



Priest-King of the Warriors and Witch-Queen of the Others

Michal Cigán

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Priest-King of the Warriors and Witch-Queen of the Others

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in Indo-European Myth and Reality

Michal Cigán

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INTRODUCTION

This book deals with anthropologically reassessed matter of Indo-European (IE) comparative mythology. Two themes are focused on directly; the primordial creation of stratified society and the conflict of elite with female witches. Invariant textual structures attested to throughout the comparative analysis are interpreted as reflections of social processes running in the contextual background of myths.

The chosen approach is based on a well-founded assumption that myth generally reflects the social life of the community by which it has been produced. All the other possible influential factors (material basis of society, historical events, natural phenomena etc.) are of secondary importance, as the point of their mythological reflection is still to demonstrate the social affairs.

Socially and anthropologically oriented comparative analysis can be considered a kind of methodological challenge in the case of IE myths. They used to be analyzed as an internally coherent and culturally exclusive set of texts. Here a different approach is demonstrated; an attempt to interpret IE myths as a matter of mechanics innate for human societies in general. Thus the methodological clash typical for humanities – exclusiveness versus universality – is evidently present. However, it will be shown that this double track interpretation is not contradictory at all.

A primary aim of this book is to bring a reassessed, more complex interpretation of well-established IE creation myth as well as to introduce a new IE mythological theme, the so-called witch-hunting myth.

Its secondary aim is to propose an alternative interpretative model for Indo-European comparative mythology (IECM). As far as I know, a thoroughly context-focused socio-anthropological approach to IE myths has not been practiced so far. The origins of discipline are drowned in idealistic romantic mythology

of natural phenomena. What is more, under the heavy influence of historical comparative linguistics interest has been centered more on the nomenclature of mythical entities than on the myths themselves. Therefore, the social processes in the background of the myths simply could not grab the attention of pioneering IE mythologists.

Comparison of the mythological texts *per se* was first introduced by the well-known work of G. Dumézil. However, Dumézil focused upon a narrow set of identified inter-textual structures rather than on examination of a myth's content in connection with its context. And even though the sociological nature of his approach often used to be stressed and praised, as far as the character of his work is concerned, this was a formal methodological catchphrase rather than a real analytical device.

The first call for change came from S. C. Littleton (1966), with his sketch of *anthropological reassessment* of IECM. But the first systematic effort to anthropologize the IECM can be considered the works of B. Lincoln (1981, 1986, 1991, 1999). As a postmodern Marxist he proposed to interpret myth as a political utterance of elites, by which they set social hierarchy determined by the existing economic base of society. An accent he put on political, economic and ecologic background of myth naturally led to reflections of social processes and their possible influence on the content of the myth.

Ideally, one would like to study each /narrative/ variant not only in its relation to all other variants, but also with attention to the social and historic situation in which each variant made its appearance and found its reception, so that one could get a sense of how interplay between narrators and audiences produced narrative innovations, taxonomic modifications, and consequent shifts in the distribution of advantages over the course of time. To put it differently, our task is not finished until we have considered texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts, subtexts, and consequences. (Lincoln 1999:150)

Another significant attempt was made by J. G. Oosten (1985). Unfortunately, his interpretative line fully copies the techniques of Levi-Strauss' schematizing structural analysis of myth.

Thus the by-goal of this work is to present a direct socio-anthropological approach to IE myth, to provide its pragmatic, context-focused, empirically oriented interpretation. The point is not to discover some predetermined philosophical construct hidden inside the text of the myth and typically detached from its original background – social as well as any other (romantic M. F. Müller). The point is not to explore the internal structure of the myth *per se* through the prism of variously designed structuralism with its rather formal interest in the social background of myth (C. Levi-Strauss, G. Dumézil). Instead, the point is to identify the mythological textual structure, which is a reflection of processes observed,

or reliably postulated to be more specific, in its social and historical background.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first chapter is devoted to theory; it introduces the basic terminology, more closely describes and argues for the chosen methodology, interpretative model as well as the criteria of the material's selection. Subsequent parts represent attempts to apply the suggested anthropological interpretation of IE mythological themes in practice. In the second chapter the issue of IE creation myth and in the third one the IE witch-hunting myth is discussed. Thus the last two parts of the work bring a very comparative analysis of original mythological texts followed by interpretation of their invariant textual structures according to the criteria and assumptions stated in the theoretical chapter.

The core of this work was composed as a dissertation thesis defended in summer 2016 at the Department of Linguistics and Baltic Languages of Masaryk University in Brno. I am grateful to my thesis supervisor Professor Václav Blažek as well as other colleagues for all the guidance and support. My thanks go to the thesis opponents, Professor Ivo Budil and Pavla Valčáková, and also to Zbyňek Holub, for their feedback helpful in the process of manuscript writing.

Theoretical Background

On the most general level, argumentation in this work is based on knowledge of the common genetic facility of mankind. Around 20,000 years ago in America, 40,000 years ago in Europe, 70,000 years ago in Asia and 200,000 years ago in Africa all the older evolutionary branches of genus *Homo* had started to be eliminated by the species of anatomically modern human (AMH) (Dunbar 2004). For this reason all the world's populations of the last 20.000 years share common physical as well as mental facility.

The commonness of cognitive facilities of AMH is caused by the process of gene and cultural co-evolution of genus *Homo*. During its evolutionary process, successful non-biological, cultural responses to the challenges of environment – invented thanks to the gradually growing mental capacities – were transmitted to the next generations via directly or indirectly corresponding gene mutations. For this reason, basic mental facilities are genetically encoded, inherited and so universally shared within the population of AMH (Boyd & Richerson 1983, Boyd & Richerson 1987, Boyd & Richerson 2008).

The element of chance in conjunction with specific historical and ecological circumstances causes the selective and specific realization of genetically transmitted mental biases. Hence the local cultural traditions of human societies are prone to be formed with relative similarity on a general level though showing variability in details.

One such cultural area, partially unique due to the influence of local conditions and conventionally labeled Proto-Indo-European (PIE), was produced by the prehistoric population of Pontic-Caspian steppes circa in 5000 – 3000 BC. For the same reason, many archaic historical traditions of IE speaking groups can also be considered culturally unique.

Product par excellence of any culture is its folklore narrative tradition, especially myths, the set of narrations produced by elites. Therefore also in the mythological texts the occurrence of universally shared biases of AMH, influenced and modified by specific local (historical, ecological) conditions, can be expected. Of course, hypothetical PIE myths or myths of later historical IE traditions do not constitute an exception.

1 INDO-EUROPEANS: URHEIMAT AND FOLKGEIST ISSUE

The concept of the PIE cultural area is crucial for the existence of IECM. According to Antalík (2005), the comparison of any cultural phenomena of geographically (and hence culturally) secluded areas needs to be justified by an ontological platform, on which a comparativist is entitled to hypothesize that he *compares the comparable*. In the case of IECM the concept of PIE Urheimat forms such a justifying platform. It gives an IE mythologist a license to relate myths produced by IE speaking groups of different historical and geographical location, referring to their common prehistoric origin (Cigán 2009).

Therefore, from the methodological as well as ontological point of view, the axiom of prehistoric existence of PIE cultural-linguistic homeland still counts as a basic factor legitimizing the existence of IECM. It is not to be refused as a racist myth, as Anthony correctly observed (Anthony 2007:89), nor as a manifestation of crypto-romantic sentiment (Cigán 2009). Quite the contrary, it can be supported by reliable scientific, for instance linguistic argumentation:

The fact that so many languages of Europe and south-west Asia show widespread agreements in their grammatical structure and vocabulary can be explained ... only by the assumption that all spring from a common basic language, which we call Indo-European, and are all nothing other than independently developed variants of this original language, the *Ursprache*. (Szemerényi 1999:31)

Just this kind of linguistic argument alone seems to be generally sufficient. In prehistory, due to the specific conditions, the fact of language unity alone often meant the cultural homogeneity of a certain speech community. This assumption will be evaluated below, together with other factors of possible prehistoric