INDO-EUROPEAN CULTURAL HISTORY

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SCIENCE

Overview   While science and technology are hard to distinguish, in Indo-European culture itself, and we have touched on 'innovation' in discussing IE 'economics,' it is worth devoting a 'science' discussion, the present, to a particular issue in the linguistic evidence through which the very lifeblood of the IE hypothesis flows. This linguistic evidence has from early modern times on played the chief role in establishing the IE hypothesis, and it is only later than archeology and genomic analysis have greatly enlarged the scientific purview onto the Into-Europeans themselves. The science of and about the Indo-Europeans is all about language.

The linguistic range of IE   From genomic testing we almost daily refine our ability to characterize large scale DNA evidence, from which we learn more about the two leading theories of the origins of the IE pastoralist sweep into the west: that it derived from the steppes of Ukraine and southern Russia, or that it stemmed from pastoralist herders in Anatolia. In any case the migrational drift was westward, though with refluxes into the East, which connected with already in- place IE residences. Whichever of these theories covers the true IE migration story, we feel confident that that story generated some 400 languages, the IE language family, and that the word correspondences among those families are arresting, and testify to many elements of a common culture.

The wheel   Archeological carbon dating has enabled us to surmise a date as early as the fifth millennium B.C.E. for the effective PIE use of the potter's wheel, and from that point on, in stages, of wheeled vehicles--which of course involves the accoutrements that go with an effective transportation wheel--a yoke, an axle, a hub; as well, say, as for the making of spinning wheels, so indispensable for making clothes in Northern Europe. The lexicon of wheel-related words, in PIE, is lengthy, although we believe that the PIE's were not the original inventors of the wheel. Here's a small sequence. Wheel--*k'ek'los* in one of its two original forms--opens out into Vedic Sanskrit *cakra*, Greek *kuklos*, Old English *hweol*, Serbo-Croatian *kolo*; while *wheel*, in its other original form*, roth eh*--becomes fashioned into Vedic Sanskrit *ratha*, German *Rad*, Latin *rota*.

The reasoning about PIE   In this entry our interest is in the science employed by the Indo-Europeans. It goes without saying that we are assuming that use of the above derived words, to indicate the nature of the wheel, means that the IE's were using wheels, in different functions, to serve as part of daily life. We are assuming that if you name something you know what it is, how it can be made, and what to do with it. That is what we mean by attending to the scientific capacities of the Indo-Europeans. By the same process of reasoning, we will follow other word families, in PIE, with the assumption that by writing the words for spinning, weaving, basket making, fence-making, and wall-making, the IE's were showing they were capable of carrying out those activities. Our view of the PIE's as 'early scientists' depends on the truth of that assumption.

Reading

Becker, Robert S.P*., Comparative Indo-European Linguistics,* Amsterdam, l995.

Ramat, Paolo; Ramat, *Anna Giacolone, The Indo-European* Languages, London, 1998.

Discussion questions

Does language seem to you an accurate measure of your culture's capacities and skills? How would you go about evaluating the relation between your culture's working vocabulary and its 'scientific achievements'?

What kind of innovative thinking is required, to bring the wheel into existence? When the spark of invention is ignited, does the name of the invention come near the beginning of the inventing? How does the name of the thing get applied?

There are said to be 400 IE languages. Did they primarily develop from one another, or from a common source?

ART

Overview To reconstruct the nature or development of IE art requires flexibility and a willingness to construct from the ground up. We have wide evidence of ancient art-works, but must decide whether to include them in the IE corpus. We have the increasingly coherent map provided by comparative linguistics, with its forays into language and prosody use in the IE zone. Finally, pointing at least *in the direction of ar*t, we have the outlines of an IE poetics in the kinds of 'literary criticism' offered us by (for example) scholarship like Watkins' *To Slay a Dragon*.

Evidence from art-works   The identification of art works which derive from IE cultures is shaky, but valuable when the art style and material we identify cohere with other plausible examples, from the IE land and timescape. An instance confidently described as IE in style would be the cast-iron helmet plates from Torslunda in   Sweden. Dating to the 6th or 7th century C.E., they depict Scandinavians and monsters in mortal mutually consuming poses. (The static built up fury between the two forces is exactly the emotional formula argued out for a wealth of textual examples in Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, below.) A second example of IE art, that enriches the thematic material of our experience, is the Gundestrup cauldron, which depicts troops of infantry and cavalry wearing Celtic regalia, and compelling our attention by a scene of immersion, a military baptism into the good vibes of the next world. The militant, fearsome, stocky Iron Age figures, illustrated in these first two examples, set the tone for the multiple plate-illustrations--double axe wielding heroes, sacred twins, Polish face-urns-- found, and referenced, in *In Search of the Indo Europeans,* by J.P.Mallory, London, l989. That work is a cogent starting point for unfolding examples of IU visual art.

How to kill a dragon   Calvert Watkins' *How to kill a dragon* (Oxford, 1995) is a very close microtextural reading of fragments of IE texts. The common theme he is disengaging, from the rich collection before him, is the pervasive IE concern with slaying the dragon of evil; with a narrative layout in which the divine hero slays the evil force--the Grendel in the world. (Watkins finds plentiful corroboration of this narrative in languages like Old and Middle Iranian, Greek epic fragments, Germanic sagas, all the way to Armenian oral epic of the past century.) Is Watkins excavating art from this scattered tapestry of fragments before him? He is helping us find our way into a consistent theme, and a consistent series of formulations of the theme, in the linguistic network which was In the first place the source of the discovery of IE.

Linguistic networking into ancient epic traditions   Themes from IE myth find their ways into such high art as the ancient oral epic traditions of India, Iran, or Greece. This foundation level of ancient mythical creativity is plain in the 'theme of twins,' a commonplace in IE myths, and readily apparent in a work like the *Iliad*, where we find a special setting in which to understand the relation of Achilles to Patroclos, or for that matter of Nestor the older man to his virtual twin, Nestor the younger man, the man 'who once fought at…' In other words, the deep lived meanings of twinship play out across the IE

experience, into the literatures--the *Mahabharata,* the *Avesta*, *Cuchulain,* th*e Iliad*-- which track the embodied profundity of early IE epic poetry.

Reading

Mallory, James; Adams, Douglas Q., eds., *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture,* London, 1997.

Anthony, David; *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, Princeton, 2007.

Discussion questions

What do you think of the nature of art as the IE people conceived it? Can you extrapolate a basic character for the art of the IE people?

Homer's work and that of the Vedic epic poets is arguably the greatest achievement of early epic poetry. What can we understand better about that poetry, when we know its IE setting?

What do you think of the 'anti-reconstructive' position on the IE achievement? Are you yourself easy with thinking of the Indo-Europeans as a meaningfully collective group? Or do they remain, for you, an hypothesis?

RELIGION

Overview   The outlines of an Indo-European religion are generated both by historical linguistic evidence, aa was, originally, the whole IE hypothesis, and by evidence drawn from comparative mythology and certain archeological finds that seem to support that mythology. The 'religion' extracted from these kinds of evidence is concrete but the reality you ascribe to it will depend on the view you take, of the way the component parts of the theory cohere.

The linguistic evidence   The linguistic evidence was the first to generate the PIE theory. Philologists became aware, as early as the l8th century, that over a wide range of languages, the PIE languages, the word for 'god,' 'sky-father,' was similar: Sanskrit *dyaus-pita*; Greek *zeu-pater*; Latin *Ju-piter;* Umbrian *luve-patre*; Illyrian, *Dei-patyros*. The list is extensive, and the conclusion, to this and much more verbal evidence, makes it likely that multiple cultural moves might be in common among the language families assembled here.

The mythological approach   The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) developed at length the theory that a society myths reflect its own social structure. For instance, Sumerian society seems to be neatly replicated by the social interrelations and interactions of its gods, while Greek (Olympos society) and Norse (the world of Valhalla) societies reflect substantial parallels between the 'myth world' and the social structure 'behind it.' This fertile hypothesis, which has led in many scholarly directions, has been supplemented by the work of George Dumézil and Jan Puhvel--plus an army of scholarly enrichers--directed toward the application of myth theory to what we can surmise about IE cultures.

What we learn from the mythological approach   We learn, thanks especially to the theories of Georges Dumezil, to look for (and find) tripartite and binary divisions which would appear to be plausible characteristics of IE socieites, and to make out the profiles of an IE religion. (What religion is is itself one of the questions raised here.) The tripartite structure of IE myth is typically characterized by a belief system like the Vedic, in which the dominant myth characters are of three different types or levels: the *brahmanas* (priests), *ksatriyas* (warriors), and *vaisyas* (herdsmen or cultivators). This kind of tripartite division, among the dominant figures of a culture's myth--and thus a reflection of the culture's society--is amply illustrated by the myths reflected in other IE languages. In Greek and Roman societies, to illustrate,

the same kind of tripartism is broadly reflecte*d on the mythological level:* the Greeks celebrating *priests and magistrates, warriors*, then *laborers/artisans*; the Romans *flamines (priests)*, *milites (soldiers)*, and *quirites (ordinary citizens)*, in that order, as their pre eminent myth figures.

Ramifications of the mythological approach   The profiles of religious belief, sketched in the above fashions, have promoted widespread researches into the characteristics of IE belief. One might mention the importance of binary relations--the importance of twins, right and left hand relations--in the repertoire of belief-traits, to be found among IE cultures; or the importance of animal sacrifices, especially involving the horse in IE cultures. The approach before us deals in scattered shapings of belief, for the archeological or funerary evidence remaining cannot support a firmer theory of IE religious belief.

Readings

Mallory, J.P*., In search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth*, London, l991.

Fortson, Benjamin W*., Indo-European Language and Culture*, Oxford, 2004.

Discussion questions

Is myth an expression of religious belief? How are the two terms, myth and religion, related?

Are linguistic parallels, such as we find in the names for 'god' in IE languages, meaningful indications of affinities between cultures?

Do you see some relation between IE religion, and the major world religions which follow the PIE peoples?