

Indo-European Studies 1

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Question 1: Describe several of the factors that define a culture as Indo-European and how those defining factors are useful in understanding that culture. (minimum 300 words)

Indo-European cultures share a number of elements in common. Common cultural elements of particular importance chiefly include language, myths, and values. By far the elements that link Indo-European cultures together in the eyes of the academic community are the elements of language and the presumed parentage they share. Most linguists accept that languages like Gaelic, Sanskrit, Slavic and Italic all developed from Proto-Indo-European. Similarities in the language can be seen in a number of cognates. For example, the modern English word *hundred* would be *cant* in Welsh, *cet* in Old Irish, *centum* in Latin, *hund* in Old English, *hunt* in Old High German, *šimtas* in Lithuanian, *satəm* in Avestan, and *śatám* in Old Indic. Some of these words share enough similar characteristics that linguists are able to extrapolate a hypothetical root word, **k'mtom* which may be very similar to the word used in the original Prot-Indo-European language before these cultures diverged. Generally words will be more likely to shift to softer consonants at the beginning of a word over time. So a word that starts with a hard k sound can eventually be changed to a similar word that starts with a *c*, *s*, *sh* sound instead. In Germanic languages this shift went to an *h* sound instead of a *c*, *s* or *sh*.¹

There also appear to be a number of similarities in the mythology of these cultures, especially in the descriptions, names, and stories surrounding the deities they honored. For example, evidence of shared mythology can be found in the stories involving the slaying of serpents, demons, or dragons by a deity. This includes *Thor* versus *Jörmungandr*² and *Sigurd* versus *Fafnir*³ in Germanic mythos; *Zeus* versus *Typhon*,⁴ *Apollo* versus *Python*,⁵ *Heracles* versus the *Ladon*,⁶ *Perseus* versus the *Gorgon*⁷ and *Bellerophon* versus the *Chimaira*⁸ in Greek mythology; *Indra* versus *Vrtra*⁹ in the Rigveda; *Krishna* versus *Kaliya*¹⁰ in the Bhagavata;

¹ Anthony, David W. The Horse the Wheel and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World. Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2007. 28-29.

² Keary, Charles Francis. Outlines of Primitive Belief Among the Indo-European Races. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882. 471.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fontenrose, Joseph. Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins. New York: Biblo & Tannen Publishers, 1974. 150.

⁵ Keary, Charles Francis. Outlines of Primitive Belief Among the Indo-European Races. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1882. 74.

⁶ Ibid. 73.

⁷ Bulfinch, Thomas. Bulfinch's Mythology. New York: Crown Publishers. 1979. 116.

⁸ Caldwell, Richard S. The Origin of the Gods: A Psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth. New York: Oxford University Press. 1989. 41.

⁹ Oldenberg, Hermann & Shridhar B. Shrotri. The Religion of the Veda. Jawahar Nagar Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1988. 74.

Kərəsāspa versus *Aži Dahāka*¹¹ in Persian mythology, *Perun* versus *Volos*¹² in Slavic mythology; and *Tarhunt* versus *Illuyanka*¹³ of Hittite mythology.

Finally, there also seem to be indications that an ancestral religion existed, which can be detected by reconstructing the names of the deities they honored and comparison of certain cosmological similarities in their mythology. For example, there seems to be a wide-spread belief in a world tree, which would have been an ash in German (*Yggdrasil/Irminsul* in Norse),¹⁴ an oak in Slavic,¹⁵ a hazel in Celtic, and the *Saena* (tree of all seeds) in Iranian.¹⁶ There are also a number of traditions that have a mountain as their world axis (or as part of their world access), including Mount Olympus of the Greeks and Romans,¹⁷ Mount Meru of the Vedics,¹⁸ and *Harā Bərəzaitī* for the Iranians.¹⁹ It seems that even the Iberians may have venerated mountains (and possibly stone pillars) as the axis mundi. Many other Indo-European cultures also seem to have recognized pillars as the cosmic axis or at least as part of the axis mundi; these include the Iberians, the Iranians, and the Vedics.

The shared commonalities between language, culture, mythology, and religious beliefs (cosmology) can give us glimpses into the beliefs of these culture's shared ancestors, the Proto-Indo-Europeans. Moreover, by looking at similar stories in other hearth cultures and comparing them we may be able to shed light on the practices of our own hearth cultures.

Question 2: George Dumézil's theory of tripartition has been central to many modern approaches to Indo-European studies. Outline Dumézil's three social functions in general, and as they appear in one particular Indo-European society. Offer your opinion as to whether you believe Dumézil's claim that tripartition is central to IE cultures. (minimum 300 words)

Georges Dumézil's theory of tripartition, also known as the *function theory* or the *tripartite theory*, is prominent in ADF. However, not all people in ADF agree completely with it nor does ADF seem to have an official position on the topic.

Dumézil's theory divides the Indo-European concept of sovereignty into two separate but complementary parts and the people of Proto-Indo-European cultures into three classes, or "functions." The first "function," the sacerdotal role, was concerned with the maintenance of magico-religious and judicial order; the second "function," the warrior branch, was concerned

¹⁰ Wakeman, Mary K. God's Battle with the Monster. New York: Brill Archive. 12-13.

¹¹ Rose, Carol. Giants, Monsters, and Dragons: An Encyclopedia of Folklore, Legend, and Myth. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001. 33.

¹² Warner, Elizabeth. Russian Myths. Austin: University of Texas Press. 2002. 14.

¹³ Green, Alberto Ravinell Whitney. The Storm-god in the Ancient Near East. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns. 2003. 147.

¹⁴ James, E. O. The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study. New York: Brill. 1966. 160.

¹⁵ Pyman, Avril. A History of Russian Symbolism. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1994. 193.

¹⁶ Stookey, Lorena Laura. Thematic Guide to World Mythology. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group. 2004. 209-210.

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, Rosemary Sheed & John C. Holt. Patterns in Comparative Religion. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1996. 99.

¹⁸ Smith, C. Michael. Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul / Retrieving the Sacred. Victoria: Trafford Publishing. 2007. 50.

¹⁹ Yasht, 12.25. 07 August 2008. <<http://www.avesta.org/ka/yt12sbe.htm>>.

with physical prowess and the protection of the tribe; and the third “function,” the pastoralist division, was responsible for the provision of sustenance and other related activities.^{20, 21} The core of Dumézil’s premise also seems to be that society and the gods were both divided in this way. So, each of the castes had its own god or pantheon of gods whose skills or values correlated with the function of that caste.

I have great reservations in regards to Georges Dumézil’s theory of tripartation. I do not necessarily disagree that the three social functions existed in Indo-European cultures. However, I do disagree with the way these groups of people were interpreted by Dumézil.

I do not necessarily believe that these classes were hereditary. Nor do I believe that these functions were restricted to IE cultures, rather I view them as central to most cultures. I also recognize that the so-called hereditary classes were formed during a time when it was traditional for a child to follow in his father’s footsteps; we still see remnants of this in certain professional (doctors’ and lawyers’) and military families. I also question his belief that each social group had their own pantheon. There just does not seem to be enough evidence to support the division of Indo-European deities into three castes in the same way that Dumézil divided the people of these cultures.

Question 3: Choose one Indo-European culture and describe briefly the influences that have shaped it and distinguish it from other Indo-European derived cultures. Examples include migration, contact with other cultures, changes in religion, language, and political factors. Is there any sense in which this culture can be said to have stopped being an Indo-European culture? (minimum 300 words)

The Avestan (ancient Iranian) culture was once a part of the Indo-Iranian society, which included what we now know as the Vedics. The Indo-Iranians are identified with the Andronovo culture, a group of related Bronze Age cultures that thrived *ca.* 2300–1000 BCE in the west Asiatic steppes and western Siberia.²² Historical linguists estimate that Indo-Iranian languages probably began to diverge by about 2000 BCE,²³ about the same time that the Andronovo culture is credited with the invention of the spoked chariot wheel,²⁴ preceding both the Vedic and Avestan (Iranian) cultures.

Evidence for the close relationship between these two cultures can be found in their language; the earliest recorded forms of Indo-Iranian languages, Gathic Avestan and Vedic Sanskrit, are incredibly similar, some scholars say even virtually identical. Sometime during this

²⁰ Littleton, C. Scott. “The Comparative Indo-European Mythology of Georges Dumézil.” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1.3 (1964): 147-166.

²¹ Winn, Shan. *Heaven, heroes and Happiness: The Indo-European Roots of Western Ideology*. Lanham: University Press of America. 41.

²² Lamberg-Karlovsky, C. C. *Archaeology and Language: The Indo-Iranians*. *Current Anthropology*. 43. 1. 2002. 67-68

²³ Mallory, J.P. *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1989.

²⁴ Anthony, David & Vinogradov, Nikolai. “Birth of the Chariot.” *Archaeology* 48.2 (1995): 36–41.

period there was a split between the Iranian people and they broke away and formed what we know as the Scythians, Parthians, Persians, and Medians.²⁵

When the Iranians arrived on the continent (1100-539 B.C.E.)²⁶ the existing people, mostly Elamites and Susianans, were absorbed into the Iranian culture. Some of the beliefs and language of those people were also absorbed and became part of the traditions and religion of the Iranians. By this time much of their original culture was still intact. Even the religion of these people was largely intact, despite Zoroaster's reformation of the existing religion around 1738 BCE.²⁷

The Zoroastrian religion still exists and it is likely that a majority of the elements practiced in their religion and culture are still very much in keeping with the original traditions of the ancient Iranian people. However, due to the aggressive reformations instituted by Zoroaster very early in the literary history of these people, it is difficult to distinguish ancient Iranian from Zoroastrian traditions. Nevertheless, they are most certainly Indo-European and practice some of the oldest traditions that survive in the cultures of the decedents of the Indo-European people.

Question 4: Choose one other Indo-European culture and compare and contrast it to the culture discussed in question 3 above with respect to each culture's Indo-European nature. (minimum 300 words)

The Vedics were part of the Indo-Aryan culture that derived from Proto-Indo-Iranians. They presumably migrated to Northern India from the west Asiatic steppe in the late Bronze Age (ca. 2000 BCE)²⁸ and are identified with the Andronovo culture of that region.²⁹

The migration of the Indic branch of the Indo-Aryans into northern Punjab was simultaneous with the decline of the existing Indus-Valley civilization (approximately 1500 BC).³⁰ The Vedic culture seems to be an amalgamation of the Indo-Aryans and the remnants of the indigenous civilization.

Evidence for Indo-Aryan influence on the Indus-Valley people can be found in changes in the burial practices during this time. In 1800 BCE the Gandhara grave culture in the Swat Valley emerged, which featured two new forms of burial rites including flexed inhumation (fetal position) in pit graves and cremation with burial in urns.³¹ These were both known to be

²⁵ Rezakhani, Khodadad. History of Iran, Chapter 2: Iranians before Iran. 2002. Retrieved 26 August 2008. <<http://www.iranologie.com/history/history2.html>>.

²⁶ Vallat, François. The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies. The History of Elam. 2008 August 27 <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/History/Elamite/elam_history.htm>.

²⁷ The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies. An Introduction to Daenâ Vanuhi: The Good Religion of Asho Zarathushtra. Iranian Religions: Zoroastrianism. Shapour Suren-Pahlav (Ed.). 2000. Retrieved 27 August 2008. <<http://www.cais-soas.com/cais/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/introduction.htm>>.

²⁸ Mallory, J.P. In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth. London: Thames & Hudson, 1989.

²⁹ Lamberg-Karlovsky, C. C. Archaeology and Language: The Indo-Iranians. *Current Anthropology*. 43. 1. 2002. 67-68

³⁰ Fitzsimons, Matthew A. The Indus Valley Civilization. *The History Teacher*. 4. 1. 1970. 16.

³¹ Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe International Conference South Asian Archaeology 1975: Papers from the Third International Conference of the Association of

practiced in early Andorovo civilization.³² Horse burials were also found in Gandharan grave culture and it is also attested in the Andronovo graves of the steppe.³³

It seems that burial customs and horses are not the only thing that the Indo-Aryans brought to the region. They also brought their language. While most of the Indic languages continue to share traits unique to Indo-European cultures, they also share a number of syntactical and morphological features that are alien to other Indo-European languages, including Avestan (Old Iranian). The proto-Dravidian language group, the hypothesized language of the Indus-Valley civilization, shares these uncharacteristic syntactical and morphological features.^{34, 35}

While there is some evidence for the diffusion of the Indo-Aryan culture throughout Indus-Valley civilization, there is also evidence for the invasion and overpowering of the existing culture by the Indo-Aryans. There have been studies on the genetic traits of the Indians in various castes. Most have concluded that the highest incidence of West Eurasian haploid genotypes is found in the upper castes of India.³⁶ In fact, based on paternally inherited Y-chromosome variation, the upper castes are more similar to Europeans than to Asians.³⁷ It seems natural that the upper castes would have been more likely to be occupied by foreign rulers.

Despite the fact that most of the modern Indian population seems to consist of people primarily descended from Asians and not Indo-Europeans the culture is still very Indo-European. The religion is based on the religion of the Vedics and many of the traditions, values, and beliefs are also descended from this culture. Even the language remains, in large part, Indo-European. Therefore, I would still characterize these modern descendents of the Indo-Aryans as Indo-European.

Question 5: From its beginnings, ADF has defined itself in relation to Indo-European pagan traditions. What relevance do you think historical and reconstructed IE traditions from the past have in constructing or reconstructing a Pagan spirituality for the present and future? (minimum 600 words)

In Druid's Progress #1 Isaac Bonewits said that he intended to form a new type of Druidism that was Pan-European. He went on to say that he meant "to include all of the European branches of the Indo-European culture and language tree – Celtic, Germanic, Slavic,

South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in Paris. Johanna Engelberta & Lohuizen-De Leeuw (contr.). New York: Brill, 1979. 89.

³² Lamberg-Karlovsky, C. C. Archaeology and Language: The Indo-Iranians. *Current Anthropology*. 43. 1. 2002. 67-68

³³ Sharma, R. S. The Aryan Problem and the Horse. *Social Scientist*. 21, 7/8. 1993. 10.

³⁴ Master, Alfred. Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*. 11, 2. 1944. 297-307.

³⁵ Master, Alfred. Indo-Aryan and Dravidian III. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*. 12, 2. 1948. 340-364.

³⁶ Michael Bamshad, Toomas Kivisild, W. Scott Watkins, Mary E. Dixon, Chris E. Ricker, Baskara B. Rao, J. Mastan Naidu, B.V. Ravi Prasad, P. Govinda Reddy, Arani Rasanayagam, Surinder S. Papiha, Richard Villems, Alan J. Redd, Michael F. Hammer, Son V. Nguyen, Marion L. Carroll, Mark A. Batzer, and Lynn B. Jorde. Genetic Evidence on the Origins of Indian Caste Populations. *Genome Research*. 11, 6. 2001. 994-1004.

³⁷ Ibid.

Baltic, even the pre-Classical Greek & Roman.”³⁸ What we have created since that time now includes Vedic and Iranian cultures as well.

When I consider ADF’s broad Indo-European base I am of two minds. On one hand it is difficult to grow a religion that encompasses so many different pantheons. To my knowledge no other religion does this. On the other hand it is intriguing to practice a religion that allows for so much diversity.

Trying to be too many things to too many people from so many diverse backgrounds and traditions can be trying at best; at worst it can be detrimental to the growth of our organization. We often attempt to apply, some might say impose, policies that are meant to unify the people of our church. Often, those policies do not work well with every hearth culture represented in ADF. This can cause strife for those who would like to practice the beliefs of their hearth culture in a more authentic manner, without the perceived imposition of the Mother Grove.

While many members of ADF would like to apply a more genuine practice of the religion of their respective hearth cultures, many of these practices may be wholly inappropriate for modern people and modern law.

However, as a religion that venerates our ancestors, understanding what our ancestors did and why they did it may help us connect further with that part of our spiritual practice. Understanding our ancestors could bring us closer to ourselves. Research on ancient Indo-European culture, especially its religious and social traditions, may give us a more information upon which to base our current spiritual practices if they are also acceptable to modern society.

I do believe that historical Indo-European traditions are very pertinent to constructing or reconstructing future Pagan spiritual practices. However, they must also be in keeping with modern culture and laws. For example, we have ample evidence that many Indo-European cultures practiced human sacrifice but it is clear that this ancient traditional practice would not be appropriate in our modern culture. We also know that many Indo-Europeans used enthiogens to heighten their spiritual experiences; however, several enthiogens are dangerous and many are illegal.

Another good example of why some ancient traditions should not necessarily be incorporated in our modern practices is Dumézil’s tripartite ideology. If Dumézil was correct, and I am not conceding that he was, then our ancestors observed strict division between social classes. This is not appropriate in our modern culture, especially in the United States where people from lower social classes are encouraged to ascend to higher social classes though higher education.

When I consider the traditions and beliefs of our ancestors I have to remember that the things they chose to believe and the actions they took in response to those beliefs were not developed in a vacuum. These beliefs developed over time and were influenced by the experiences and events of their time and culture. As much as we might like it to be, the cultures of our respective hearths are not the same as our current customs. Our beliefs and actions are guided by our own experiences and those are often far removed from those that our ancestors may have had. Therefore, we cannot adopt the newly discovered practices of our ancestors without careful investigation and consideration. We must not allow antiquated beliefs or archaic attitudes to affect the way we develop the culture of ADF.

³⁸ Bonewits, Isaac. “The Beginning of Ár nDraíocht Féin.” The Druid’s Progress. Issue # 1. 1984: 2.