth, "Die Sage von Feridun in Indien und Iran," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 2 (1848): 216-30; Michel Bréal's "Hercule et Cacus," in his *Mélanges de mythologie et de linguistique* (Paris, 1882), pp. 1-62, first published as his dissertation in 1850. While chronologically much later, the treatment of Leopold von Schroeder, *Herakles und Indra* (Vienna: Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, 1914), pp. 57-67, should be grouped with them.

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universal in its dispersion, being seen in such well-known versions as the stories of Beowulf and Grendel, Marduk and Tiamat, Re and Apophis, or such less noted versions as the Ngaju Dayak myth of the conflict of Hornbill and Watersnake,<sup>7</sup> while the cattle-raiding theme is known among all people who keep cattle, appearing in such versions as the struggle of Nuer and Dinka, Masai and Kikuyu, or David's raids while living among the Philistines.<sup>8</sup>

Both of these themes were well known to the Indo-Europeans. Thórr and the Miðgarð serpent, Herakles and the Hydra, Kərəsāspa and the horned serpent are but a few of the I-E monster-slaying stories,<sup>9</sup> while the cattle-raiding theme can be seen in such tales as Indra and the Paṇis, Queen Medb's quest for the Bull of Cualnge, or Odysseus's men and Helios's cattle.<sup>10</sup> The great number and wide distribution of these stories show that they were highly popular themes among the I-Es, but in all probability none is of great antiquity ascending to the Proto-Indo-European period. Rather, they are all simply endless variations on a much-beloved theme. They are Greek myths or Celtic myths or Indian or Iranian myths, but none of these has a proper claim to Indo-European status.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the case, however, with the \*Trito myth, which, as we shall see, is simultaneously a myth of victory over a serpentine monster and of the winning of cattle. It is clearly attested in India, Iran, Greece, and Rome, as has long been recognized.

<sup>7</sup> For Beowulf, see the translation in G. N. Garmonsway et al., *Beowulf and Its Analogues* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1969), with its appendix on other Norse and Celtic dragon-slaying stories (pp. 333–39); for Marduk and Tiamat, Alexander Heidel, trans., *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); for Re and Apophis, translation by John A. Wilson in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3d ed. (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 6–7; for Hornbill and Watersnake, Hans Schärer, *Ngaju Religion* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), esp. pp. 163–203.

<sup>8</sup> For Nuer and Dinka, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 11 ff.; for Masai and Kikuyu, M. Merker, *Die Masai* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1904), p. 196; on David among the Philistines, 1 Sam. 27: 8–12.

<sup>9</sup> Numerous materials have been collected by Joseph Fontenrose in *Python* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), though I cannot agree with his interpretations.

<sup>10</sup> No adequate collection of the great number of I-E myths and legends of raiding has yet been attempted, but note Josef Weisweiler, "Vorindogermanische Schichten der irischen Heldensage," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 24 (1954): 27–28, and A. Venkantasubbiah, "On Indra's Winning of Cows and Waters," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 115 (1965): 120–33, for some of the important Irish and Indian references. Again, the interpretations of both scholars leave something to be desired.

<sup>11</sup> One of the most interesting of these recent myths is that of Odysseus and Cyclops, which is a myth that combines monster slaying and cattle stealing. On the etymology of Cyclops as "cattle-thief," see Paul Thieme, "Etymologische Vexierbilder," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschungen* 69 (1951): 177–78.

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Baltic and Slavic parallels have also been cited<sup>12</sup> and a Hittite version may also be discerned, though there are numerous difficulties in this case;<sup>13</sup> an Armenian version is known, though this ultimately depends on the Iranian version,<sup>14</sup> and a Germanic version is also clear, though this has not heretofore been recognized. The relations between the various versions can be schematized, as in figure 1.

For the present, I shall not attempt to deal with all of these variants but will take up only those which are most helpful for a reconstruction of the P-I-E version. Given the controversy surrounding the Hittite version, it is best omitted at this stage of the study, and as the Baltic and Slavic reflexes exist mainly in the form of folktales recorded at a very late date, they present many problems of interpretation that are best left to experts in that field.<sup>15</sup> Also, the independent Roman version of the myth—the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii of Livy 3. 12—has been almost entirely historicized, and many of the elements which I take to be crucial have been lost. While this version provides a marvelous example of the way in which the Roman mentality transformed Indo-European myths,<sup>16</sup> it does not really help us in a

<sup>12</sup> See V. Ivanov and V. Toporov, "Le Mythe Indo-Européen du dieu de l'orage poursuivant le serpent: Réconstruction du schema," in *Echanges et communications: Mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss* (The Hague: 1968), pp. 1180–1206. Also note the story of the third brother who rescues princesses and treasures from a monster in the underworld, which Gubernatis recognized as related to the \*Trito myth, in W. R. S. Ralston, *Russian Folktales* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873), pp. 73–84. The variant of Ivan Suchenko (p. 84) is particularly significant, as the monster who is slain appears as three serpents.

<sup>13</sup> This myth, which appears in translation by Albrecht Götze in Pritchard, pp. 125–26, has been the subject of great debate. Paul Kretschmer championed the I-E origin of the myth in his articles, "Weiteres zur Urgeschichte der Inder," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschungen* 55 (1927): 78–79, and "Indra und der Hethitische Gott Inaraš," *Kleinasiatische Forschungen* 1 (1927): 297–303. Some of his philological arguments, however, may no longer be accepted. Others who saw an I-E myth in this text were Giuseppe Furlani, *La Religione degli Hittiti* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1936), p. 42; Friedrich Hrozný, "Hethiter und Inder," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 38 (1928): 184–85; and Jean Pryzluski, "Inara et Indra," *Revue Hittite et Asiatique* 5 (1940): 142–46. Those who attacked this conclusion were Ferdinand Sommer, *Die Ahhijāva Urkunden* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1932), pp. 22–24, 383; Albrecht Götze, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Orients, II, 1.3 Kleinasiens* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1933), p. 131 n.; and Emmanuel LaRoche, *Recueil d'onomastique Hittite* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1951), p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> See Herman Lommel, *Der Arische Kriegsgott* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1939), pp. 51–53; Georges Dumézil, "Vahagn," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 117 (1938): pp. 152–70.

<sup>15</sup> For literature on the Hittite version, see n. 13 above. With regard to the Baltic-Slavic reflexes, the best treatment to date is that of Ivanov and Toporov, where many of the same features which will be discussed in this paper are brought out: the serpentine nature of the enemy, the importance of cattle as booty, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Horace et les Curiaes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), pp. 89–140, and *Destiny of the Warrior*, pp. 12–28.

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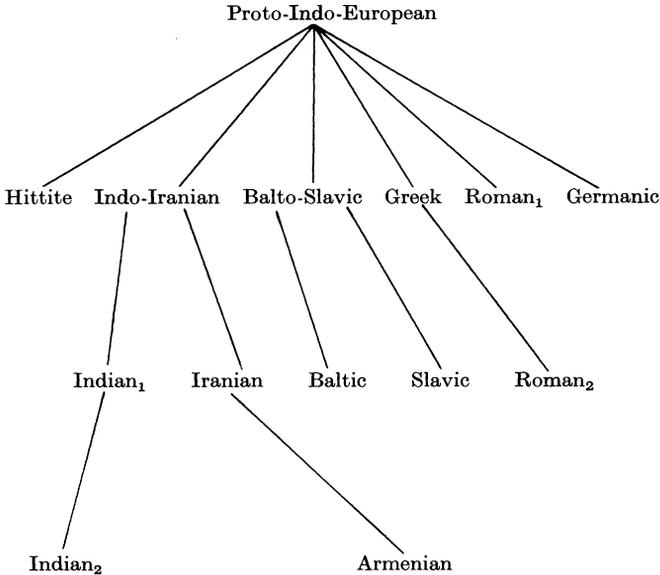


FIG. 1.—Variants of the myth. Indian<sub>1</sub> = original version, Trita and Viśvarūpa; Indian<sub>2</sub> = remodeled version, Indra and Vṛtra; Roman<sub>1</sub> = independent version, Horatius and the Curiatii; Roman<sub>2</sub> = dependent version, Hercules and Cacus.

reconstruction of the original. Finally, the later Indian developments, in which the combat of Indra and Vṛtra was modeled on that of Trita and Ahi (or Viśvarūpa),<sup>17</sup> do not really provide us with much in the way of new material. Thus we will focus on the remaining versions: Indian (Trita and Viśvarūpa/Ahi), Iranian (Thraētaona and Aži Dahāka), Armenian (Vahagn and the dragon), Greek (Herakles and Geryon), dependent Roman (Hercules and Cacus), and Germanic (iconographic only). The Indian and Iranian texts provide a convenient starting point:

RG VEDA 10.8.8–9

Āptya, knowing the ancestral weapons and impelled by Indra, did battle.

Having killed the three-headed, seven-bridled one, Trita drove off the cattle of Tvaṣṭr's own son.

The mighty lord Indra struck down the conceited one who had sought great power.

Driving forth the cattle of Viśvarūpa, Tvaṣṭr's own son, he ripped off those three heads.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the secondary nature of Indra-Vṛtra, see the classic treatment of Emile Benveniste and Louis Renou, *Vṛtra et Vṛtragna* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1934), esp. pp. 93–94.

<sup>18</sup> sā pitṛyāny āyudhāni vidvān indreṣita āptyó abhy āyudhyat /  
triśīrśānam saptāraśmim jaghanvān tvāṣṭrāśya cin niḥ sasṛje tritó gāḥ //  
bhūrid indra udinaksantam ójó 'vābhinat sátpatir mányamānam /  
tvāṣṭrāśya cid viśvārūpasya gónām ācakraṇás triṇi śīrśá párá vark //.

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YAŠT 15.23-24

Thraētaona, the son of the house of Athwya, of the heroic house, sacrificed to him [i.e., Vayu] in four-cornered Varana, on a golden chair, on a golden pillow, on a golden rug. He strewed the sacred twigs from cupped hands streaming [libations].

He asked: "Grant success to me, O Vayu, whose deeds are the highest, that I might be victorious over Aži Dahāka, the three-mawed, three-skulled, six-robed, strong daēvic lie possessed of a thousand powers, the evil betrayer of mankind, who is the strongest lie created by Anra Mainyu [the Evil Spirit] against the material world and to destroy the world of Aša [Right]. And may I carry off his two women [*vantā*], Savaṅhavač and Arənavāč, who raised themselves up with the most beautiful bodies for the world, who are the most excellent."<sup>19</sup>

Both of these texts describe the slaying of a three-headed monster. Moreover, the name of the hero in both cases is the same, for the Indian Trita Āptya corresponds perfectly to the Avestan Thraētaona Āthwya. Their first names, while not identical, are closely related, Thraētaona being a patronymic from Avestan *Thrita*, which is a perfect match for Sanskrit *Trita*, both being derived from P-I-E \**Tri-to-*. This \**Tri-to-* has further reflexes: Greek *Τρίτος*, Old Norse *þridi*, Albanian *tretë*, Latin *tertius*, Welsh *trydydd*, Old High German *dritto*, and so forth, and means literally "third."<sup>20</sup> The second name, \*Āptya, seems simply to be the name of a family of Indo-Iranian heroes<sup>21</sup> and, contrary to the

<sup>19</sup> tēm yazata višō puθrō āθwyanōiš višō sūrayā θraētaonō upa varənem čaθru.gaošəm zaranaēne paiti gātvō zaranaēne paiti fraspāiti zaranaēne paiti upastarəne frastarētāt paiti barəsmān pərənaēibyō paiti yžarayatybō. aom jaidyaṭ avat āyaptəm dazdi me vayo yō uparō.kairyō yaṭ bavāni aiwi.vanyā azīm dahākəm θrizafanəm θrikamərəðəm xšvašašīm hazarə.yaoxštīm ašaojəṅham daēvim druḅəm aḅəm gaēθavyō drvantəm yaṃ ašaojastəmam druḅəm frača kərəntaṭ aḅrō mainyuš avi yaṃ astvaitīm gaēθām mahrkāi ašahe gaēθanəm. uta he vantā azāni savaṅhavača arənavāča yōi həm kəhrpa sraēšta zazāitōe gaēθyāiča yōi abdōtəme. Translation of the last phrase following Karl Hoffmann, "Jungwestisch zazaite," *Munchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 4 (1954): 45-52.

<sup>20</sup> Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1969), p. 1091; Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1956), 1: 534-35; Hermann Güntert, *Der arische Weltkönig und Heiland* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1923), p. 31; Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, p. 14; Walther Wüst, "Trita und Verwandtes," *Wörter und Sachen* 3 (1940): 225-27. Kasten Rönnow, *Trita Āptya, eine vedische Gottheit* (Uppsala: Appelberg, 1927) attempted to show a relation to Greek *ῥίτων*, both being water deities, but the long *-i-* of *ῥίτων* makes this impossible (see Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1960], 2: 933-34). The line of argument suggested by Jacob Wackernagel, "Akzentstudien I," *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Göttingen, Philosophisch-Historisch Klasse* (1909), pp. 60-61, n., accepted by Herman Lommel, "Naotara und Spitāma," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 53 (1935): 183, and Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "Aw. θraētaona-," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 54 (1936): 205, is labored and unnecessary.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1902), 3: 341-43. This remains the most probable explanation, though not the most widely accepted. In any event, there are no further Indo-European correspondences, and the problem involves only interpretation of material specific to the Indo-Iranian context.

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generally accepted opinion, has nothing whatever to do with water, as Bartholomae and Wackernagel have convincingly demonstrated.<sup>22</sup>

The only mutation which needs to be accounted for, then, is the shift from Indo-Iranian \*Trita- to Avestan Thraētaona, "Son of Thrīta." Why should we have this slip in generations? The answer seems to be found in the Iranian ideology of the making of a hero. To judge from certain Avestan texts, most particularly Yasna 9, heroism was something of a two-generation affair for the Iranians. It is part of a cycle bound up with the reformed haoma sacrifice, whereby if a father wishes heroic sons he prepares the intoxicating haoma according to ritual, offers some to the gods, and drinks some himself. Once within his body, it descends to the genitals where it is distilled into semen, and this, when transmitted to a son, develops into the *x'arənah*, the radiant nimbus enveloping heroes and kings.<sup>23</sup> This complex theory is a specifically Iranian piece of speculation, and in India one who prepares and drinks the soma (= haoma, both being derived from I-I \**sauma*- "pressed drink") is himself gifted with heroic properties without having to wait a generation.<sup>24</sup> Now Trita and Thrīta are both known as preparers of \**sauma*, as in RV 8.12.16, 1.187.1, or Yasna 9.10, and it thus seems likely that in the original Indo-Iranian version \*Trita prepared and drank the \**sauma* himself, thus taking on heroic powers. The development whereby Thrīta → Thraētaona is a later development, and the Avestan Thrīta and Thraētaona can both be understood as reflexes of an I-I \*Trita.

It should be noted that this \*Trita was a mythic personage and a great hero, but certainly was not a god. There is no evidence on the Iranian side for divine status,<sup>25</sup> and the majority of the

<sup>22</sup> Christian Bartholomae, *Arische Forschungen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1882), 1:8 n. & f., and "Arica I," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 1 (1892): 180-82; Wackernagel, p. 61 n., and a note contributed to Hanns Oertel, *The Syntax of Cases in the Narrative and Descriptive Prose of the Brāhmaṇas* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1926), p. 328.

<sup>23</sup> Thus, in Yasna 9, each of the first four men to prepare Haoma are themselves not heroes but are blessed with heroic sons: Vivanphant with Yima, Aθwya with Thraētaona, Thrīta with Kərəsāspa, and Pouruśaspa with Zarathuštra. All of the fathers prepare Haoma and all of the sons bear the *x'arənah*. On the nature of *x'arənah* and its relation to mystic physiology, see J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Le X'arənah," *Annali Istituto di Napoli, sezione linguistica* 5 (1963): 25-26, and, in a broader context, Mircea Eliade, "Spirit, Light and Seed," *History of Religions* 11 (1971): 1-30.

<sup>24</sup> As, for instance, in the famous hymn of the man drunk with soma, RV 10.119.

<sup>25</sup> Roth, pp. 220-21, 225. His reporting of the evidence is perfect, but he came to the mistaken conclusion that Trita was originally a god who sank to human status in Iran while retaining his original form in India.

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forty-odd occurrences in the Ṛg Veda show him to be human<sup>26</sup>—in contact with the gods and aided by them, but no god himself—thus, for example, ṚV 5.86.1, 10.48.2, 2.11.19, 9.34.4, 2.34.14, 10.64.3, 8.52.1, and so forth. Those verses where he does occasionally appear as a god, such as ṚV 5.41.4 and 8.41.6, are either the result of independent Indian elevation of the hero or, perhaps even a second Trita.<sup>27</sup> Originally, though, like \*Manu and \*Yemo with whom he is often grouped,<sup>28</sup> \*Trito was one of the first men in myth whose actions helped to shape the world and continue to serve as a prototype for men of the present day.

Given the Indo-Iranian correspondence, plus the other I-E correspondences which we will take up below, numerous scholars have been inclined to treat the Indian Trita as the original figure of the serpent- or dragon-slaying myth, seeing Indra—who often plays the role of dragon slayer—as a late intruder into the cycle.<sup>29</sup> In their opinion, in the earliest versions of the myth it is Trita and \*Trita alone who slays the monster, Indra taking this role only in later versions. Those versions in which the two appear together as in the text we have cited are seen as cases of incomplete dominance, composed before Indra had completely overshadowed his forerunner. This theory, however, does not seem to be supported by the evidence. Rather than a gradual process of eclipse, there is a consistent relation of assistance and dependence between Indra and Trita. In the text under consideration, both figures are credited with having killed the enemy, and Trita

<sup>26</sup> Hillebrandt, p. 344; Herman Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1894), pp. 143–44. Others have had varying opinions, and attempts have frequently been made to identify Trita with a god. Thus, Abel Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1963), 1:328–9, identified him with Apām Napāt; A. A. Macdonell, “Mythological Studies in the Rigveda: The god Trita,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1893), pp. 419–96, and Murray Fowler, “Trita Soter,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 67 (1947): 59–60, saw him as Agni; Edward Delavan Perry, “Indra in the Rig-Veda,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 11 (1885): 142–48, and Roth saw him as a storm god; Rönnow saw him as a water god; L. D. Barnett, “The Genius: A Study in Indo-European Psychology,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1929): 740–41, saw him as the father of the Maruts. The very diversity of opinion might indicate the mistaken nature of the quest.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Spiegel, *Arische Periode und ihre Zustände* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1887), pp. 268–69, suggested this, and the appearance of a Trita *Vaiḥhūvasa* in ṚV 10.46.3, in contrast our Trita *Āptya*, lends credence to the suggestion.

<sup>28</sup> See ṚV 10.64.3, 1.163.2–3, 8.52.1. In Iran, see Yasna 9.3–13 and Yašt 19.36.

<sup>29</sup> Thus: Jarl Charpentier, *Kleine Beiträge zur indoiranischen Mythologie* (Uppsala: Akademische Buchdruckerei, 1911), p. 56; A. B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1925), pp. 127–28; Oldenberg, p. 143; Perry, p. 144; Leopold von Schroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus in Rigveda* (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1908), p. 132; R. N. Dandekar, “Vṛtrahā Indra,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute* 31 (1950): 10–11.

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is explicitly said to be "impelled by Indra" (*indreṣita*), being similarly aided by him in RV 10.48.2, 5.86.1, and 2.11.19. Trita, in turn, gives soma to Indra (RV 9.34.4, 9.86.20) and is said to drink the intoxicating brew alongside the god in RV 8.12.16. All in all, their relation might be explained as an exchange of strength, whereby the warrior hero offers sacrifice of \**sauma* to the warrior god. This drink strengthens the latter and allows him to bring strength and assistance to the hero in return. Given this, we are led to see both Trita and Indra as originally present in the Indian version of the myth, Trita appearing as the hero who slew the monster and Indra as the god who aided in the exploit.

The Iranian evidence is somewhat inconclusive on this point. In the text cited above, Thraētaona calls on the god Vayu for help, and in parallel passages elsewhere he similarly calls on Ardvi Sūra Anāhita (Yt. 5.33–34), Drvāspa (Yt. 9.13–14), and Aši Vaṅuhi (Yt. 17.33–34). Clearly the hero was aided by a deity in Iran also, the only question being which one was original. Given the changes which the reform of Zarathuštra effected in the status of \*Vrtraghna \*Indra,<sup>30</sup> I am led to hypothesize that this old Indo-Iranian warrior god originally played this role, and that only after his demotion at the prophet's hands did other deities rush in to fill the vacuum.<sup>31</sup> But we need not content ourselves with hypothesis, for there is another text that allows us certainty on this point.

### MOSES OF CHORENE "HISTORY OF ARMENIA" 1. 31

His [Tigran's] sons were Bab, Tiran, Vahagn: of this latter, the fables tell: "Heaven and earth were in travail, the purple sea was in travail; a red reed had its birth in the seas, from the stems of the reed came forth smoke, from the stems of the reed came forth a flame, and from the flame sprang a young man; this youth had fiery hair, also a beard of flame, and his eyes were suns." All sing of this one, I have heard it with my own ears; they thus recount in song along with cymbals, his battle with the dragon and his victory, and they sing of him in every way as of the heroic deeds of Hercules.<sup>32</sup>

The first point which we must note is, as has long been known, the name *Vahagn* is a loan word into Armenian and is derived

<sup>30</sup> Following Benveniste-Renou, I take \*Vrtraghna to be the original name of the Indo-Iranian warrior god. But, as the name Indra appears in Avestan (Vendidad 10.9 and 19.43) as well as Sanskrit, this must also be accepted as an I-I epithet of the god.

<sup>31</sup> As argued by Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965), p. 18; R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 89; Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, pp. 116–17.

<sup>32</sup> Translation following the German of M. Lauer, *Der Moses von Chorene Geschichte Gross Armeniens* (Regensburg: Georg Mainz, 1869), p. 52.

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from Avestan *Vərəθraγna* (= Skt. *Vṛtrahan*).<sup>33</sup> The story of his birth from a flaming reed has been connected with an Indian *itihāsa* tradition telling of the reenergizing of Indra.<sup>34</sup> Thus we are virtually certain that Vahagn is a dependent variant of the Indo-Iranian warrior god, who was known as both \*Vṛtraghna, “smasher of resistance,”<sup>35</sup> and \*Indra, “the manly, the strong.”<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, his role as a dragon slayer in this text has frequently aroused the interest of scholars.<sup>37</sup> Two other details should be noted as well. First, Vahagn is set in a distinctly human genealogy, descended from a king and having two human brothers. He is compared with a hero, Hercules, and not to a god.<sup>38</sup> Thus, despite his bearing a name derived from that of the warrior god, Vahagn is a mortal. Second, Vahagn is the third child born to Tigran. The other two play no roles of any importance and seem to have been added simply to preserve Vahagn’s position as third in line.<sup>39</sup> So he seems to represent not only the god \*Vṛtraghna, but also the hero \*Trito, “Third,” the roles of god and hero who originally cooperated in the dragon slaying having fused into one figure, a hero who bears the name of the god.

In the Armenian version, however, the myth is given in a most abbreviated form. As a result, \*Trito’s enemy has lost much of the specificity he had in the Indian and Iranian versions. There, in the first place, he is described as a serpent, Avestan *aži*, Sanskrit *ahi* (see RV 10.48.2), both of which are derived from P-I-E \**ǵhwi-*, “serpent,” of which Latin *anguis*, Lithuanian *angis*, Armenian *avj*, Greek *ὄφις*, and Middle Irish *esc-ung*, “eel” (lit.

<sup>33</sup> Benveniste-Renou, p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> Dumézil, “Vahagn,” pp. 152–70.

<sup>35</sup> Benveniste-Renou, pp. 19–22.

<sup>36</sup> On the etymology of the name Indra, now see H. W. Bailey, “The Second Stratum of the Indo-Iranian Gods,” in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. John R. Hinnells, 2 vols. (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1975), 1: 9–11 and n., which serves to vindicate the view of H. Jacobi, “Über Indra,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 31 (1892): 316–19.

<sup>37</sup> Thus Lommel (pp. 51–53), Zaehner (p. 103), and others have insisted that since Vahagn was said to be a dragon slayer, the Iranian *Vərəθraγna* must have played this role. In anticipation of their line of argument, Benveniste (*Vṛtra et Vṛtraghna*, pp. 75 ff.) was led to make some very ill-founded remarks, attempting to derive Vahagn from Herakles in his deeds and *Vərəθraγna* in his name.

<sup>38</sup> There is still further identification of Herakles and the I-I \*Trita in other sources. Thus, in relating Scythian legends, Herodotus 4. 8–10 places Herakles in the role of Feridūn (< Thraētaona) in the story of the initiation of his three sons. For the Middle Persian version, see Reuben Levy, trans., *The Epic of the Kings: Shah-nāmā* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 26–27.

<sup>39</sup> For similar transformations, note that the three-headed Geryon is turned into three brothers in Diodorus Siculus 4. 17. 2, and that the hero \*Trito becomes the last of the three Horatii brothers in Livy 1. 25–26. On this latter, see Dumézil, *Horace et les Curiaces*, pp. 89–140, or *Destiny of the Warrior*, pp. 12–28.

## *Indo-European Cattle-raiding Myth*

“serpent of the waters”) are also reflexes.<sup>40</sup> Second, this serpent is said to be three headed, Avestan *θri-kamərədəm*, Sanskrit *tri-śīrṣānaṃ*. Finally, this three-headed serpent is further marked as a \**dāsa*-, an aboriginal inhabitant who is inimical to the Indo-European invaders. The Iranian Aži Dahāka carries this in his name, the *-ka* apparently being a prejorative suffix,<sup>41</sup> while Viśvarūpa is described as a *dāsa* in RV 10.99.6 and 1.158.4.

One element is completely lacking in the Armenian version, and in my opinion it is a crucial one: the booty won in the encounter. Moreover, our Indian and Iranian sources leave some ambiguity on this point, for while the Indian story of Trita’s victory states that cattle were the plunder,<sup>42</sup> the Iranian version tells how two women previously taken from Yima by Aži Dahāka were won back by Thraētaona.<sup>43</sup> Given this set of facts, some scholars have been led to see both “cattle” and “women” as symbolic forms referring back to natural phenomena, specifically the storm or the seasonal freeing of the waters.<sup>44</sup> The myth is taken as if allegory, \*Vṛtraghna and \*Trita being identified with the storm, \*Aghi (the I-I form < I-E \**ng<sup>whi</sup>*-) with the clouds, and the cows or women with the rain. While the myth may have taken on this allegorical coloring in some variants under the impact of later Indian speculative thought,<sup>45</sup> it is doubtful that this is the original meaning. Rather, the alternation between cows and women can be explained in quite another fashion.

In order to appreciate this, it is instructive to look at the specific term used to describe the women won by Thraētaona,

<sup>40</sup> Pokorny, pp. 43–44, with modification of the initial vocalism.

<sup>41</sup> On *dāsa*, see Mayrhofer, 1:28–29. 38 f.; Emile Benveniste, *Vocabulaire des institutions Indo-Européens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 1:369. The *-ka* suffix in *Dahāka* seems analogous to that in the Sanskrit demon of the Puranas, *Dhenu-ka*, “Little (evil) cow.”

<sup>42</sup> RV 10.48.2, 10.8.8. While other booty does appear in the stories of Indra’s various combats, Trita never wins anything other than cattle. Even with regard to these later stories of Indra’s exploits, the winning of cattle is a consistent and pervasive feature, as Venkantasubbiah has shown.

<sup>43</sup> See the analysis of James Darmesteter, *Le Zend Avesta* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1960), 1:xlvi–xlvihi.

<sup>44</sup> Macdonnell, p. 467 et passim; Perry, p. 144; Roth, pp. 223–24; von Schroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus*, pp. 132 ff., and *Herakles und Indra*, pp. 57–67; Bréal, pp. 1–162; Widengren, pp. 41–42.

<sup>45</sup> Yāskā, *Nirukta* 2.6, states that in his time there were already two schools of thought as to the identity of Vṛtra in the Indra-Vṛtra myth: some held him to be a demon, others, a cloud. Sāyana, following the latter, consistently interpreted the “cows” won in the battle as rain, and it is largely due to the early Western overreliance on Sāyana for interpretation of the Veda that this notion of the storm allegory came to such prominence in the work of the “comparative mythology” school. As these speculations are not found outside of India, though, we may be certain that they are the product of the Indian speculative genius, and do not ascend to the I-I or I-E period.

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Avestan *vantā*. Bartholomae, following Darmesteter's line of investigation, glossed this word as "die Geliebte, Frau."<sup>46</sup> But when one analyzes the word, it is clear that it is nothing more than a feminine form of a past passive participle of the verb  $\sqrt{van-}$  "to wish for, desire," as Bartholomae himself noted.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in reality it means no more than "the female who is desired." Such a term could surely apply to bovines as well as to humans under certain circumstances.

A similar term is Indo-Iranian \**dhainu-* (Skt. *dhenu-* = Av. *daēnu-*), one of the most frequent terms for "cow." Yet, as Benveniste has shown, the word means nothing more than "one who lactates, gives milk," being derived from the verb "to give milk, nourish" (Skt.  $\sqrt{dhai-}$ ).<sup>48</sup> As such, it may be used for the female of any species, *Homo sapiens* included,<sup>49</sup> and in a very important verse from the Ṛg Veda (5.30.9) the parallel term *dhenā*, usually rendered "cows," is used to describe two women who have been captured by Dāsa enemies.<sup>50</sup>

The Iranian version of the myth has been well worked over, as is clear in our text. In general, a historicizing tendency is obvious, as the struggle between hero and serpent has become a dynastic dispute, the monster having become a human—albeit three-headed—usurper.<sup>51</sup> It seems highly probable, then, that the ambiguity of the Avestan words *vantā* and *daēnu* allowed for a rationalization whereby a myth of cattle raiding became the myth of recovering abducted queens.

Such a formulation finds support in the Greco-Roman versions of the myth. These variants and their relation to the Indian Indra-Trita lore were among the first texts to be dealt with by the nineteenth-century Indo-Europeanists of the "Comparative Mythology" school. Often the texts were abused, and nature allegory was imposed on every detail.<sup>52</sup> As a result of this and

<sup>46</sup> Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961), col. 1355.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, note.

<sup>48</sup> Benveniste, *Vocabulaire*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Widengren, pp. 46–47, has called attention to this text, though for a very different purpose.

<sup>51</sup> Thraētaona's constant motive is to throw out Aži, who is variously seen as a Dacian or Turanian, and to restore the proper Iranian rule that ended with Yima's fall. He thus becomes the national Iranian hero par excellence, while Zohāk (< Aži Dahāka) is remodeled to fit changing historical situations, becoming an Arab in the *Shāh-nāmeḥ* (see Levy, p. 12).

<sup>52</sup> Von Schroeder, *Herakles und Indra*, pp. 57–67, is perhaps the best example of such Procrustean interpretation.

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Dumézil's striking demonstration that quite an unexpected Roman source contained an independent and very different reflex of the myth,<sup>53</sup> these versions which had been recognized earlier fell into disuse, though the validity of their comparison with Indian and Iranian traditions has never been soundly challenged. They are extremely important for our case, since they have clearly and unambiguously preserved the fact that in the mythic encounter between a hero and a three-headed monster cattle were the prize that was sought and won by the hero.

### HESIOD "THEOGONY" 11. 287-94

And Khrysaor begat the three-headed Geryon,  
Being married to Kallirhoe, the daughter of famed Okeanos.  
Now the force of Herakles killed him  
Beside the shuffling cattle in sea-girt Erytheia  
On that very day when he drove the broad-faced cattle  
To holy Tirynth, having passed over the ford of Okeanos,  
And having killed Orthos and the cow-herd Eurytion  
In the gloomy herdsman's house beyond famed Okeanos.<sup>54</sup>

### PROPERTIUS "ELEGIES" 4. 9. 1-20

In that season when Amphitryon's son bore off  
The young oxen from your stalls, O Erythea,  
He came to the Palatine hill which is unconquered by man,  
And himself being weary, he set down his weary cattle  
Where Velabrum overflows its stream and where  
The seaman sails through urban waters.  
But they did not remain safe with Cacus, an unfaithful  
Host: that one defiled Jove with theft.  
Cacus was a native-dweller [*incola*], a robber from a dreaded  
cave,  
Who uttered sounds through three separate mouths [*tria  
partitos . . . ora*],  
This one, in order that there would not be any sure clues  
giving signs of the robbery,  
Dragged the cattle backward by the tail into his cave  
But not without witness by the god: the young oxen betrayed  
the thief with their sounds,  
And wrath pulled down the rough doors of the thief.  
Cacus lay dead, struck three times by the Maenalian bough,  
And Alcides spoke thus: "Go, you cattle,

<sup>53</sup> Dumézil, *Horace et les Curiaces*.

<sup>54</sup> Χρυσάωρ δ' ἔτεκεν τρικέφαλον Γηρυονῆα  
μειχθεῖς καλλιρῶη κόυρη κλυτοῦ Ὠκεανοῖο·  
τὸν μὲν ἄρ' ἐξενάρϊξε βίη Ἡρακλεΐη  
βοῦσι παρ' εἰλιπόδεσσι περιρῦτω εἰν Ἐρυθείη,  
ἤματι τῷ ὅτε περ βοῦς ἤλασεν εὐρυμετώπους  
Τίρυνθ' εἰς ἱερὴν διαβάς πόρον Ὠκεανοῖο,  
Ὅρθον τε κτείνας καὶ βουκόλον Εὐρυτίωνα  
σταθμῶ ἐν ἡρόεντι πέρην κλυτοῦ Ὠκεανοῖο.

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Go, you cattle of Hercules, the last labor of our club!  
Twice sought by me, and twice my booty, you cattle—  
Sanctify the fields and Cattle-place with your long lowing.  
The Forum of noble Rome will be your pasture.”<sup>55</sup>

Now these are not fully independent versions of the myth. The Greek version of Hesiod is apparently independent, but Propertius and the other Romans who told this story all seem to rely on the Greek sources in large measure.<sup>56</sup> The Greek text, while very sparse, does give us some valuable information, especially in this translation. In order to appreciate this it is crucial to note that, contrary to the general opinion since antiquity,<sup>57</sup> Hesiod did not take Herakles to be the slayer of Orthos and Eurytion; rather, this role was allotted to Geryon. The matter hinges on the question of who is the subject of line 291. Grammatically, the verb ἤλασεν has only an implied subject, which may refer back to Geryon (mentioned in the accusative in line 287, and referred to by the pronoun τὸν in line 289) or Herakles (mentioned in the dative in line 289). However, the fact that Herakles occurs only in an oblique case (βίη being the subject of line 289) makes it less likely that he is meant as the subject here. But what to my mind is most persuasive is the presence of the emphatic particle περ in line 291, giving the sense of “on that *very same day*” to the phrase ἤματι τῷ ὅτε περ. If I am right, the motivation behind this phrase is the attempt to show that two

<sup>55</sup>

Amphitryoniades qua tempestate iuvencos  
egerat a stabulis, o Erythrea, tuis,  
venit ad invictos pecorosa Palatia montes,  
et statuit fessos fessus et ipse boves,  
qua Velabra suo stagnabant flumine quaque  
nauta per urbanas velificabat aquas.  
sed non infido manserunt hospite Caco  
incolumes: furto polluit ille Iovem.  
incola Cacus erat, metuendo raptor ab antro,  
per tria partitos qui dabat ora sonos.  
hic, ne certa forent manifestae signa rapinae,  
aversos cauda traxit in antra boves,  
nec sine teste deo: furem sonuere iuveni,  
furis et implacidas diruit ira fores.  
Maenalia iacuit pulsus tria tempora ramo  
Cacus, et Alcides sic ait: “Ite boves,  
Herculis ite boves, nostrae labor ultime clavae,  
bis mihi quaesitae, bis mea praeda, boves,  
arvaeque mugitu sancite Bovaria longo:  
nobile erit Romae pascua vestra Forum.”

<sup>56</sup> Jean Bayet, *Les origines de l'Hercule Romain* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1926), p. 233; Michael Grant, *Roman Myths* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> The story is presented this way in Apollodorus *Mythographus* 2. 5. 10, and most later writers seem to have followed his version without questioning whether he had properly understood Hesiod or not.

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separate actions took place on one and the same day; that is, that on the very day Geryon killed Orthos and Eurytion, making off with their cattle, he himself was killed by Herakles, who appropriated the animals in turn. Grammatically there is no reason to reject this reading. Moreover, it is more in keeping with the I-E background of the myth, for, if it is accepted, it will be seen that (a) Herakles is the third opponent to face Geryon, and (b) Geryon is the original cattle thief, having stolen the animals in an earlier encounter, just as Aži Dahāka stole the two women from Yima before Thraētaona recovered them. We see more of these themes of thirdness and the first theft in the Roman accounts, and there it is even possible to perceive that the original name of the hero in this exploit was not Herakles, but most probably τρίτος, "Third."<sup>58</sup>

Of course Herakles is an extremely complicated figure, and I am by no means claiming to derive him in his entirety from a P-I-E hero named \*Trito. What I do claim is that the original hero of the Geryon slaying bore the name "Third" and is derived from this P-I-E figure. Herakles himself is a separate entity, a hero who for one reason or another became the most popular of the Greek world, in the process subsuming the deeds of many other heroes, deeds which were organized into a very late and artificial cycle of Twelve Deeds.<sup>59</sup>

The Roman Hercules-Cacus story, modeled after Herakles-Geryon, has managed to preserve features that point to the original hero's name, much as Hesiod's account preserves the fact that Herakles was Geryon's third opponent. The sources which lead us to this conclusion are the following:

a) Propertius *Elegies* 4. 9. 15 (cited above): Cacus is specified as being struck with the Maenalian club three times (*tria tempora*).

<sup>58</sup> There are some scattered pieces of evidence from the Greek world which might point to this same conclusion, though none are particularly convincing in and of themselves. Thus, Herakles was commonly called "Herakles of the three nights," *τρίεστερος*, due to the story in which Zeus lay with Alcmena for three nights in order to conceive him (O. Gruppe, "Herakles," in *Paulys Realencyklopadie*, suppl. 3, pp. 1004, 1016); he is occasionally depicted as three-footed on vase paintings (Ernst Curtius, *Herakles der Satyr und Dreifusssrauber, ein griechisches Vasenbild* [Berlin: W. Hertz, 1852]); in a lost comedy, three Herakleses seem to have engaged a triple Geryon in an eating contest (Stephanus Oswiecimski, "De tribus Herculis mimis," *Eos* 44 [1950]: 119-22); and in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, 16.5, there is talk of both a triple (*τριπλοῦν*) and a third (*τρίτον!*) Herakles. It is worth noting that all of these pieces of evidence come from comic sources, and it may be that the tradition of Herakles as "Third" was better preserved in this type of literature due to the opportunity for punning and farcical representation which it provided.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard Schweitzer, *Herakles* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), p. 146. For an intriguing view of the crystallization of the figure of Herakles, see Paul Kretschmer, "Mythische Namen: Herakles," *Glotta* 8 (1916): 121-29.

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b) Ovid *Fasti* 1. 575: Hercules' club, with which he kills Cacus, is said to be three-noded (*trinodis*).

c) Vergil *Aeneid* 8. 230 ff.: Having located Cacus's cave, Hercules runs around the mountain three times (*ter . . . lustrat*), batters the door three times (*ter . . . temptat*), and sits down to rest three times (*ter . . . resedit*) before finally breaking in.

In each of these versions, the number three comes into play, and in each it is in a different fashion. Ovid, Vergil, and Propertius are not quoting from each other or from some common source, yet each seems intent on introducing this numerical detail into the story. Further, in each case the detail can be taken as expressing the fact that it was the third of some sort of series (blow, node, circumambulation, or rush at the door) which caused the monster's death. Each author in his own way has preserved the fact that it was the "Third" which killed the beast.

Numerous other features from the Greco-Roman texts show resemblance to the versions we have already treated. The hero's enemy is a tricephal (*τρικέφαλος*; *tria partitos . . . ora*), and his serpentine nature can be discerned in Geryon's genealogy, his paternal grandmother being Medusa, the serpent-haired Gorgon.<sup>60</sup> Cacus, like Aži Dahāka and Viśvarūpa, is identified as a non-Indo-European aborigine (*incola*), hostile to Greek and Roman alike.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, we are told that Cacus first stole the cattle which rightfully belonged to Hercules: the latter's acts were only justified revenge, a situation corresponding to the facts of the Iranian and the Greek version, where the non-Indo-European is the original aggressor.

A split is evident between the Indo-Iranian versions of the myth and the Greco-Roman ones with regard to the role of a warrior god and libation ritual. For the Indo-Iranians, the help of \*Vṛtraghna \*Indra was invaluable in securing victory for \*Trito, and the hero was careful to pour a \*Sauma libation before the battle, strengthening the god that he might strengthen him. Yet, in the Greco-Roman versions, the hero acts alone and needs no help from a divine figure.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this seems to be a common

<sup>60</sup> Hesiod *Theogony* 1. 280–81.

<sup>61</sup> Bayet, pp. 208–14. Also note the argument of H. J. Rose, "Chthonian Cattle," *Numen* 1 (1954): 213–27, who saw in the Herakles-Geryon myth and in related tales, a myth told by the non-Indo-Europeans to account for the I-E invaders possession of cattle.

<sup>62</sup> It is possible that the god and the hero have merged in one figure, the demigod Herakles, as they have in the Armenian Vahagn. Yet the name indicates that Herakles was originally a mortal, as no other figure in the entire Greek pantheon has a name formed from that of another deity, as is \**Ἡρα-κλεΐης* "Glory of Hera" (H. J. Rose, "Herakles," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 498).

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European state of affairs, for the Germanic version likewise preserves no god.

This version, which to the best of my knowledge has never been recognized heretofore, is found in a relief on the golden horn of Gallehus, dated from the fifth century A.D. In figure 2 taken from this relief, a three-headed man carrying an axe or hammer in his right hand leads a horned animal (a goat?) with his left. At his side, three serpents lie dead (fig. 2). As always, interpretation of an iconographic representation presents many difficulties. The tri-cephal with the axe may be the hero \*Trito (I lean toward this interpretation) or he may be a doublet of the three serpents. One cannot be sure. But what is certain beyond any doubt is that this is an independent German reflex of our myth, containing the themes of triplicity, serpent enemies, and the taking of livestock by force.

We are thus led to reconstruct a myth in which an Indo-European hero whose name was \*Trito, "Third," suffered at the hands of a monstrous figure, a three-headed serpent who was explicitly identified with the aboriginals of the area in which the myth was told. In the first encounter, this serpent stole some cattle belonging to the hero or to someone close to him, but in a second meeting (when—according to the Indo-Iranian version—the hero was aided by a warrior god and fortified by an intoxicating drink) he defeated the monster and recovered the cattle. The elements which have contributed to this reconstruction are laid out in tables 1 and 2.

We are left with the question of what such a myth can mean. Scholars have often interpreted these texts as allegories of the storm<sup>63</sup> or of victory over the powers of death.<sup>64</sup> One might also be tempted to offer a reading of the myth that sees it as a conflict of cosmic realms, the hero coming from above and the serpent from below.<sup>65</sup> Psychological explanations have also been attempted.<sup>66</sup> Yet, in my opinion, such interpretations fail to take

<sup>63</sup> Thus Bréal, Schroeder, Macdonnell, etc.

<sup>64</sup> Fontenrose; Schweitzer, pp. 87, 121.

<sup>65</sup> The main problem with such a view is that there are no qualities which point toward a celestial identification for the hero. The conflict of eagle and serpent, well known among the Indo-Europeans, does have such a significance (see David M. Knipe, "The Heroic Theft: Myths from Rgveda IV and the Ancient Near East," *History of Religions* 6 [1967]: 328-60).

<sup>66</sup> For a Freudian view, see Geza Roheim, "The Dragon and the Hero," *American Imago* 1 (1940): 40-69; for Jungian, Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 152 ff., or Jung himself, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 365-75.

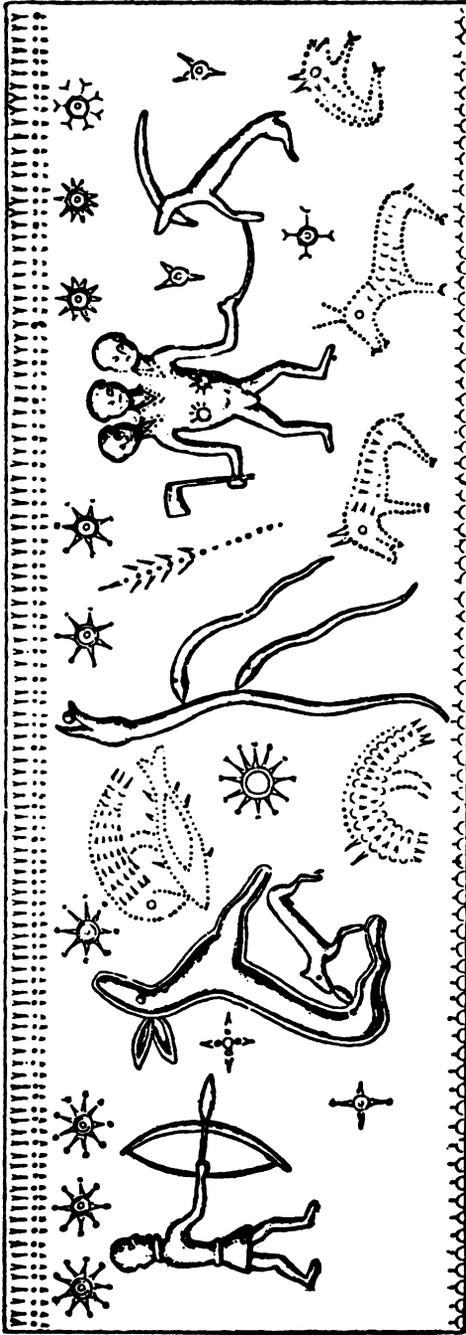


FIG. 2.—Stamped design from the Golden Horn of Gallehus (fifth century A.D.). Original in the Königliche Kunstkammer, Copenhagen.

TABLE I  
CORRESPONDENCES

P-I-E	Indic	Iranian	Armenian	Greek	Romanz	Germanic
Hero *Trito.....	Trita	Thraētaona	Vahagn	Herakles	Hercules	Man with axe (?)
Deity .....	Indra	Vayu et al.	(Vahegn)	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted
Enemy .....	Viśvarūpa	Aži Dahāka	Dragon	Geryon	Cacus	Three serpents
Three-headed .....	Tri-sīrṣānam	θri-kamerodem	Omitted	τρι-κεφάλος	Tripartitos . . . ora	Three figures
Serpent *Ņg <sup>w</sup> hi.....	Ahi	Aži	Omitted	Medusa's grandson	Omitted	Serpents
Aborigine.....	Dāsa	Dahāka	Omitted	Omitted	incola	Omitted
First encounter.....	Omitted	Stole women and realm from Yīna	Omitted	Stole cattle from Orthos and Eurytion	Stole cattle from Herakles	Omitted
Ritual intoxicant .....	Soma	(Haoma) libation	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted
Booty .....	Cattle	Women and realm	Omitted	Cattle	Cattle	Horned animal

TABLE 2  
TRANSFORMATIONS

	Indic <sub>1</sub>	Iranian	Armenian	Greek	Roman <sub>2</sub>	Germanic
Main tendency of text . . .	Mythic	Historicized	Antiquarian	Genealogic	Nationalistic	Iconographic
Specific transformations:						
Hero . . . . .	Clear	Historicized, shifts generation	Fused with deity	Absorbed by dominant Geek hero	Borrowed from Greeks	Becomes tricephal (?)
God (I-I only) . . . . .	Clear	Others substituted when dropped from pantheon	Fused with hero	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted
Enemy . . . . .	Clear	Historicized	Loses specificity	Serpent nature shifts generation	Serpent nature lost	Becomes three separate serpents
First encounter . . . . .	Omitted	Historicized	Omitted	Clear	Clear	Omitted
Intoxicant (I-I only) . .	Clear	Clear	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted
Booty . . . . .	Clear	Historicized	Omitted	Clear	Clear	Species shifts

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account of the content of the myth as we have reconstructed it, and the true task of interpretation is to account for the given data.

As we have seen, the Indo-European \*Trito myth contains two major elements. It is simultaneously a myth of the slaying of a monster and a myth of the first cattle raid. With regard to the former theme, I have tried to emphasize the explicit identification of the monster as an outsider, a non-Indo-European, a thief and a usurper. Moreover, his serpentine form marks him as being in close connection with the earth. He is the aborigine, uncivilized and bound to his land, who opposes the I-E invader and meets defeat at his hands. His three heads may be yet another way of marking his foreign status, for, as Willibald Kirfel has demonstrated in his work of sweeping scope, *Die Dreiköpfige Gottheit*,<sup>67</sup> the three-headed god is a major figure in the pantheon of pre-Indo-European peoples in India and the Mediterranean but never figured in that of the Indo-Europeans themselves. The description of the tricephal's defeat is thus the description of the Indo-European victory.<sup>68</sup>

There is, moreover, an initiatory significance to this myth, as in so many other myths of monster slaying,<sup>69</sup> for the initiation of Indo-European warriors seems to have often involved a combat with a mock monster of triple form, as Dumézil argued early in his career.<sup>70</sup> In conquering this monster, the young warrior repeats the events of primordial times which are related in our myth. He becomes again \*Trito, the first I-E warrior, and he assimilates himself to the entire I-E onslaught that overthrew aboriginal opponents in every corner.

The cattle-raiding aspect of the myth may be understood in similar ways. In order to do so, we must again note the enormous importance of cattle to the Indo-Europeans. Cattle were the very basis of the I-E economy, forming the essential measure of wealth and means of exchange. The animals supplied milk and meat, the main elements of the food supply; hides for clothing, blankets, bags, and shields; bones for tools; dung for fuel; and urine for

<sup>67</sup> Willibald Kirfel, *Die Dreiköpfige Gottheit* (Bonn: Ferdinand Dummler, 1948), pp. 35-37, 83-84, 181-86.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> On heroic initiation in general, see Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 81-87. Note also the important example of the Ngakola cult among the Mandja and the Banda cited in his *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 204-5.

<sup>70</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Mythes et dieux des Germains* (Paris: Ernest LeRoux, 1939), pp. 92-106.

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disinfectant.<sup>71</sup> They were also crucial to the social order, serving as bridewealth and wergild. Society itself was understood as the collectivity not of only men, but of “men and cattle” or “bipeds and quadrupeds.”<sup>72</sup>

Given this enormous importance of cattle within the socio-economic order, it comes as no surprise that the Indo-Europeans were always interested in preserving the cattle they had and in procuring more. Their prayers are filled with requests for cattle,<sup>73</sup> and cattle raiding seems to have been one of the most important pursuits of the warriors. Certainly their heroic literature is filled with stories of such raids. To name just a few, one could cite the Irish epic *Tain Bó Cualnge*, the “Cattle Raid of Cooley,” and the eleven other Irish stories which bear the title *Tain Bó*;<sup>74</sup> Nestor’s cattle raid (*Iliad* 11. 669–761) and the theft of Helios’s cattle (*Odyssey* 12. 339–96);<sup>75</sup> the Armenian St. George’s annual cattle theft;<sup>76</sup> and the innumerable cattle raids mentioned in the Ṛg Veda (e.g., RV 1.10.6–10; 3.16; 3.31.4–13; 3.53.9–14; 6.60.1–3; even the famous “Battle of the Ten Kings” is seen to be a cattle raid in RV 7.83.1).

The \*Trito myth tells of one such raid: more important, the first such raid. As such, it served as a model or prototype for all subsequent cattle raids. The mythic hero \*Trito established the proper form of the raid for his I-E descendants, and among the Indo-Iranians he established the rites which insure its success: invocation of the warrior god, pouring of libations, and drinking

<sup>71</sup> On the importance of cattle, see Otto Schrader, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*, trans. F. B. Jevons (London: Charles Griffin, 1890), pp. 259, 284–87, 298, and *Die Indogermanen*, ed. H. Krahe (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1935), pp. 23–29; Peter von Bradke, *Über Methode und Ergebnisse der arischen Alterthumswissenschaft* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1890), pp. 163–64; V. Gordon Childe, *The Aryans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 82; Marija Gimbutas, “Proto-Indo-European Culture: The Kurgan Culture during the 5th, 4th and 3rd Millenia B.C.,” in *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans*, ed. George Cardona et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), pp. 157, 161, 190.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wackernagel, “Indoiranica: 9. Zum Dualdvandva,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschungen* 43 (1910): 295–98; E. Benveniste, “Sur quelques dvandvas avestiques,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 8 (1935–37): 405–6.

<sup>73</sup> See, *inter alia*, RV 1.34.15, 3.31.20, 6.35.5; Yasna 4.5, 24.10, 62.10; Iguvine tables VIa 30, VIb 13, VIIa 30. On the Greek *Hekatombe* as a sacrifice which obtains 100 cattle rather than one in which 100 cattle are offered, see Paul Thieme, *Studien zur indogermanischen Wortkunde und Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1952), pp. 62–76; and also note Jaan Puhvel, “The Meaning of Greek *βουκάριος*,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 79 (1964): 7–10.

<sup>74</sup> Weisweiler, pp. 27–29.

<sup>75</sup> On Greek cattle raiding, see Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), pp. 3–7.

<sup>76</sup> Franz Cumont, “St. George and Mithra the Cattle Thief,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 27 (1937): 63–71.

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of intoxicants. In India, numerous texts show warriors identifying themselves with Trita (RV 2.11.19, 9.86.20, 2.34.14, 5.86.1), and the same is true for Iran with regard to Thraētaona (Yt. 19.92–96)<sup>77</sup> and Thrīta, as can be seen from the name of a general of Xerxes recorded in Herodotus 7. 82: *τρίανταίχμης* “Bold (Av. *taxma-*) as Thrīta.”<sup>78</sup> In this regard, the Roman emperor Commodus’s identification of himself with Hercules might not be taken as a sign of insanity, as it usually is, but merely as a re-emergence of the ancient I-E ideology.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, an ethical concern seems to be present in our myth, for it must be noted that \*Trito’s raid was not unprovoked aggression, but followed upon the tricephal’s earlier theft. It is thus justified, for the I-E hero is only taking back that which rightfully belongs to his people. Moreover, he uses open force to regain his stock, in contrast to what must have been regarded as the despicable stealth of the tricephal. The myth is an imperialistic myth, it is true, but even imperialists need their rationalizations.<sup>80</sup>

As I stated at the outset, I feel that this myth of \*Trito, “Third” is to be grouped with that of \*Manu and \*Yemo, “Man” and “Twin.” The Indo-Iranian figures are often grouped together,<sup>81</sup> and in Livy the story of Hercules and Cacus (1. 7. 3–12) follows immediately upon that of Rōmulus and Remus (1. 6. 3–7. 2)—the figures who represent \*Manu and \*Yemo—for no reason that is readily apparent from the immediate context.

While the myth of “Man” and “Twin” seemed to be a myth of the sovereign function, establishing the model for later priests and kings, so this myth of “Third” seems to be a myth of the warrior function, establishing the model for all later men of arms. As yet, I have not been able to locate a myth which relates in a similar fashion to Dumézil’s “Third Function,” but that is not to say that one does not exist. Perhaps it will be discovered at some

<sup>77</sup> See the treatment of this text in Gerhard Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königs-kindes Kyros and Romulus* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hall, 1964), pp. 60–61.

<sup>78</sup> Herman Güntert, *Der arische Weltkönig und Heiland* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1923), p. 29, was the first to recognize the significance and importance of this name.

<sup>79</sup> For another creative use of this old image, see the analysis of Pindar’s first Pythian Ode in Jürgen Trümpf, “Stadtgründung und Drachenkampf,” *Hermes* 86 (1958): 129–57. Again it is a case of a monarch attempting to bolster his reign by identification with the figure of Herakles.

<sup>80</sup> Rose’s argument that the aborigines told this myth to explain their loss of cattle to the I-E’s (see n. 61 above) need not be dismissed on this account, for such a myth could be told by both sides in the conflict. This is the case with the cattle-raiding myth of the Nuer and Dinka (see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940], pp. 125–26).

<sup>81</sup> RV 10.64.3, 1.163,2–3, 8.52.1; Yasna 9.3-13, Yašt 19.36.

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later date, or it may simply be that this “function,” being more disparate and ill-defined than the others as well as lower in rank (I prefer the term “commoners” to his *agriculteurs* or *éleveurs*), may simply lack such a mythical prototype. Only further research will determine the case.

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