A READER IN COMPARATIVE INDO-EUROPEAN RELIGION

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ABBREVIATIONS

A) Languages

Alb. = Albanian
Arm. = (Classical) Armenian
Av. = Avestan
Croat. = Croatian
CSl. = Church Slavic
Eng. = English
Gaul. = Gaulish
Goth. = Gothic
Gr. = Greek
Hitt. = Hittite
Hom. = Homeric (Greek)
L- = Late-
Lat. = Latin
Latv. = Latvian
Lith. = Lithuanian
Luv. = (Cuneiform) Luvian
Lyd. = Lydian
Myc. = Mycenaean
O- = Old-
OCS = Old Church Slavic
OHG = Old High German
Olc. = Old Icelandic
OIr. = Old Irish
ON = Old Norse
OPr. = Old Prussian
ORuss. = Old Russian
P- = Proto-
Phryg. = Phrygian
Pol. = Polish
Skr. = Sanskrit
TochA = Tocharian A
TochB = Tocharian B
Umbr. = Umbrian
Ved. = Vedic
W = Welsh

B) Texts

Aen. = The Aeneid (Virgil)
AV = Atharvaveda
CA = Canu Aneurin
Hymn. = Homeric Hymns
Il. = The Iliad (Homer)
Isth. = Isthmian Odes (Pindar)
KBo = Keilschrifttexte aus Boghaz-Köy, Berlin 1916ff.
KUB = Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazkōi, Berlin 1921ff.
Met. = Metamorphoses (Ovid)
Nem. = Nemean Odes (Pindar)
Od. = The Odyssey (Homer)
Ol. = Olympian Odes (Pindar)
PIT = Prince Igor’s Tale (ORuss. Слово о полку Игореве)
Pyth. = Pythian Odes (Pindar)
RV = Rig-Veda
Theog. = Theogony (Hesiod)
Y = Yasna
Yt = Yašt
FOREWORD

Comparative Indo-European religion is a study of the history of religious ideas. The central idea of this approach is that by comparing the religious ideas of the peoples who speak (or spoke) Indo-European languages we can plausibly reconstruct some of the religious ideas of the speakers of the common Proto-Indo-European language, from which the attested languages are descended. As in the case of the reconstruction of the PIE phonology and morphology, the reconstruction of the PIE religion is not an end in itself. Rather, it is intended to shed some light on the earliest history of religious ideas of the early historical communities of speakers of IE languages.

The approach adopted here is strictly inductive; we do not make any a priori assumptions about what the system of belief of Indo-Europeans may have been, nor do we posit any original ‘ideology’, or mythopoetic ‘structure’. We believe we can know about the PIE religion only what the reconstructed fragments of PIE religious texts can teach us. Since ‘Proto-Indo-European’ is primarily a linguistic entity, our primary data are mythological texts attested in different IE traditions, and all conclusions are based on their comparison. The texts selected here are meant not only to illustrate the common features of various IE traditions, but also their differences, and the multi-faceted nature of all religions.

It should be stressed that this booklet is not in the first place about what Indo-Europeans believed, or how they represented their gods. It is about how they expressed their beliefs in words, and how they addressed their gods in their prayers, hymns, and incantations. We hope to reach a picture of this by a careful semantic reconstruction of the religious terminology of PIE, including the poetic formulas, occurring in texts dealing with religious matters. These formulas have been preserved thanks to the stubborn and uninterrupted oral poetic tradition extending from PIE to the daughter languages. Much in that picture is likely to remain fragmentary and unclear, but a fragmentary reconstruction reached by sound methodology is preferable, in our opinion, to aprioristic speculations of any kind, however persuasive and rational they might appear to the uninformed reader.

Zagreb, November 2018
PART I: ELEMENTS OF PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN RELIGION

1. RECONSTRUCTION OF PIE RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY AND PHRASEOLOGY

Vocabulary belonging to the sphere of the sacred is reconstructable by means of the comparative method just like any other set of words that form a single semantic field. The comparative method allows us to reconstruct not only the form of words in Proto-Indo-European, the language from which all Indo-European languages developed, but also their meaning. For example, on the basis of Lat. equus, Gr. ἱππος, Skr. āśvas, OE eoh, which all mean ‘horse’, we can safely reconstruct onot only the form *h₁ek’wos to PIE, but also attribute to it the meaning ‘horse’.

The meaning of words belonging to the same semantic field represents a system in which the exact meaning of each word depends on the meaning of all the others. PIE *h₁ek’wos was indeed the term for ‘horse’ in PIE, but there were other words referring to horses, or kinds of horses, e.g. *kabalo- (LLat. caballus, OIr. capall, OCS kobyla ‘mare’), which probably specifically denoted work horses that first appeared in Late Antiquity, PIE *polHo- ‘foal’ (OHG folo, Gr. pόλος, Lat. pullus ‘young animal (including foal)’, dialectal *marko- ‘horse’ (W march, OE mearh ‘mare’), etc. To fully understand the meaning of one word, one has to understand its relationships with the other words with which it shares some semantic features. This particularly holds for the semantic fields containing abstract lexemes so that, in order to reconstruct the semantic content of any word relating to PIE religion, one has to reconstruct the whole system.

The semantic reconstruction of lexical items relating to religion in PIE has to start with the exact meanings of lexical cognates, and these can best be revealed in their contexts. This means that the comparative reconstruction of the PIE religious vocabulary has to start from the careful philological study of religious texts in the early IE languages. It is in these texts that we find the earliest and the most exact meanings of lexical items on which we base our reconstructions. However, just as the forms of words on which we base our lexical reconstructions are attested in already differentiated IE languages with sometimes very diverging phonological systems, so the meanings of these words are often found in very different contexts, i.e. in texts belonging to already differentiated religious and mythological traditions bearing little resemblance to their assumed source. Sometimes these traditions underwent strong influences from religious and mythological spheres belonging to communities speaking non-Indo-European languages (e.g. in the case of Hurrian and Semitic influences on the Hittite religion), and some traditions were significantly affected by cultural and religious “revolutions”, that disrupted the organic development of religious ideas and mythological conceptions (e.g. in the case of the influence of Zarathuštra’s reforms on Iranian religion, or the influence of Christianization on the religious vocabulary of Germanic, Baltic and Slavic). This means that the evidence for the semantic reconstruction of words belonging to the religious sphere is often muddled and incomplete, and this has to be borne in mind whenever we attempt to say anything meaningful about “the PIE religion”.
The semantic relationships of words are not only made apparent by comparing their meanings; sometimes, the derivational patterns of their forms are also instructive. For example, something about the way horses were conceptualized in PIE is revealed by the fact that *h₁ek'wos ‘horse’ is derived from the same root as the adjective *h₁oh₁k'us ‘swift’ (Skr. āśu-, Av. āsu-, Gr. ὀξυς, Lat. comparative ociōr ‘swifter’). Likewise, as we shall see, the meaning of PIE *deywos ‘god’ (Lat. deus, Skr. devá-, Lith. diuvas) can only be appreciated when it is taken into account that it is a derivative of PIE *dyēw- ‘(bright) sky’ (Skr. du-, Lat. diū ‘by day’, diēs ‘day’). Apparently, *deywos was not just a generic term for ‘god’, but rather a designation of ‘celestial’ gods.

Finally, one has to take into account that texts, just like words, have their prehistory. In traditional, illiterate societies texts are transmitted orally from generation to generation and, while many of their elements may be lost in transmission, some can be preserved remarkably long, including mythological motives, names of mythological beings, and fixed poetic formulas. Sometimes the same poetic formulas are preserved in similar contexts for generations, and the etymological correspondences between such formulas can still be recognized, although neither the original texts, nor indeed the language in which these formulas were originally composed, exist any longer. For example, in several early traditions, we find the fixed expression ‘swift horses’ going back to PIE *h₁ek'wōs *h₁oh₁k'ewes: Vedic ēśvāh ēśāvah (RV 10.78.5a), Avestan āsueca apsi (Yt. 13.52e) and Gr. ὀκέεις ἵπποι (Il. 5.257, 10.474 etc.) are directly superimposable on each other etymologically and attest to the existence of a PIE figura etymologica meaning ‘swift horses’. If this is accepted, one may further suppose that this expression has been transformed, during centuries of oral tradition, into poetic phrases meaning ‘swift horses’ found in several Indo-European languages, e.g. are found in other IE traditions, e.g. in Germanic (OE swifta mearh, Beowulf 2264), Old Russian (бръзъ комони, PIT 83) and Welsh (Rhagorai feirch rhagfuan yn nhrin ‘He ran before swift horses in battle’, CA 830). All of these are formulas with the same meaning, but expressed with etymologically unrelated words, unlike the pair ēśvāh ēśāvah and ὀκέεις ἵπποι discussed above. Of course, one cannot exclude the possibility that such semantic correspondences are accidental, but once we have proved that at least some etymologically related formulas are inherited, the accumulation of evidence will increase the likelihood that they are not accidental.

In the next section, we will therefore compare not only individual words belonging to the religious vocabulary of different IE languages, but also syntagms and poetic phrases (formulas) that share the meaning and, often, are etymologically related. Two examples must suffice here: firstly, in several early IE mythological traditions, we find the figure of ‘father Sky’ at the top of the pantheon. In Greek, Zeús is regularly called patēr ‘father’ (e.g. Od. 4.341, II. 1.503, etc.), and the Latin name of Juppiter is actually a compound meaning ‘father Sky’. The Vedic sky-god, Dyauis, likewise bears the standing epithet pîtā (e.g. RV 1.90.7c, 6.51.5a, etc.), and all of these syntagms go back to the PIE poetic and mythological phrase *dyēws ph2tēr ‘father Sky’. The likelihood that the correspondences on which this reconstruction is based are accidental is minimal, so we can conclude that the speakers of the PIE language regularly called the Sky god ‘father’ in their sacral poetry, and that the reflexes of this formula are preserved in Greek, Latin and Vedic. In some languages, the reflexes of the word *ph2tēr were replaced by a different word for ‘father’, so in Luvian we find tāṭiš Tiwaz ‘father Sun-god’ (KBo IX 143 iii 10) and in Hittite attaš nepišanza ‘father Sky’ (KUB XV 34 iv 32), and one of the chief pagan gods of the Irish pantheon is called Dagdae oll-athir lit. ‘the good (day-)god, the father of all’. Such non-etymological semantic parallels are
acceptable as evidence for a mythological motive (or a mythopoetical phrase) in PIE only when etymological cognates can be established independently.

It is particularly significant when the reflexes of such PIE poetic formulas occur in similar, or identical mythological contexts. This is the case of the formula 
\[ *g^\text{hwent}_\text{h}^\text{eg\text{whi}} \text{m} \] ‘he slew the serpent’, the reflexes of which are regularly used in dragon-slaying myths of different IE peoples. In the Rig-Veda, the formula \[ \text{áhann } \text{áhim} \] ‘he slew the serpent’ is regularly used of Indra, the Thunderer (e.g. RV 5.29.2c, cf. also \[ \text{yad } \text{áhim } \text{hán} \] ‘who slew the serpent’, RV 2.15.1d, also of Indra), while Aeschylus (\textit{Eumenides} 181-184) sings of ‘a winged flashing snake \( \text{óphin} \)...(with) clots of blood \( \text{phónou} \)’ where Gr. \( \text{óphis} \) ‘snake’ and \( \text{phónos} \) ‘slaying, murder, blood’ are etymological cognates of Ved. \[ \text{áhann } \text{áhim} \]. In the Hittite myth about the slaying of the dragon \textit{Illyankaš}, we read the reflex of a similar formula, \[ ^{\text{d}i\text{M-aš \text{MUŠ}}}{\text{illuya[nkan] } \text{Ú DUMU-ŠU kuenta} } \] ‘the storm-god killed the serpent \text{Illyanka} and its children’ (KBo III 7 iii 31f). It is important to note that, although the myths of dragon-slaying can be found in different IE traditions as a result of pure chance, it is \textit{a priori} unlikely that the reflexes of the roots \[ *g^\text{when} \text{– ‘slay’} \] and \[ *h^\text{eg\text{whi}} \text{– ‘snake’} \] are consistently found in this context in various myths, and that the snake- or dragon-slayer is usually the god of thunder.

This brief introduction serves to show on which methodological principles our reconstruction of the PIE religious vocabulary and phraseology is based. Needless to say, not all reconstructions are equally well established, and each individual proposal must be judged on its own merit.
2. BASIC RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY OF PIE

GOD

Since we have been living in a monotheist society for centuries, the very meaning of ‘god’ in our modern languages has evolved: ‘god’ is the all-powerful being who is in charge of, ultimately, everything (or so many of us like to think). In societies unaffected by monotheist way of thinking, this definition will obviously not do. For our purposes, we can consider as gods all beings capable of entering into a religious bond with humans, so that they can be addressed in prayers and expected to assist humans, provided that appropriate rites are performed. It follows that it is not necessary to have a cover term for such a being, and indeed, there is little reason to believe that there was an all-inclusive term for ‘god’ in PIE. What we have is rather a list of terms covering various aspects of divine beings:

PIE *deywo- ‘caelestial god’: Lat. dīvus, Skr. devās, Lith. diēvas, OE Tīw, OIr. dia; this word denotes the deity as a celestial being, in opposition to the earth-bound humans, the name of which is derived from ‘earth’ in PIE (cf. Lat. homo ‘man’ < dʰgʰom-on- vs. humus ‘earth’ < *dʰgʰom-o-, OIr. duine < *dʰgʰom-yo-). Its meaning probably does not include chthonic deities (Lat. di inferi), or deities belonging to the social sphere rather than to the cosmic sphere of existence.

PIE *dʰeh₁-s / *dʰh₁-sos ‘divinely inspired being’: Gr. theós ‘god’, Arm. di-kē ‘gods’, Lat. fānum ‘consecrated place’ < *fasnom <*dʰh₁-s-no-, fēriae ‘religious festival’ < *dʰeh₁-s-, Skr. dhiṣā ‘with impetuosity’; this word did not necessarily refer to gods, but rather to any divinely inspired being, or (according to some etymologists), a religious rite or oblation. In Greek, theós took on the general meaning of ‘god’, while another word, daimōn, took the original semantic sphere of *dʰeh₁-s- (‘a divine power that may seize an individual’). In origin, daimōn is a derivative of daimai ‘divide, share’ (< PIE *deh₂-s-, Ved. dāyate cf. the similar semantic development of Slavic bogъ below). In principle, it would be possible to interpret *dʰeh₁-s- as an s-stem built to the root *dʰeh₁- ‘to do, put, make’ (Lat. facio, OCS děti, etc.) in the sense ‘that which is established (by religious observance)’, but the semantic connection is weak.

*h₂nsu- > Hitt. haššu- ‘king’, OIr. áss ‘a kind of god’, Skr. āsura- ‘a kind of god’, Av. ahu- ‘lord’; I believe this word originally referred to divine beings in their social aspect. In the Rig-Veda, the Asuras (Bhaga, Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman) are notably the deities belonging to the social sphere of existence (in contradistinction to the ‘cosmic’ devas). In the later layers of the Vedas, they become demons, opposed to caelestial gods, the devas. It is possible that the meaning ‘god’ developed independently in Germanic and Indo-Aryan, and that the original meaning is preserved in Avestan (‘lord’). Some linguists derive these words from the root *h₂ens- ‘to beget’ (Hitt. hāši ‘begets’, LIV 239), but this is quite uncertain.

*bʰh₂eg- (or *bʰag-) > Skr. bhág- (one of the Asuras), Av. baγa- ‘god’, OCS bogъ. Some linguists think that the Slavic word is an Iranian loanword, but I find that it is more probably inherited. The old derivative OCS ubogъ ‘poor’ testifies that the original meaning in Slavic was ‘share, lot’, as in Indo-Aryan. A further cognate might lie in Gr. phágos ‘a glutton’, but this is difficult for semantic reasons.

For the Germanic word for ‘god’ see below.
Gods are often represented as ‘bestowers of wealth’: Gr. Hom. _dotéres eáon_, e.g. Od. 8.335, Ved. _dātā vāsūnām_ RV 8. 51. 5 (cf. OCS _daźdabog_, Russ. _daźbog_). The PIE expression would have been *deh₁tores h₁ weswom._

In many traditions, we hear about ‘many-named’ gods, PIE *polh₁-h₂nomn-o- > Skr. _purūṇāman_- , Gr. _polyōnymos_ (RV 8. 93. 17, AV 6. 99. 1, of Indra; _Hymn. Dem._ 18 and 32, of Hades; _Hymn. Ap._ 82, of Apollo). Gods have many names, but the correct name must be used in prayer, otherwise the prayer is void. The god's names may be secret (_devānām gūhyā nāmāni_, RV 5. 5. 10) and Rome, according to legends, had a secret name known only to the initiated. A similar conception of many names of god is found in Islam.

The gods have their own language, different from the language of men, a conception found in the Sanskrit _Taittiriya-Samhitā_ 5.25.5.2, in Homer (II. 1.403f., Od. 10.305), etc., and the Norse _Alvíssmál_ (9-34). A Roman prayer invokes Jupiter Optimus Maximus _sive quo alio nomine te appelari volueris_ ‘or by whatever other name you wish to be addressed’ (Servius, _Aen._ II. 351). The gods are often called ‘the greatest’, or the highest’, cf. e.g. _Zeit kyidiste_, _mégiste_ ‘Zeus, most glorious and greatest’ (II. 2.412), ‘Indra, the highest one’ ( _uttamā_- , RV 10.159.4), and Jupiter's standing epithets _optimus maximus_ ‘the best and the greatest’.

The gods are represented as a breed, or a race (PIE *g'enh₁-os > Gr. _genus_, Skr. _jānas_), and the breed of gods (*deywōm g'enh₁-os) is often contrasted to the breed of humans, or mortals (*mrēwōm g'enh₁-os), e.g. RV 1.70 6b: _devānām jānma mártām ca_ ‘the breed of gods and of mortals’, Pindar, Nem. 6.1 _hēn andrōn, hēn theōn génos_ “One is the race of men, another of gods”, cf. also Virgil’s opposition between _hominum genus_ and _di immortales_ in _Aeneid_ 1.542.

Finally, in contrast to us mortals, the gods are, of course, ‘immortal’, PIE *n-mrōs deywōs > Skr. _devā amṛtās_ RV 3. 4. 11, 5. 69. 4; Gr. _athānatoi_ (II. 1.520). In this case it is probable that Gr. _athānatoi_ replaced the original epithet *āmbrotoi_, which was etymologically cognate with Skr. _amṛtās_.

The proper seat of the gods is exactly that, PIE *sēdōs, derived from *sēd- ‘to sit’ (Lat. _sedeo_, OCS _sēsti_, Eng. _sit_, etc.): in Homer’s _Iliad_ (5.360, 367) the Olympus is called _athanātōn hēdōs_ ‘seat of immortals’, and the same expression is used in Hesiod's _Theogony_ (128) of the sky (_ouranōs_; in RV 3. 54. 5 we read that the gods abide in ‘seats’ (_sādamst_), and in 10. 96. 2 a heavenly (or divine) seat is mentioned (_diviyām sādas_). The Old Irish word for the mounds or hills where the ancient pagan gods live is _síd_, from PIE *sēdōs- (apparently with the lengthened grade of the root).

It has been argued by George Dumézil and others (see Dumézil 1958a, Littleton 1982) that Indo-European gods were organized in a system of triads, to reflect the ‘tripartite ideology’ of Indo-Europeans. According to this ‘ideology’, society is ideally divided into three groups, or social ‘functions’: the priests, the warriors and the agriculturalists (or craftsmen). In India, these social functions evolved into a rigid caste system, consisting of _ksatriyas_ (warriors), priests (_brahman_), and free craftsmen (_vaishyas_), but, in Dumézil’s opinion, there are traces of this kind of social organization in other early IE societies as well: in Rome, the three original tribes (according to a legend preserved by Titus Livius) were _Ramnes_, _Luceres_ and _Titienses_. The first of those were Romulus’ Latin companions, and they represented the priests (Romulus himself was a _rex-augur_). The second group, the _Luceres_, were warriors brought by
Lucumon, while the Titiens were the Sabines brought by Titus Tatius; they represent the agricultural fertility and opes, or abundance (they brought with them to Rome not just their agricultural skills, but also women, abducted by Romans). Dumézil saw a similar tripartite organization of society reflected in the traditional division of Ionians into four tribes representing three social functions, in the three original kin-groups depicted in Nart legends of the Ossetes (an Iranian people living in the Caucasus and having a rich oral heroic tradition), in the three original groups of the Scythians (as related by Herodotus), etc. According to Dumézil, each ‘function’ had a symbolic system associated with it, including a colour (white as the colour of priests, red as the colour of warriors, and black as the colour of the agriculturalists).

These three social groups (or ‘functions’) have their different gods assigned to their respective domains. In the Vedic pantheon, Indra (the thunderer) would be a typical god of the warriors, Varuṇa and Mitra would represent the priests, while the agriculturalists would be represented by Aryaman. In Rome, the three functions would correspond to the Capitoline triad of gods: Juppiter would be the god of the priestly function, Mars the warrior-god, and Quirinus the god of the third social group or function (the agriculturalists). This tripartite ideology would, in Dumézil’s opinion, be reflected not just in the way the gods were conceived (and in the myths associated with them), but also in the way they were worshipped, in the religious practices of Indo-Europeans. For example, the widespread practice of healing by word (magical charms), surgery and medicine would reflect the ideological division of proper actions for priests (speaking holy words), warriors (acting with instruments, including surgical instruments) and agriculturalists (procuring food and medicine).

It must be noted that the term ‘Indo-European ideology’ is not meant to reflect the real social organization of the society of speakers of PIE (or any other concrete society), but rather as a set of ideas determining the culture of early IE societies; there is certainly nothing particular about the languages of the Indo-Europeans or their genes that made them accept that particular system of ideas which was transmitted to their descendants by cultural, chiefly oral transmission: “J’appelle ‘idéologie’ l’inventaire des idées directrices qui commandent la réflexion et la conduite d’une société et qui, bien entendu, n’impliquent pas je ne sais quelle organisation particulière des cerveaux” (Dumézil 1985: 312).

Although intelectually bold and ingenuous, Dumézil’s ideas about the organization of PIE religion and mythology remain controversial. They are aprioristic, in the sense that almost any type of textual evidence can be made to fit a “tripartite” ideological scheme, hence the very hypothesis of a tripartite ideology of Indo-Europeans is strictly irrefutable. The same applies to Allen’s (1987) attempt to introduce a fourth ‘function’ to Dumézil’s system, that of the ‘other’, and to connect the social functions of early Indo-European societies with organizational schemes of kinship systems. Because of their inherent irrefutability, such theories will not be further mentioned in this book.

SACRED

To conclude from the number of preserved cognates, PIE had a rather rich terminology connected with the sacred sphere:

PIE *seh₂-k-/*sh₂k- > Lat. sacer, sacerdōs, sācer ‘worthy to be sacrificed’, TochB sākre ‘happy, blessed’, Lat. sancio ‘establish a law’, sanctus ‘sanctified’, Hitt. šāklāi ‘rite, custom’.
The semantic connection of holyness and (ritual) purification can be observed in the etymology of Lat. *pius* ‘faithful, pious’ (originally an attribute of one who conscientiously...
performs religious duties). Like its Italic cognates (e.g. Umbrian piúhiúí (Dat. sg.) it is derivable from the root *pēh₂u- (or *pewh₂-, with laryngeal metathesis) ‘to purify’, from which we also have Lat. pūrus ‘clean’ (< *puh₂-ro-). The development of pius from *puh₂-yo-is likewise regular, cf. also the verb piāre ‘to propitiate, cleanse by expiation’ and piāculum ‘victim, expiatory offering’ < *puh₂-yeh₂-tlo-.

PRIESTS

There is no common PIE term for ‘priest’; however, here are two terms that are at least reasonably good candidates for PIE status, whatever their exact original meaning:

PIE *kowh₁- > Gr. koíēs ‘priest of the Samothracian mysteries’, Lyd. kaveš ‘priest’, OInd. kaví- ‘seer’. The root is also found in OCS čjualan, čuti ‘to hear’, Gr. koé ‘hear, notice’, Lat. caue ‘be careful, heed’. With s-mobile we also have OHG scouwn ‘watch’, Eng. show, and, perhaps, Pol. chować ‘be careful’.

Lat. flāmen ‘priest’ and Skr. brahmán- ‘brahmin’ might, in principle, be from something like *bʰlag’smen, however non-Indo-European that reconstruction looks. Note also that the Lat. word is usually derived from PIE *bʰlew₂-, cf. Goth. blōtan ‘sacrifice’. Skr. brahmán- is also related to OIc. bragr ‘poetry’. Although this etymology is disputed, it is interesting to note that there are several common taboos affecting the desired behavior of both Roman flamines and Vedic brahmans:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Brahman</strong></th>
<th><strong>Flamen Dialis</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cannot be killed</td>
<td>cannot have hands laid upon him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannot be compelled as witness</td>
<td>cannot be compelled to swear an oath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must avoid funeral pyre</td>
<td>must avoid funeral pyre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannot drink alcohol</td>
<td>must not get drunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must not touch unsacrificed meat</td>
<td>must not touch raw meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must not oil his body (except head)</td>
<td>must not rub himself with oil outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must stop performing rites at time of war</td>
<td>must not see an army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must not study on horseback</td>
<td>must not touch a horse or ride it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must avoid dogs</td>
<td>must not touch or mention dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should never be naked or see his wife naked</td>
<td>must have some priestly sign on his body</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Sanskrit and Avestan there are many terms for ‘priest’, since there were many specialized kinds of priests. Etymological cognates include Skr. hōtar- and Av. zaotar, which are both from *gʰew- ‘to pour (a libation)’, Gr. khéō. The Germanic word for ‘god’ (Eng. god, Germ. Gott, Goth. guþ, originally neuter) is often derived from this root (PIE *gʰu-tóm ‘worthy of libation’), but equally possible is to derive it from the quasi-homophonous root *gʰewH- ‘call, invoke’ (Skr. hāvate, OCS zъvati). If that is correct, god would originally have been ‘the invoked one’.


Lat. pontífex ‘priest’ is an old compound meaning ‘bridge-maker’ or ‘path-maker’ (from PIE *ponth₂- ‘bridge, path’ > Lat. pons, ‘bridge’, Gr. pátos ‘path’ and *dʰeh₁- ‘do, make’ > Lat. facio, OCS dětí). From the point of view of eneolithic technology of Indo-Europeans, bridges
and paths were more or less the same thing, a set of planks making it possible for carts to cross swampy areas. Priests were therefore seen as those who set the paths (for gods and men), and in the Rig-Veda the ancient seers (the Rishis) are called pathikāt- (RV 10.14.15cd, 2.23.6a), from Ved. panthā- ‘path’ and kr- ‘do, make’.

SACRIFICE

The functions of the PIE priest would have included the performance of various rites, including the sacrifice. The most common types of sacrifice are the libation and the slaughter of animals; of these, the cattle, the sheep and the horse are the most prominent sacrificial animals, and there are several combinations, such as the Roman Suovetaurilia (the sacrifice of a sheep, a pig, and a bull, chiefly during the festival of Ambarvalia in May, when the sacrificial animals are led around the crops to protect them from blight).

Any self-respecting sacrificer ended the sacrifice with a feast, on which the sacrificed animal was shared with the gods. This feast seems to be denoted by PIE *dapnom ‘sacrificial meal’ (Lat. daps, ON tafn ‘sacrificial animal’, Arm. tawn ‘feast’, Hitt. ḫītappala- ‘person responsible for court cooking’, Gr. dapanē ‘ostentatious expenditure’).

The term for libation is PIE *spend-, hence Lat. spondeo ‘promise, vow’, Gr. spendō ‘pour a libation’, spondê, Hitt. ișpand- ‘pour a libation’, TochAB spânt- ‘trust’. The development of meaning in Lat. spondeo (cf. also sponsa ‘the promised bride, fiancée’) is clear if we recall that a libation is the proper time to make a promise to the deity in expectation of a returned favor.

Another root which denoted the libation was *gʰew- > Gr. khéō, Phryg. zeuman ‘libation’, Skr. hu- ‘pour’, hōtar ‘priest’, Arm. jawnem ‘offer, consecrate’, TochAB ku- ‘pour’. The original meaning was perhaps less tightly tied to the religious sphere, but ‘the pourer’ is a common term for a priest, cf. also Gaul. gutu-ater, who was a kind of a priest (‘the father of libations’?).

In contrast to PIE *spend-, which denoted the sacrificial pouring of a substantial amount of liquid (milk, or mead, or anything pleasing the gods), PIE *leyb- probably meant ‘to pour a few drops’, hence Lat. libō, libum ‘sacrificial cake’, Gr. leibō; de Vaan derives Lat. libō from *h₂leýbʰ- ‘to anoint’ (Gr. aleíphō, aleíphar ‘unguent’), cf. Lat. lino. In that case it would be unrelated to Gr. leibō, which is hard to believe. Gr. loibē is a sacrifice made by pouring a sacrificial liquid (especially wine), but, unlike khoē and spondē, it was used to avert a punishment by the gods, rather than to ensure their help and propitiousness.

PRAYER

Prayer is closely connected with incantation and magic, the chief difference being that, in a prayer, you don't expect the desired outcome to occur as a direct consequence of your prayer (as in a charm, or incantation); the prayer is intended to persuade the supernatural beings, while the charm should coerce them. Moreover, since prayers usually involve a promise to the deity that the supplicant would do certain things, it is clear that the words for ‘prayer’ will to some extent overlap with the words for ‘vow’, or ‘solemn declaration’. There are several verbal roots in PIE that can be translated as ‘to pray’; it is difficult to ascertain which of them were used in the specifically religious sense of ‘prayer’.
**MAGIC**

PIE *meldʰih- > OE meldian ‘announce’, Lith. meldžiū ‘pray’, OCS moliti, Hitt. maldāi ‘pray’; as Pol. modlić ‘pray’ shows, we have to assume the metathesis in Proto-Slavic (*ld > *dl). I am not sure whether Arm. malf’em ‘pray’ also belongs here, because of the unexpected -f- (*d would be regular). The semantics of the reflexes in Germanic point to the conclusion that the original meaning was probably ‘utter a solemn prayer’ or similar;

PIE *gʷh cdʰi- > OIr. guidid ‘pray’, Gr. théssasthai ‘ask, pray’, Av. ādyemi ‘pray’, OCS žeždaq ‘thirst’.

PIE *h₁or- > Lat. óro, Hitt. arīya- ‘consult an oracle’; the length of the vowel in Latin points to a root-noun *h₁õr-, but the etymology is doubtful (some linguists derive Lat. óro from the noun õs, õris ‘mouth’, which is not very convincing from the semantic point of view).

PIE *h₁wegʰ- ‘vow’ > Lat. voveo, Gr. eukhomai ‘pray’, Skr. oh- ‘utter solemnly, pride oneself’, Av. aog- ‘utter (with authority)’.


The correspondence between Lat. lito ‘to obtain or give favourable omens’ and Gr. litē ‘request’ (usually a request for a compensation when one has been wronged, or when one has wronged the gods) is doubtful; many linguists think that Lat. lito is a denominative verb from unattested *lita, which is in turn borrowed from Gr. litē (cf. the Gr. denominative lissomai ‘beg’). Lat. supplicāre ‘to pray, implore, beg humbly’ is derived from supplix ‘begging, humble, submissive’, which is in turn from *sub- and *plek- ‘bent, twisted’ (OCS plėtq ‘weave’, Gr. plékō), since praying was done while kneeing in a submissive, ‘bent’ position. Another derivative of the same root is supplicium ‘prayer’. Another common metaphor for ‘prayer’ is a libation (or pouring) of words’, cf. Gr. Od. 19.521 khēei phōnēn ‘she pours the voice’, RV. 2.27.1ab girah juhomi ‘I pour the songs’, where both gr. khēō and Skr. juhōmi are from PIE *gʰew- ‘pour’, cf. also Virgil, Aen. 6.55 funditque preces ‘he poured the prayers’.

In several IE traditions, prayers begin with a standard invocation to the deity, PIE *k’ludʰi moy ‘hear me’ > Gr. klýthi moi (e.g. Il. 5.115), Skr. śringh me ‘hear me’ (e.g. RV 8.66.12), Av. srāotā moi (Y 33.11c, Zarathuštra’s invocation of Ahura Mazda) cf. also klýthi theá ‘hear o goddess’ (Il. 23.770, Odysseus to Athena). Gods are then often called to come to the sacrifice, e.g. in RV 1.1.5 (of Agni): devó devēbhir ā gamat ‘the god may come here with the gods’, RV 1.21 Vāyav ā yāhi darśata ‘Vāyu, come, o beautiful one’; Sappho calls on Aphrodite (1. 5) thus: týid’ étih’ ai pota katērōta tās émas aiōdas aiōsa pēloí/ ēklyes ‘but come here, if ever at another time you heard my voice far of and hearkened’. Other parts of the prayer may include a reminiscence of the past services done to the deity, or of the past favours the deity has done to the supplicant, and a detailed request, specifying what is desired of the deity. The preciseness of formulation of such requests is particularly developed in Roman prayers, both private and public.

A particular formula associated with IE prayers is ‘protect men and livestock’, PIE *wiHro- *pekʰu- peh₂-, reflected as Umbrian ueirō pequo ... salua seritu, Lat. pastores pecuque salua seruassis, Av. ṛāyrāī pasvā virayā, Skr. trāvāntām... pūrusāṃ pāsum.
Magic is the method of directly achieving one's goals – without the intercession of a deity that needs to be persuaded – through magical deeds or incantations. In many languages, the magical action is seen as ‘binding’, PIE *śeh₁-i- (ON seiðr ‘band, belt’, Lith. saitas ‘bond, fetter’, from which we have W hud ‘magic’, ON seid ‘magic’, perhaps also TochB nesait ‘magic’. The root *kʷer- ‘make, do’ may have been used in the technical sense of performing magical rites or composing incantations, cf. OIr. creith, W prydydd ‘poet’, OCS čari, Lith. kerai ‘magical spells’ and the Ved. formula vācam kṛ- (e.g. RV 10.71.2: vācam akṛata ‘they (the poets) made the Word’). It has been argued that the visible sign of supernatural action was denoted by PIE *kewdos > Gr. kŷdos, OCS čudo (Gen. sg. čudese) ‘miracle’.

In a number of traditions magical incantations have been preserved, e.g. the Gaulish Phraseological correspondences have been discovered in a number of charms used for healing the disjointed leg. The Atharva-Veda (4.12) heals the disjointed leg by putting ‘marrow to marrow, skin to skin and flesh to flesh’, and the same procedure is applied in the OHG ‘Second Merseburg Charm’, where various deities cure the leg of Baldur's horse by joining ben zi bena, bluozi bluoda, lidzi gelden ‘bone to bone, blood to blood, limb to limb’. Finally, in the OIr. tale Cath Maige Tuired (34. 135-6) we read how the Irish physician Míach tried to rejoin the severed arm of the god Níadu by chanting ault fri halt di, & féith fri féith ‘joint to joint of it, and sinew to sinew’. Similar incantations are found in Hittite, Latvian, and Russian, but in the absence of specific etymological correspondences, they may have spread by diffusion, or simply be the result of chance (or similar ways of thinking about healing).

BElIefe

In our modern world-view, ‘to believe’ is to have a particular attitude towards the truth of a proposition. We ‘believe’ that there was a thing the physicists call the ‘Big Bang’, because that belief is consistent with other things the physicists teach us, although this particular belief does not affect our everyday lives and actions at all. This modern sense of ‘believe’, however, is the result of a long semantic evolution; in pre-modern societies, ‘to believe’ is to place one's trust into a set of actions, to establish a bond with the supernatural. In PIE, this is the sense of the phrase *k'erd > Lat. credo, OIr. cretid, Skr. śrad-dhā-, Hitt. karatan-dai; the first element of this compound is often related to PIE *k'erd- ‘heart’ (Lat. cor, OCS sr̥dce etc.), but this is doubtful, since this word never occurs with the full grade in the second syllable (*k'erd-). The appurtenance and the exact meaning of Hitt. karatan- have also been doubted.

Perhaps it is possible to reconstruct another verb, PIE*h₂eh₁- ‘believe’ > Hitt. hā-zi, Lat. ômen ‘omen, augury’; the semantics of the connection would work if the original meaning of *h₂eh₁- men- > Lat. ômen was ‘the credible (sign of the gods)’. Note that an alternative etymology derives Lat. ômen from *h₂eʷ-s-men (‘what is seen’, from the root of oculus ‘eye’). Finally, there is the Avestan term daēna- which is usually rendered as ‘religion’; it is the etymological equivalent of Skr. dhena-. Another possible cognate is Lith. dainà 'song', Latv. daina.

OATH

Swearing is a religious act in all archaic religions, as the swearer takes gods as his witnesses. A common motive in many IE traditions is swearing by some holy water, e.g. the river Styx in
the Greek mythology, Ganges in India and Leiptr in ancient Scandinavia. These rivers are often connected with the Otherworld (suggesting that one actually swears by one’s ancestors who are now deceased), but Ganges was believed to have a source in the heavens (Mahābhārata 3.107). In the Iliad (14.271-3) Hypnos (god of dreams) asks Hera to swear to him by using this formula: ágrei nyn moi ómosson áaaton Stygís hýdór // kheirí dè tēi hetérēi mèn héle khthoná polybóteiran // tēi d’ hetérēi hálá marmarēēn... ‘Come on, and swear to me now by the terrible water of Styx, take by one hand the earth, rich in fodder, and by the other the shining sea’.

There are not many words for ‘swearing’ and ‘oath’ in the PIE lexicon:

*h₁oyto- ‘oath’ (OIr. oeth, OHG eid, Gr. oítos ‘course, fate’), a derivative of the root *h₁ey- ‘go’ (Skr. ēmi, Lat. eo, OCS ići); the semantic connection between the verb ‘to go’ and ‘oath’ is seen in the practice of walking between parts of a sacrificed animal while giving an oath (this custom is recorded in Hittite documents and in the 14th century Lithuania).

*wroto- ‘oath’ (ORuss. rota, Croat. arch. rōta, Skr. vratám ‘command, law’); this term seems to be dialectal in PIE. The semantic connection between ‘command, law’ and ‘oath’ is parallel to the connection between Lat. iūro ‘swear’ and iūs ‘law’ < PIE *h₂yewos- ‘vital force’ (Skr. yóś- ‘of life’, Av. yaoś- ‘life’).

*h₂emh₃- ‘grasp, swear’ (Gr. ómnymi ‘swear’, Skr. ámīti ‘holds grasps, swears’, perhaps Lat. amo ‘love’); in Latin, the semantic evolution was from ‘be bound by an oath’ to ‘have as friend, love’; the semantic connection between ‘hold, grasp’ and ‘swear’ lies in the custom of touching or holding an object (or a person) one swears by. A similar semantic development may be seen in PCelt. *tongo- ‘swear’ (OIr. tongaid, W tyngu) from PIE *teh₂g- ‘touch’ (Lat. tango, Goth. tekan).

In some languages the words for ‘oath’ have less clear etymologies. PCelt. *lugiyo- ‘oath’ (OIr. lugae) is sometimes derived from PIE *h₂lewg- (Hitt. haluga- ‘message’), but the original meaning of the root is uncertain and the semantic connection is weak. PGerm. *swarja- ‘to swear’ (Eng. swear, Germ. schwören, Schwur) is usually connected with OCS svarъ ‘dispute’ (Russ. svára, Pol. swar), so the semantic evolution would be from ‘to have a dispute’ to ‘swear’ (the Slavic forms would need to be from a lengthened grade expected in a root-noun, PIE *swörr-, and the Germanic forms from the o-grade *swor- of the same root). The Balto-Slavic verb for ‘swearing’ (OCS klęti, Latv. klentēt, OPr. klantemmai ‘we beseech’) is probably from PIE *kleh₁- ‘call’ (Gr. kalēō ‘call’, OE hlynn ‘sound’).
3. ELEMENTS OF PIE MYTHOLOGY

SKY GOD

There are reasons to believe that PIE *dyēws ‘sky, Sky-god’ was the supreme deity of the PIE pantheon. He was certainly most often preserved in the individual pantheons, cf. Ved. dyaū-, Lat. Dias Fidius, Gr. Zeus, Hitt. šiuš ‘god’, ON Tyr. He is commonly addressed as ‘father’, PIE *dyēws ph2tēr ‘Sky Father’ > Lat. Iuppiter, Umb. Iupiter, Gr. Zeus patēr, Skr. Dyauṣ pītā, Luv. tātīs tiwaz, Latv. Dievs debess tēvs; cf. also ON Óðinn Alfhöðr ‘Odin, father of all’ and OIr. (Echu) Ollathir ‘(Echu) father of all’.

The sky god often bears the standard epithet ‘All-knowing’, or ‘All-seeing’: Gr. eurýopa Zeus, RV 6.70.6 višvavedas Dyaus.

DAWN GODDESS

The Vedas praise the Dawn as a young maiden, and Ved. Uṣās is clearly the same etymon as Gr. Hom. ēós; this deity plays almost no role in Greek mythology, so it seems that several of her attributes were taken over by other deities, chiefly Aphrodite and Helēnē < *welenā, from PIE *wellh₂, -‘wish, desire, choose’ (Lat. velle, OCS volja ‘will’). Similarly in Lat. aurora is just an appellative, but the cult of the Dawn was preserved in the rites devoted to Mater Matuta. In Lithuanian dainas, Aušrinė ‘dawn’ is a young maiden often represented as marrying Mėnų ‘the moon’. Lasicius (a Polish writer of the 16th century, on Lith. Aušra): Ausca dea est radiorum solis vel occumbentis vel supra horizontem ascendentis.

The Dawn was originally the ‘daughter of the Sky’, PIE *dUGH₂tēr deivos > Ved. duhitā divās, Gr. thygatēr Diōs (especially of Aphrodite, Helen, and the Muses); Alcman (Fr. 43 Edm.) begins his poem with the words: Mōs’ āge Kalliōpa thygatēr Diōs ‘come on Muse Calliope, daughter of Zeus!’ . Since Dawn is associated with poetic inspiration in the Vedas, it is not too far-fetched to assume that the phrase thygatēr Diōs was transferred to the Muse from Ėōs, who plays an insignificant role in Greek mythology. In the Latvian and Lithuanian dainas, the phrase *dUGH₂tēr deivos is also found, e.g. Lith. Dievo dukrūtē (of Saule, the Sun goddess). Uṣās was a patron of the rishis, the Vedic poets, and the Old Irish goddess Brigit (dea petarum according to bishop Cormac, who wrote in the tenth century) was born at dawn. Her name comes from PCelt. *brigantī < PIE *bhrg'ntih₂ and from the same proto-form is derived one of the epithets of Uṣās, bhratī ‘the exalted one’. The common epithet of the PIE dawn was ‘Shiny Dawn’, with the adjective ‘shiny’ derived from PIE *b₂h₂-, cf. RV 3.6.7: Uṣō vibhātī, Gr. Hom. phaeinē (an epithet of Eos), Pindar Nem. 6.52 phaennās Aōos ‘of shiny Dawn’; she was the one who regularly opened the ‘doors of heaven’ RV 1.48.15: dvārau divās, Latv. dieva durvis, cf. RV 7.79.4 vi dfēhaṣya dúro ādrer aurōs ‘you (Uṣās) have opened the gates of the closed rock’. As a beautiful young woman, she is often represented as smiling, cf. Ved. Uṣās... smayate ‘Dawn smiles’ (RV 3.4.6ab), Gr. (Aphrodite) meididiet ‘Aphrodite is smiling’ (Hom. Hymn. 10.3); we mentioned above that there are reasons to believe that Aphrodite took over several of her attributes from the dawn goddess Eos, and in early Greek poetry Aphrodite’s standing epithet is philo-meidēs ‘laughter-loving’ (e.g. Il. 5.375), where both Ved. smāyate and Gr. -meid- are from PIE *smey- ‘smile’.
MOTHER EARTH

Although it appears that the Earth was represented as ‘mother’ in most IE traditions, it is not generally represented as the spouse of ‘father sky’; the Earth is a deity in Ved., where she is called Prthiṅī (Gr. plateia, Gaul. Litiavi, OE folde) < PIE *pltlHwīh₂ ‘The broad one’. Gr. Gaïa, does not have a PIE etymology, but she is also called Khthōn (Aesch. Eumenides 6, fr. 44. 1), and this is the Greek reflex of the PIE word for ‘earth’ (*dʰegʰōm). Gr. Dāmātēr is sometimes believed to be a personification of the same earth-goddess, but there is little evidence that dā- actually meant ‘earth’. Other deities that belong here are Hitt. Dagan-zipas annas, Lith. Žemynė, Latv. Zemes Māte (‘Mother of the Earth’), ON Íðrō (Odinn’s wife), and perhaps Thracian Semele; in Old English we have Folde, fīra modor ‘Earth, mother of men’ (in a charm). Tacitus claims that the Germans worship ‘Nerthum, id est Terram matrem’ (Germ. 40. 2). Finally, OIr. Anu is called mater deorum Hiberniensium (by Cormac in the 10th century), cf. Dá chích Anann (in Killarney) ‘two breasts of Anu’. The etymology of the name Anu is unknown.

The standard epithets of earth is ‘dark’, cf. Hitt. dankuiš tekan, Gr. khthōn mélaina, Russ. Mat’ čërkana zemlja, Lith. juodoji žemaité, uoda Žemélė, perhaps OIr. domunn donn (where domunn means ‘world’, but donn is ‘dark’). Another common expression is ‘broad earth’: Hom. eureia khthōn, RV 6.17.7. kśām uvṛm. Calin (2017: 75) mentions also Alb. dhe ië zi ‘black earth’ in Albanian folk-songs. In the Russian folklore, zemlja is commonly called syraja ‘wet, moist’, and the name of the Slavic goddess Mokša (perhaps the consort of the thunderer Perunъ) is probably from the root of *mokrъ ‘wet’ (Croat. mokar, Russ. mokryj, etc.).

SUN-GOD AND SUN MAIDEN

The Sun is the only heavenly body that was worshipped by Indo-Europeans. In contrast to, e.g., the Semitic religions, the Moon plays a very modest role in Indo-European mythologies. The PIE word for ‘sun’, on the other hand, is a theonym in several traditions. PIE *seh₂wōl ‘sun’ is preserved as Ved. Sūrya- and Sūryā, Gr. Hēlios, Latv. Saule and Saules meīta. As a common noun, it is preserved in Lat. sól, as well as in OCS sλъnc,e, etc.

As a mythological creature, the Sun shares a number of epithets across several IE traditions; e.g. it is a ‘seer’, cf. Ved. sūryam...spaśam, RV 4. 13. 3 Gr. Êêlios...skopón ‘sun, the seer’; Also in Hymn to Demeter; since the sun is a ‘seer’, we can easily understand the semantic evolution in OIr., where sūl means ‘eye’, cf. also Arm. aregakn ‘sun’ < ‘eye of the sun’. As the all-seeing deity, the Sun is the natural choice for the supervisor of oaths, and in several traditions we have records of oaths directed to the Sun (cf. Agamemnon’s oath in the Iliad 3.276f.). In RV, it is stated that diśah sūryo nā mināti ‘Sun does not infringe the directions prescribed’, where diś- ‘direction’ is from the same root as Gr. dikē ‘justice, divine law’. Heraclitus (B 92) states that the Sun does not overstep his measures, which implies that it always obeys the same divine rule.

Moreover, the Sun drives across the sky in a chariot. Hence the expressions Ved. sūryasya cákram, Gr. Hēliou kýklos ‘the wheel of the sun’ Aeschylus, Persae 504. Its course is ‘fast’, cf. Mimnermus fr. 11a. ōkēos ēlēioio and AV 13.2.2 āśūm Sūryam < PIE *h₁ōk’u- *seh₂wōl ‘swift sun’. In several traditions, Sun’s horses are also invoked (PIE *suh₂lōs h₁ek’wōs), e.g.
RV 1.115.3a áśvāḥ...sūryasya ‘the Sun’s horses’, Pindar Isth. 5.1+5 Aeliou hippoi ‘the Sun’s horses’, Ovid Met. 2.154 solis equi, Latv. (LD 33627-10) Saules zirgu ‘the Sun’s horse’, etc. Of course, these are the horses drawing the Sun’s chariot, cf. Old Norse (Grímnismál 37) ‘(the horses) Árvakr and Alsviðr shall draw up the sun’.

Finally, there are reasons to believe that heaven, or the Otherworld of the blessed ones, is located at the end of the Sun’s path in the PIE cosmology, cf. RV 10.95.18d: ‘(after death) you shall rejoice in heaven (svarga). Skr. svarga- ‘heaven’ and Gr. ólbos ‘bliss’ can probably both be derived from a PIE compound *su(h₂)ol-gʷ*h₂o- ‘that which goes towards the sun’ (Janda 2005: 261f.).

STORM-GOD (THUNDERER)

The name of the PIE Storm-God is probably preserved in Hitt. Tarhunt-, ON Þôrr, Ofr. torann < PIE *törh₂-n- ‘thunder’; we find a rather different etymon in Lith. Perkūnas and Russ. Perún (cf. also Gr. keraunós ‘thunder’, which may have been abstracted from Zeus' epithet terpsikēraunos ‘delighting in thunderbolt’, perhaps from *perkʷi-perawnos ‘having a smiting bolt’). These names seem to come from PIE *per-kʷ-u-no-. In this PIE form, we may have the amalgam of two distinct etymons, a word for ‘rock’ (cf. Hitt. peruna- ‘rock’, OLInd. parvata- < *perwnto-), and the word for ‘oak’ (PIE *perkʷu-> Lat. quercus, OHG fereh-eih), cf. also the ON theonym Fjörgyn ‘mother Earth’ which appears to be from PGerm. *fėrgunja- ‘mountain’ > Goth. faigunu ‘mountain’). The thunder is believed to be rocky (cf. the Byelorussian expression kamen Peruna, Lith. perkūno akmuo), and the oak is the tree most often hit by thunder, hence it is dedicated to the Storm-God. On the other hand, these theonyms are probably unrelated to Ved. Parjānya-, who is mostly associated with rain in the RV, and whose name is difficult to reconcile with the PIE proto-form *per-kʷ-u-no- (which is problematic anyway). PSl. *Perunъ is probably originally ‘the Striker’, from the root *perti ‘to strike’ (cf. the figura etymologica in Byelorussian charms pjarun pjarec ‘the Thunder strikes’). The suffix is probably Slavic -unъ used to form nomina agentis (as in OCS běgunъ ‘fugitive’ from *běgti ‘run’).

The standard weapon of the Storm-God is, of course, the thunder, which is often represented as some sort of mace, or hammer. Thus, Indra's mace is called vájra-, from PIE *wag-‘smash’ (or *weh₂gʷ-, with vowel-shortening by Lubotsky's rule), cf. Gr. āgnymi ‘smash’, TochA wašīr ‘thunderbolt’. Thor's hammer is called Mjöllnir in the Edda, and this is from the same root as Latv. milna ‘thunder’, OCS mlsṇji ‘thunder’, Luv. maldani ‘hammer’ and Lat. malleus ‘hammer’. In religious poetry and ritual, the Thunderer is often represented as a bull, e.g. Indra is said to be ‘the bull of heaven’ (vīṣā divāḥ, RV 8.57.3b), while the Hittite storm-god Tarhuntas is said to have become a bull (GUD.MAH kīšati, KBo III 41). In the Greek religion, the bull was one of the sacred animals of Zeus, who became the Thunderer (although he bears the name of the original sky-god), and in Latvian dainas one refers to ‘bulls of Dievs’ (Dieva vērši, LD 2221) who drink up a river.

DIVINE TWINS

The following mythological creatures are divine twins, a mythological conception of probably PIE origin: Gr. Dióskouroi (Castor and Polydeuces), Ved. Aśvins (dual), also called Nāsatyā, Latv. dieva dēli ‘(the sons of Dievs). In the RV, the Aśvins are called ‘Descendents (or sons)
of the Sky': Ved. divó napātā RV1. 117. 12, 182. 1; they are often described as ‘youthful’, yuvānā (RV 1. 117. 14), and in Latin, Castor and Pollux (< Polydeučēs) are called iuvenes (Cicero, De natura deorum 2.6).

They are associated with horses: Pindar (Ol. 3. 39) calls them eúippoi, ‘having good horses’, and RV 7.68.1 has suāśvā ‘with good horses’; Castor is usually called hippódamos ‘horse-taming’ in Homer. They are ‘bright’: RV 8.5.32 refers to the Āśvins as pūruścandrā ‘very bright’. The name of Polydeukēs is probably dissimilated from *polyleukēs ‘with many lights’ (cf. Gr. leukós ‘white’).

They are brothers of the Dawn (in the RV), and of Helen (in Greek Myth); in both the Greek and in the Vedic traditions they are invoked as the saviours, or helpers, Gr. sótēres. Their Vedic name Nāsatyā probably also originally meant ‘saviours’, cf. Goth. nasjands ‘Saviour, Christ’.

Some authors have proposed that traces of the Indo-European twin horsemen were preserved in the Anglo-Saxon legend about Hengest and Horsa (literally ‘Stallion’ and ‘Horse’, the brothers who allegedly conquered Roman Britain in the 5th century A.D. The legend is preserved by Bede the Venerable in his Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum and in the later Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

HORSE SACRIFICE

There is no doubt that horses played an important role in the Indo-European society. Consequently, the sacrifice of a horse is the mother of all sacrifices. Ved. aśvamedha- was a ritual of royal inauguration; after running around the kingdom freely for an amount of time, the queen was made to symbolically mate with it, and then it was butchered. The Vedic name of the ritual is sometimes compared with the Gaul. name Epomeduos, but this does not amount to much; more importantly, the coronation ritual of Ulster kings, as recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis in the 12th century also included the ritual slaughter of a horse, in whose broth the elected king was made to bath. One important character in the Ulster sagas, Medb, is often seen as a sovereignty figure (she spends men quite ostentatiously, including several kings), and her name contains the same element (*medʰwo- ‘intoxication’) recognized in aśvamedha-. Finally, the Roman ritual October Equus (unsurprisingly held in October) involved horse racing followed by the sacrifice of a horse, whose head was put on a stake outside of the Regia. The ritual involved the Rex sacrorum, so it is quite possible that it had something to do with the consecration of a king in Rome’s days of kingship. In the Slavic folklore songs studied by Radoslav Katičić, the hero whose return marks the beginning of spring (Jarylo) is slaughtered in the form of a horse at the end of the fertility rite.

Although horses are important in mythologies of several Indo-European peoples, it is by no means clear that the rite of horse sacrifice itself was inherited from PIE, as it could equally have spread at a later date. This depends, in part, on whether the speakers of PIE domesticated horses or not. The date of domestication of horses is debated in archaeology: the first culture to systematically herd horses was probably the Botai culture from Kazakhstan in the 4th millennium B.C, and it is not impossible that this culture was in contact with the speakers of PIE, who could have used horses for riding. However, the horse-drawn chariots that play an important role in Hittite, Indo-Iranian, Greek and Celtic cultures are certainly a post-Indo-European technological development.
THE DRAGON-SLAYING MYTH

It has been claimed that a PIE formula *gʰwhent h₃egʰim ‘he slew the serpent’ can be reconstructed on the basis of the formulaic expressions such as the following: Ved. áhann áhim (of Indra, who slew the dragon Vrtra), Av. ōṇaṭ ažīm (of Thraetaona, who slew the nasty serpent Aži Dahaka, Hitt. Ṝḷḷuyyankana kuentə (of the Storm God, Hitt. Tarhunt-), OIr. gono mil ‘I slay the beast’ (in charm texts). Homer also uses verbs from the same root, e.g. ἐπεφήνη, when describing the slaying of several monsters. For example, in his description of how Bellerophontes slew the Chimaira (Il. 6. 179-186): próton mén rha Khímairan amaimakēten ekéleusen pephnémen... t₁ tríton aû katépephnen Amazónas anianeíra ‘first he decided to kill the terrible Chimaira... and thirdly he killed the Amazons, who were similar to men’. The same phraseology is used in Pindar’s account of the same myth (Ol. 6. 179-186): ‘So mounted, out of the cold gulfs of the high air forlorn, he smote the archered host of women, the Amazons, and the Chimaira, breathing flame; and the Solymoi, and slew (ἐπεφήνη) them’. Another root often used in dragon-slaying texts is *bʰeyd- ‘split’ (vitrāsya śiro bibheda ‘he (Indra) splitted the head of Vrtra’ (RV 8. 6. 6.). It is possible that the root *bʰeyd- is just a variant of *bʰeyH- (if *H = *h₁) ‘to strike’, which yielded OCS biti, OIr. benaid, OLat. per-fines. This verb is regularly used in the Slavic dragon-slaying myth preserved in the folk-lore texts (e.g. in Byelorussian dyk tut Pjarun zabiv zmeja ‘here the Thunder slew the dragon’, Katičić 2008: 136). The alternation *d / *h₁ would be parallel to the one in PIE *med- ‘measure’ (> Lat. medeor ‘heal’, OIr. midithir ‘judge’) and *meh₁- ‘measure’ (> OCS méra, Skt. māti).

The original dragon-slayer was probably the Storm-God, PIE *torh₂nt-, as in the Slavic myth, where the thunderer Perun slays the snaky dragon Veles (Volos in Russian sources). Note that there is still no consensus about the reconstruction of the PIE word for ‘snake’, the Storm-God’s opponent. While *h₃egʰi- will serve to reconcile Ved. áhi-, Av. ažī- and Gr. ὀphis, Lat. anguis and OCS qž point to a nasalized root, perhaps *h₂engʰi/*h₂egʰi-.

THE DRINK OF IMMORTALITY

Many IE traditions have a story about the drink and/or food of the immortals; this substance is often said to provide the consumer with immortality, cf. Ved. soma, Gr. ambrosía (the food of the gods, from PIE *n-mrto- ‘immortal’), and nēktar, the drink of the gods, from PIE *nek'-terh₂- ‘death-overcoming’, with the regular loss of the laryngeal in compounds. Compare AV 4.35 tarāṇi mṛtyum ‘I will overcome death’. In the Norse tradition, a parallel is perhaps represented by the story of Mímir’s well, a drink from which gives supernatural wisdom. The immortal drink of the gods is often represented as mead, PIE *medʰu- (> Skr. mādhu, Gr. méthy ‘wine’, Lith. medus). The Norse tradition also teaches us that it was Odin who changed into an eagle, and then fēlu and spat the mead into the cauldrons of gods (Skáldskaparmál 6; this story has curious parallels in the Hittite rituals (KBo 6472 11ff) where the Storm-god receives the sacred water from eagles Rig-Veda, where it is the falcon (śyenā-) who brought the mead (mādhu-) to the god Indra (RV 4.18.13d).
In a number of traditions, the origin of the world – either in its physical or in its social aspect – is connected with the myth of the ‘twin’ (PIE *(H)yemo- > Skr. yama- ‘twin’, Av. yima-, Latv. jùmis ‘pair (of fruits)’, OIr. emon ‘twin’, ON Ýmir, perhaps also Lat. Remus (if from *yemos on the analogy with Romulus) and geminus ‘twin’ (with g- on the analogy with gigno ‘engender’). The root may be identical with the one in imágo ‘picture’, Hitt. himma- ‘imitation, substitute’. This primeval twin has, in all appearances, nothing to do with the divine twins, the sons of the sky (see above). In the Norse myth (Grímnismál 40-41) the giant Ymir is dissected and the mountains are formed from his skull, the trees from his hair, etc: Ór Ymis holdi vas jörð of sköpuþ, en ór sveita sær, björg ór beinum, baþmr ór hári en ór hausi himinn. ‘From the flesh of Ymir the world was formed, from his blood the billows of the sea, the hills from his bones, the trees from his hair, the sphere of heaven from his skull’.

In Middle Persian Bundahišn, it is told how Ohrmazd created the first human, Gayōmart (from Av. gaya- ‘alive’ and marstan ‘dead’) together with an ox; both the ox and Gayōmart later died (partly due to the intervention of the evil demon Ahriman), and then the beneficial plants, animals and, ultimately, humans were created from the semen of the ox, while the metals (copper, tin, gold, iron) were created from various parts of Gayōmart’s body. According to a different tradition (Bundahišn 6.17), the first human couple Mašia and Mašiānag sprang from a rhubarb plant that grew from Gayōmart’s sperm.

Tacitus (in Germania, 2), tells how the Germans believe that they originate from a primeval Tuisto (originally ‘twin’?), who had a son called Mannus ‘man’. This is reminiscent of the Vedic myth, where Yama was the first mortal to die (RV 10.13.4d: ‘for the gods’s sake, he chose death’), and he was subsequently given the rule of the Otherworld. His brother, Manu-, the progenitor of the humankind, sacrificed him. Some comparative mythologists believe that the figure of Yama-/Yima- was replaced by Kronos, the castrated and deposed father of Zeus, in Greek mythology. According to Pindar (Ol. 2.68-73) he continued to reign in the Isle of the Blessed, one of the Greek variants of the Otherworlds. In Latvian dainas, there is a mythological figure of Jumis who has a sister Jumala (e.g. LD 28536: ‘Jumis took Jumala for a ride’), but there are no indication that they were ever considered the progenitors of humankind. Incidentally, in some Vedic hymns, Yama is given a twin sister Yamī (e.g. 10.10.7a: ‘I have been consumed by the love for Yama, Yamī’).

The legend of a miraculous birth of twins also lies in the legend of the foundations of Emain Machae, the ancient capital of Ulster in the Old Irish Ulster Cycle. In that legend, it is told how the goddess Macha raced as a mare with other horses while being pregnant, and gave birth to twins after the race. The tale is used to explain how Emain Machae ‘the twins of Macha’ got its name. The motif of the sacrificed twin may have its roots in the widespread infanticide of one of the twins in early societies, in which it was economically impossible for women to raise twins.

OTHERWORLD

There is no evidence for a consistent picture of the PIE otherworld. We do not know where it was, but it appears that the abode of the dead is reachable by boat, cf. OIr. tír inna mban, which is an island, as is the tech Duinn ‘the house of Donn’, to which the eponymous deity (“the dark one”) invited his descendants, the Irish people to come when they die (OIr. co tech nDuind frisndálaít mairb ‘to the house of Donn where the dead have their tryst’). Likewise, the island of Avalon in the British legend is the resting place of heroes, such as King Arthur.
(Welsh Arthwr). OCS navъ ‘the otherworld’ is derivable from the word for ‘boat’, PIE *neh2w-. (Lat. nāvis, Skr. náū-, etc.), and in the Greek belief, one has to cross the river Styx to reach the otherworld. The idea that one crosses the river is here combined with the other one, namely that the realm of the dead is underground; in the Old Irish sagas, you enter it via the fairy mounds, the síd (< PIE *sēdos ‘seat’). In a few traditions we find the idea that the dead abide in a wonderful meadow, rich in horses, cf. Hitt. wēllu- ‘meadow (of the otherworld)’.

Gr. (W)ēlýsion pedión ‘Elysian fields’; in TochA the word valu ‘dead’ may be related, as well as ON val-holl ‘Valhalla’. Lith. Vělnias ‘devil’ may be from the same root, as well as the name of the Slavic god of death and cattle, Velesъ (Russian also Volosъ), but this is uncertain. If all of these words are indeed related, they point to a PIE root *welH-. The concept of a meadow, or pasture for the dead is also found in Vedic, e.g. RV 10.14.2: ‘this cow pasture is not to be taken away’, as well as in OIr. mag mell, mag meld ‘the plain of pleasure’, one of the euphemisms for the Otherworld (e.g. Immram Brain, 34, 39; the attribute meld is probably related to Lat. mollis ‘soft’). The Elysian fields in the Greek tradition are sometimes confused with the Meadow of Asphodelus (Asphódelos leimόn), where souls of the dead wander to receive the blood sacrifices of the living (e.g. Od. 24.13-14).

In the Rig Veda, we find a belief that the realm of the deceased (‘the fathers’, pitaras) is in the sky, more precisely in the Milky Way (svarga-, which is compared to Gr. õlbios ‘blessed’ < *swel-g”(H)o-).

The otherworld may have been ruled by the original progenitor of mankind, *Yemo- (Skr. Yama-, Av. Yima-), see above. Caesar (De bello Gallico, IV: 18) says that the Gauls considered themselves descendants of Dis Pater, the god he identified with the Roman god of the underworld.

FIRE IN WATER (?)

A mythological fiery protector of waters is reconstructed on the basis of Lat. Neptūnus, Skr. Apām Nāpāt (< *h₂epōm nepōr- ‘the descendant of water (ap-)’, identified with Agni, the fire), OIr. Nechtan (a mythical spouse of Boand, the river Boyne), cf. also ON saevar níðr ‘descendant of the sea’ (a kenning for ‘fire’). In the RV (e.g. RV 2.1.ab), it is stated that Agni ‘fire’ is born from the waters (adbhyás), and his home is in the waters (apsv agne sādhis táva, RV 8.43.9a). Pindar, in his famous first Olympian Ode (1.1) constrasts fire with water: áriston mèn hýdor, ho dè khrysòs aithónemon pýr ‘Water is best, while gold, like blazing fire (shines)’. All of this, however, is on a very shaky soil. Neptūnus is plausibly derived from PIE *neb²-tu- ‘moisture’ (Av. napta- ‘moist’), and the name Nechtan may be from the root *neyg²- ‘to wash’ (OIr. nígéd).

THE WORLD-TREE

In a number of traditions we find a conception of a world-tree, growing through the three cosmic spheres: the earth, the middle sphere (Ved. antāriksa-) and the sky. The most famous example is the Old Norse ash-tree yggdrasil. Here is its description in Grimnismál 32: Ratatoskr heitir ikorní, / er renna skal /at aski Yggdrasils; /arnar oró /hann skal ofan bera /ok segja /niðhöggvi níðr. ‘Ratatosk is the squirrel who shall run on the ash-tree Yggdrasil; from above it bears the words of the eagle and tells them to Niðhögg (the world serpent) beneath’; the picture is repeated in Gylfaginning 16: ‘An eagle (órn) sits in the limbs of the Ash and
between his eyes sits the hawk called Veðrföllnir. The squirrel called Ratatosk... bears words between the eagle and the serpent Niðhögg’. Similar motives are found in Slavic folk-lore and in the Celtic mythology (e.g. the wonderful tree on which the god Llew is sitting in the shape of the eagle in the Mabinogi). The first element of the name Ygg-drasil contains the root *IHwo- ‘yew’ which is also found in the name of the mythological world-tree of the Hittite myth (GišEya-, KUB XVII, 10. IV 27-31: ‘Before Telipiniu stands an eya-tree, from the eya-tree a sheepskin is hung’). In Hittite, the tree is represented in the myth of the vanishing god Telipinu (who is discovered in his hiding by a bee), and it is said that sheep’s wool (hulana-) and other valuables are hanging from it. In the Slavic folk-lore texts, the tree is represented as a fir-tree with roots in the water (a stream or a source), and a dragon is often depicted lying beneath it. Bees are found in its branches, and on its top there is a bird of prey (an eagle or a falcon) watching far away. In some East Slavic charms the wool is also found on its branches (in parallel to the Hittite motive mentioned above).

In Greek and Indo-Iranian, the conception of the world-tree seems to be missing, but we do have the idea that the sky is supported by props, or pillars (the pillars of Atlas, sometimes understood as his shoulders, e.g. in Ibycus, or Od. 1.52-4 (kiones makrai)). In RV 8.41.10 it is said that Varuṇa holds the heaven with a pillar, and in RV 1.24. 7 it is said that ‘Varuna is holding the top of the tree erected in the baseless space’. AV 5.4.3ab speaks of the Áśvattha tree ‘in the third heaven above us... the seat of gods’. Many linguists see in the conception of the world tree an influence of the shamanistic traditions of Northern Eurasia, rather than PIE inheritance.

The heaven itself is considered to be made of stone; indeed, the word for ‘heaven’ in Avestan is asman-, from PIE *h₂ek’mōn, the reflexes of which mean ‘stone’ (Skr. áśmā, OCS kamy, Lith. akmuo). Note that in Greek we have a shadowy figure of Ákmn, who is said to be the father of Ouranós (‘the sky’) in Alkman, (PMGF 61).

BATTLE OF GODS

In a number of traditions, we find mention of ‘former gods’, Gr. theoi próteroi (Hesiod, Theog. 424, 486, Ved. pūrvē devās (RV 1.164.50), Hitt. karuiliš šiuneš. Also, in several traditions, we find the two generations of gods fighting each other for supremacy, like Ved. Asuras and Devas, Av. Daevas and Angra Mainyu versus Ahura Mazda (the supreme deity established by Zarathuštra), the Greek Olympian gods and Titans, OIr. Tiúatha Dé Danann, the Fir Bolg and the Fomoire, and the Norse Aesir and Vanir. These stories about the clash of two generations (or simply bands) of gods have actually rather little in common and it is unclear whether a common myth can be posited for PIE.

FATES

Most IE mythologies recognize three female divine figures in charge of the fates of men and, sometimes, also of the gods. In Greece they are known collectively as the Moĩrai (from the root *smer- ‘receive a share’, Gr. méros), and their names are Klōtho (from the verb klōtho ‘weave’), Lákhesis (from lagkhanō ‘receive (by lot)’ and Átropos (‘the un-turning’ from a- ‘not’ and trépō ‘turn’), cf. Hesiod, Theog. 905; in Rome, they are the Parcae (from parere ‘to give birth to’), and their names are Nona (“the ninth”), Decuma (“the tenth”) and Morta (“the dead one” or rather a derivative of PIE *smer-, like Moĩrai); Nona and Decuma are probably
called thus because children are born in the ninth or tenth month of pregnancy. In Old Norse the Fates are the three Nornir: Urð, Verðandi and Skuld (literally ‘the one which was, the present one and the one who shall be’, e.g. Völuspá 20, Gylfaginning 15). In Lithuanian Dainas, the goddess of fate is called Laimė, but sometimes she is represented in triple form, as the three fates, Latima, Dalia and Giltinė. In the Hittite mythology, there are the Gulšeš (from the verbal root gulš- ‘to write’, since they write down the man’s fate) but we do not know their individual names (in other contexts, when they are represented as spinners of destiny, fate goddesses are called Ištuštaya and Papaya). While it is curious that there are usually three female goddesses of fate, it is quite possible that we are dealing with a single mythological motive spreading from Anatolia and/or the Eastern Mediterranean, since we cannot exclude the possibility that the three Greek Moiras are the source of all the other goddesses of Fate. The motive of spinning the thread of a man’s life or destiny (e.g. Od. 7.195-198, Ovid, Met. 2.653-4, 8.451-457) can also have been ultimately borrowed from the Middle East via the Greeks.

A FEW OTHER MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

Gr. Pān and Ved. Pūśan- < *pewh₂sōn (or *peh₂us-h₂sōn-, from the root *peh₂- ‘to herd’, cf. Lat. pāstor ‘shepherd’); both deities are protectors of cattle and are associated with wilderness and traveling. Pan is not attested in Homer, and his chief sanctuary was in Arcadia. Elsewhere in Greece his functions seem to have been taken over by Hermes. Pūśan- is the mediator between gods and men, usually accompanied by goats (like Pan). Like Hermes in his function of the psychopompos, Pūṣan guides the dead on the ancestors' path.

Skr. ṛbhu- and Gr. Orpheus; the ṛbhūs are divine craftsmen in the Veda, and their art resembles the musical artistry of Orpheus; together with Tvaṣṭara, their boss, they made the weapon of Indra, his vājra. The ṛbhūs have also been related to Norse Alfs (dwarves), but that is even less convincing.

Skr. Aryaṁaṇ- (Av. airyaaman- ‘friendship’) and OIr. Éremón (son of Míl), OIC. Iormōnr (a name of Óðinn); all three names could be derived from the alleged PIE ethnonym *h₂eryo- ‘the Aryan’.

‘The fire-thief’ Gr. Promētheús bears a name similar to Skr. Māthava-, a mythical king who had fire in his eyes. The root would have been PIE *meth₂- ‘to steal’ (Ved. mathnāti).

Gr. Ὠκεανός (a mythical river encompassing the world) has been compared to the Vedic epithet ā-sāyāna-, predicated of the dragon Vṛtrā- (e.g. RV 4.17.7), who captured the cows/rivers (for the mythical equivalence of cows and rivers compare also OIr. Bóand ‘the river Boyne < PCelt. *bow-windā ‘white cow’). And indeed, the Okeanos is represented with a dragon-tail on some early Greek vases.

The hell-hound, or the dog guarding the entrance to the underworld, is sometimes posited on the basis of the correspondence between Gr. Kérberos and Ved. sābala- (later also sārvara- ‘speckled’, but the epithet is applied to the two hounds guarding the otherworld). However, a proto-form *Kerbero- looks distinctly non-Indo-European, so it is probable that both Kérberos and sābala- are loanwords from some unknown source.
PART II. A SELECTION OF TEXTS

HITTITE

The sources of our knowledge about Hittite religion are quite diverse. Firstly, there is a large number of archaeological findings, scattered throughout the Hittite Empire, including the spectacular temple at Yazilikaya and religious complexes within the Hittite capital at Hattuša (Boğaz-Köy, see Appendix). More importantly for our purposes, we have extensive written documents found in the royal archives of Hattuša (texts found in other excavations are much less numerous). These include many precise descriptions of Hittite rituals, including mythological texts and prayers recited during their performance, but also historiographic texts (the annals of Hittite kings) which often include references to rituals and prayers (e.g. the famous Prayers of Muršili II against the plague). They were written down roughly between 1700 and 1180 B.C.. The standard reference to Hittite texts are the abbreviations KUB (Keilschrift-Urkunden aus Boghazköy, 60 volumes) and (Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy, 45 volumes). All of these texts are written in cuneiform script on clay tablets, and methods of modern palaeography have allowed linguists to distinguish between Old Hittite texts (roughly from 1700 until 1550), Middle Hittite (1550-1300) and Neo-Hittite (1300-1150), though many Old Hittite texts exist only in rather late transcriptions.

‗One thousand gods of the land of Hatti‘ included many borrowed deities, and a handful of them that bear inherited names. For example, the Hittite god of Thunder was called Tarhunt in Hittite, and this name has a clear Indo-European etymology (see below); however, in Hattic he was called Taru, and the similarity of the two names is probably accidental. Likewise, original Sumerian Inanna was first identified with the Akkadian goddess Ištar, and then she became Hurrian Šawoška. None of these names are originally Hittite or Indo-European.

There is some evidence for a structured pantheon, especially in the Hattic stratum of the Hittite religion. The divine family is represented by Wurukatte (the Hattic head of the pantheon) and his wife Wurušemmu, probably identical to the Sun-goddess of Arinna. Their children are Telipinu (a fertility god who cyclically disappears and causes the general infertility of the land) and Mezzula, whose function is not entirely clear. These gods seem to have been particularly worshipped at the court, and are in a sense protectors of the king and the royal family.

Many Hittite gods are local, in the sense that the center of their power is concentrated in particular places of worship. Thus, the Hattic Sun-goddess (probably) Wurušemmu, had her cult center in Arinna, and the Storm-god was worshipped in Nerik and in Zippalanda. At Šarišša and Karakhna, there was a cult center of a god often depicted on a stag, with a hare and a falcon in his hand. His name was probably Kurunta. Kubaba, a minor goddess in Hittite religion, was worshipped at Karchemish, but later she became the Cybebe-Cybele, the great Mother-goddess of the Phrygians, whose cult was imported to Rome. Carchemish was a city in northern Syria, but only a few of other ancient places of worship can be localized archaeologically.

Since the Hittite Empire lasted for more than half a millennium (roughly from 1750 to 1150), divinities and their names went in and out of fashion. It is curious that one of the earliest Hittite theonyms, that of ‘Our God’ (Hitt. Štu-šummiš), which is attested in our very first Hittite text (‗The Proclamation of Anitta‘) does not occur in later texts. In the last centuries of the existence of the Hittite state, it seems that the Hurrian divine names gain ground at the
expense of Hittite, Hattic and Semitic ones, and this can be connected to the fact that the ruling dynasty of the Empire was Hurrian at that time.

Hittite gods were anthropomorphic; there were, however, a few theriomorphic divine creatures, like the bulls of the Storm-God, Šerri and Hurri. Indeed, the Storm-God himself, Tarhunt, is occasionally represented as a bull (e.g. in the depictions found in Alaca-Hüyük). One recalls immediately the epithets of Indra (vr̥śabha- and vr̥śabha-, both meaning ‘bull’) and the fact that the Greek master of the thunderbolt, Zeus, also has a strong connection with bulls (in the shape of a bull he impregnated his mistress Europa). But, on the whole, it appears that Hittites, as well as Indo-Europeans, worshipped their gods in the human shape, but that, being very powerful, the gods could, if they wished, change their shape into particular animals.

As in many other religions of the Ancient Near East, the proper attitude of humans towards gods is the one of slaves, or servants to their masters. The structure of the divine society is modelled according to the structure of the human society, so that, for instance, the king is seen as the chief servant of the gods. If they are not served properly, the gods are likely to take offence, and to punish the negligent servant and his property (including his family and his land, i.e. the land of the Hittites). Only regular sacrifices can supress the wrath of the gods, who usually do not forget the sins of the humans. When king Šuppiluliuma (‘He of the pure sources’) forgot to perform the sacrifice to the river Māla (Euphrates), the plague ravished his land for twenty years. Failure to perform the proper sacrifices is a sin, just like breaking one of many taboos that affected the life of ordinary people as well as of kings. The most awful of all taboos are called hurkil, e.g. having sex with cows, dogs, or pigs, but, interestingly, having sex with horses is not a hurkil according to Hittite laws.

In the last decades of the existence of the Hittite empire, it seems that a new conception gained ground: the last Hittite kings had their own personal protectors, with whom they established a more personal relationship; as Hattušili III tells us in his autobiography, he was the favourite of Ištar of Šamukha since he was born, and it was this goddess that helped his way to the throne. It is important to note that many Hittites bore theophoric names, but some of these names were never recorded outside of the royal family. This might mean that several deities – including, probably, most of the Hattic gods and goddesses – were only worshipped at the court, as part of the official cult, whereas they were practically unknown among the ordinary people.

Eschatological conceptions of the Hittites are not altogether clear; broken vessels in tombs, together with remains of food and drinks, clearly indicate that some sort of afterlife was envisaged, and in the case of the king, it was generally thought that he would be deified after his death; in fact, the common expression for ‘he died’, when applied to kings, is ‘he became god’. Note that in Egypt, the Pharaohs were thought to be gods already during their lifetime, and the Hittite habit of deifying their kings is similar to Roman solemn declarations by the Senate that people like Caesar, Augustus, and other emperors became gods after dying. There is, moreover, the conception of the ‘meadow of the otherworld’ (Hitt. wellu-), where the king is supposed to pasture his flocks in the afterlife. This has clear parallels in Greek (the Elysian fields) and, perhaps, Celtic (OIr. mag mell). It is quite unclear where the meadow of the otherworld is supposed to be located.

The priests were a numerous and very privileged caste in the Hittite society. Their duty was to take care of the temple, seen as the house of gods. The gods were thought to be actually living in the temple, and they were represented by their statues, many of which were excavated at Hittite sites. Temples contained paved courts and many small rooms surrounding them, as in Babylonia and Minoan Crete, and one of the rooms adjacent to the court housed the statue of
the god worshipped in the temple, usually on a pedestal, or the so-called huwaši stone. Taking away a statue of a god was considered as an ill-omen. The priests were also responsible for various rites and sacrifices, and these had to be performed according to rigidly prescribed instructions, in conditions of ritual purity – pollution or impurity (Hitt. pāpratār) can spoil any ceremony, and had to be avoided, or remedied, by magical incantations. The large majority of Hittite texts, especially from the late periods (13-12 centuries B.C.) are instructions for the correct performance of seemingly endless rituals. The rites, although rigidly prescribed, were not necessarily ascetic: most of the instructions end with the phrase ‘and then the priests eat and drink’, and there is one particular ritual in which the royal prince must sleep with twelve women (servants in a temple).

Divination was also part of the priests’ duties, and there were several techniques thereof: interpreting dreams, looking into a sacrificed animal's liver, or examining how one of the temple’s animals had waned. All of these techniques are attested in other Near Easter religions of the IIInd Millennium B.C..

It appears that there were also priestesses (they are usually called ‘wise women’) but they were in charge of less important rituals, especially magic.

Principal Hittite gods all have non-IE names: Wurušemmu, Wurukatte, Lelwanni (the death goddess), Taru, Telepinu, Eštan (the sun god), Hapantallī (sun god’s shepherd), Halmašuitt (the personified throne), Kašku (the Moon), Kait (the grain goddess) and the divine smith Hašammili are all from Hattic. On the other hand, Hurrian names include the two bulls Šerrī and Hurri, the Hurrian equivalent of Ištar, the winged seductress Šawoška standing on a lion, her two female attendants Ninatta and Kulitta, the Hurrian storm-god Teššub and his consort Hebat, their son Šarruma as well as Kumarbi, the ruler of gods before Tarhunt’s revolution overthrew him. Thonyms with decent PIE etymologies include Šiuš (< *dyēws ‘sky’), Tarhunt- (the Storm-God, from PIE *torh2nt- ‘thunder’), Dagan-zipa (from PIE *dʰe₂gʰom-‘earth’, with the Hattic suffix -zipa) and, possibly, Ullikummi, if from PIE *wlikʷ-mo- ‘the wet (or bathed) one’, since this name denotes the giant, slain by the Thunder-God, who is standing in the Ocean (cf. OIr. fliuich ‘wet’, Lat. liquor ‘liquid’). Arma, the Hittite name of the Moon god (Sumerian 𒀭EN.ZU, Akkadian 𒀭ŠIN), may be derivable from PIE *h₁ormo- ‘the measurer’ (TochB yarm ‘measure’).
1. The dragon Illuyankaš and the Storm-God

1. UM-MA mKi-il-[a l̃IM.ME] dŨ uNe-ni-ik
2. ne-piša-aš dIM-[x-x-]x-[n]a²
3. pu-ru-ul-li-ya-aš ut-tar nu ma-a-an³
4. ki-is-ša-an tar-a-an-zi
5. ud-ni-wa⁴ ma-a-ú še-eš-du nu-wa ud-ni-e
6. pa-aḥ-ša-nu-wa-an e-eš-du nu ma-a-an
7. ma-a-ši še-eš-zi nu EZEN pu-ru-ul-li-ya-aš
8. i-ya-an-zi
9. ma-a-an dIM-aš mušlu-ya-an-ka-ašša
10. I-NA⁵ urKi-is-ki-šu-ša ar-ga-ti-[i]-e-eer
11. nu-za mušlu-ya-an-ka-ašša dIM-an tar-aḥ-ta
12. dIM-aš-ta-ašša Dmeš-na-aš ḫu-u-ma-a[n-du]-uš
13. mu-u-ga-it⁷ an-da-ma 'PA'-ti-i-[ya][x-x-]x-te-en
14. nu-za dIn-na-ra-aš EZEN-an i-e-et⁸
15. nu ḫu-u-ma-an me-ek-ki ḫa-an-da-it
16. GESNIN-aš DUG pal-ḫi mar-nu-wa-an-da-aš DUG pal-ḫi
17. [wa]-al-ḫi-ya-aš DUG pal-ḫi [nu DUG] pal-ḫa-aš
18. an-[da]-an i-ya-a-da i-[e-et]
19. nu d{I-na-ra-aš I-NA uNeZ[i]-ig-ga-ra-at-ta pa-it
20. nu mḪu-u-pa-ši-ya-an LULULULU ú-e-mi-it
21. UM-MA dIn-ar mḪu-u-pa-ši-ya ka-aša-wa
22. ki-i-ya ki-i-ya ut-tar i-ya-mi
23. nu-wa-mu-ušša-an zi-iq-qa ḫar-ap-ḫu-ut
Thus speaks the priest Kilas of the city of Nerik on the feast-day of the Tarhunt, the Caelestial One:

When the feast of Purulliya is held, they speak thus:
There should be peace in the land of Hatti and the earth should be steadfast, and when the earth is steadfast Purulliya is held.

When Tarhunt, the Storm God escaped from Illuyanka in the land of Kiškilu Illuyanka overcame him.

Then Tarhunt became sad and he was with all the gods. Inara made a feast:
she prepared many things, a barrel of wine, a barrel of beer and a barrel of another drink.
There was plenty of drink there. Inara then went to Zigarat and found Hupašiya.
Inara said:
‘Hupašiya, look, behold! I will say something to you: come here and join me!’

Hupašiya said to Inara:
‘I will do your heart's desire if I may sleep with you.’
And she lay with him.
Inara took Hupašiya to a temple, and locked him there.
She called Illuyanka from its hole:
‘Behold, I will make a feast, come eat and drink!’
Then Illuyanka came with its offspring, they ate and they drank, they drank a barrel of each drink and became very drunk.
Thus, they could not return to their hole, and Hupašiya tied Illuyanka with a rope.
Then Tarhunt came, and slew Illuyanka, and all the gods were with him.”

2. The myth of Telipinu, the vanishing God

The text is in Sumerian and contains complex linguistic elements.

“The fog kept (filled) the windows; the smoke kept (filled) the house;
the woods in the oven were smothered;
At the altars the god were smothered, the sheep in the fold were
smothered, in the stable
The cattle were smothered, the sheep refused her lamb,
the cow refused her calf.
Telipinu too went away;
the fertility of animals and seeds, their productivity and (also)
their abundance to desert and
meadow he took away. Telipinu too went into the field and in the
filed
he disappeared (mixed in). Over him, halenzu plant grew. So
the barley and the wheat haven’t grown anymore. Cattle, sheep
and human beings
didn’t become pregnant anymore and the pregnant ones didn’t
give birth.
In order to sprout not, mountains and trees got dry.
In order to be hunger in the country, pastures and springs got dry.
The human beings and the gods are dying of hunger.
The Great Sun God arranged a banquet and he invited thousand gods.
They ate.
But they weren’t full up; they drank, but they didn’t quench their thirst.”
VEDIC

Almost everything we know of the original Vedic religion has been transmitted orally from around the middle of the 2nd century B.C. until the present day in the form of śruti- or ‘what has been heard’. This oral tradition has been collected in the form of the Vedas (cf. Skr. vedā- ‘knowledge’), or four collections of hymns and ritual texts devoted to Vedic deities. These are composed in an early form of Sanskrit, the learned language of India, which is commonly referred to simply as Vedic, or Vedic Sanskrit. Since there are no manuscript from that period (the oldest inscriptions in India are Buddhist inscriptions of king Aśoka from the 3rd century B.C.), the datation of the core of the Vedic texts is estimated on the basis of philological arguments and the assumed rate of language change from the Vedic period until our earliest historical documents in India (chiefly related to the life of Buddha in the 5th century B.C.).

The oldest parts of the Vedas could have been roughly contemporary with the ‘Mitanni Contracts’, documents preserved in Hittite archives, in which the ruler of the Kingdom of Mitanni in Northern Mesopotamia swears by invoking Vedic deities Mitra, Indra, Varuna and the Nasatyas. We know, then, that the ruling caste of the State of Mitanni in the 14th century B.C. worshipped the same gods to whom hymns are devoted in the Vedic texts, and many of them, as we shall see below, have exact counterparts in the Iranian religion (note, however, that the names mentioned in the “Mitanni Contracts” are specifically Indo-Aryan, not Iranian or Indo-Iranian).

The four collections of Vedic texts (also called samhitās, from PIE *som- ‘together’ and *dʰeh₁- ‘put, make’) are Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Atharva-Veda. The Rig Veda is certainly the oldest of them; the Sama-Veda and the Yajur-Veda contain mostly material taken over from the Rig-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda is a collection of magical chants and rituals, and it is generally believed to be the latest of all four samhitas. All of the samhitas have their own commentaries and texts based on them, especially the Brāhmaṇas and the later Upaniṣads. The texts of the samhitas were preserved within different priestly schools, or śākās (literally ‘branches’). The Rig-Veda, which is of particular interest for comparative Indo-European religion, has been preserved in only one, but very conservative, school, that of Śākalya, which was active in Eastern India probably in the early 1st millennium B.C.

The Rig-Veda got its name from the Sanskrit word Ṛc- ‘praise, verse’. It is divided into ten books, or māndalas (from Skr. māndala- ‘circular, circle’, of uncertain etymology). Each of the books contains several dozens of hymns, or sūktas (from su-ukta- ‘well recited, eulogy’), the total number of suktas in the Rig-Veda being 1028, which is the amount of text corresponding, roughly, to the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey” put together. The hymns are believed to have been “heard” by the mythical “seers” or rishis (Skr. ṛṣi- < PIE *h₂er-s-, cf. Lith. aršus ‘violent’, MHG rasen ‘rage’, Arm. her ‘rage’), and they were chanted by the Vedic priests, the purohitas (Skr. purōhita-, from purā- ‘in front of, before’ and -hita- ‘put, placed’) during religious rituals. The so-called “family books”, attributed to various families of priests, are generally believed to contain the oldest material in the Rig-Veda. These are the books 2-7. The books 1 and 10 are, on the other hand, younger than the rest and contain traces of post-Vedic philosophical speculations and religious views. The book 9 contains only hymns dedicated to Soma, the divine intoxicating drink. The text of the Rig-Veda has been preserved in several versions. It is usually reproduced either as padapatha, with words isolated by pauses for better memorizing, or as the samhitapatha, in which words are generally joined by sandhi for easier reciting. The oldest surviving manuscript of the Rig-Veda, written in devanagari script, dates only from 1464.
The Vedic hymns are composed in a variety of isosyllabic metres, and the most common ones are the eight-syllable (composing the stanza called gāyatrī with three eight-syllable lines), the twelve-syllable (composing the jagatī, with four lines), and the eleven-syllable (composing the four line triṣṭubh stanza).

Many Rig-Vedic hymns mention various forms of sacrifice, the most prominent being the sacrifice of the holy drink, the soma- (from *suH- ‘to press’, since the drink was prepared from some plant that had to be pressed). There are also fire rituals, chiefly devoted to the fire deity (the Agnihotra-, or simple offering of milk to the fire twice daily, and the more elaborate Agnicayana-, the piling of the fire altar), the horse-sacrifice (Aśvamedha), the human sacrifice (Puruṣamedha-, which did not include the actual killing of a man), the seasonal sacrifices such as Caturmasya- and the royal consecration (Rājasūya-). Apparently, all rituals (including sacrifices) were performed in the open: there is no indication that there were any temples in the Vedic period. Likewise, there were no idols or images representing gods. All depictions of Hinduistic gods are of a much later date.

Vedic sacrifices are, as a rule, organized by yajamāna- or ‘sacrificer’, who orders the sacrifice actually performed by a priest, or a group of priests on his behalf. For this service, he pays the ‘priestly gift’, a daksinā. Many hymns end with a dānastuti-, praise of the gift expected by the priests as a reward for the sacrifice. Priests are of different kinds and specializations, the most important being the hotar (the chief priest who recites the Rig-Veda), the udgātar (who sings the verses of the Sāma-Veda), and the adhvaryu (responsible for reciting the formulas of the Yajur-Veda). The rtvij- seems to have been the chief operating priest.

In the later books of the Rig-Veda we also find accounts of Vedic cosmogony and eschatology. The famous Purusha-Sukta (RV 10.90) tells how the world was created from the body of the primeval Man, Puruṣa-, who had been sacrificed. The priest (brāhmā-) originated from his head, the warrior (rājanyā-) from his hands, the freeman (vaīśya-) from his hips, and the slave (śūdrā-) from his feet. Moreover, his spirit is the source of the Moon, the Sun was created from his eye, the Wind from his breath, and the Fire from his mouth. Thus both the social and the cosmic order originated from the same source. Hymns such as RV 10.18, recited during funeral ceremonies, give an account of the fate of the soul after death and cremation; the urn with the cremated remains was buried, and the family of the deceased was ritually purified, while the soul was thought to follow the celestial ‘path of the Fathers’ (pitṛyāna).

Besides the Vedas themselves, we also have a number of commentaries on the Vedas stemming from the Vedic period (roughly, before the 5th century B.C.). These are the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads. Some of these texts comment on the Vedas and interpret the Vedic religious beliefs and practices, but there is ample evidence that the original function of the Rig-Vedic deities was significantly altered and ill-understood during the later Vedic period. This can also be seen in the later Sanskrit commentaries of the Vedas (e.g. in Yāska’s etymological compendium “Nirukta”, or in Sāyaṇa’s “Vedartha Prakasha”). Although they preserved some ancient lore, they are not completely reliable. After the Vedic period, the Aryan religion evolved slowly towards Hinduism, which is divided into a number of sects and schools of religious thought. However, all Hindu sects still share the belief in the sacred nature of the Vedas, which are considered to be holy texts by all the Hindus.

In contrast to the abundance of archaic Vedic texts, archaeology yields very little information about the earliest form of Indian religion. Archeological sites in Northern India attributable to the Indo-Aryans in the 2nd and early 1st millennium B.C. are few and contain very scarce
remains attributable to cultic practices or rituals. The remains of the “Painted Grey Ware” culture, which stretched from East Punjab to the Middle Ganges in the 1300- 400 contain very little excavations of inhabited sites; houses were built from primitive wickerwork and mud, and simple red decorations on ceramic pots do not tell us anything about deities worshipped by Indo-Aryans during that period. Depictions of later Hindu gods (see APPENDIX) certainly bear little resemblance to the Vedic originals. Earlier archaeological cultures possibly attributable to Indo-Aryans, such as the “Gandhara Grave Culture” in the Swat valley in Pakistan (in the early 2nd Millennium B.C.) have left us equally scarce remains.

Principal Vedic gods are the following: Indra- (of unknown origin, no relation whatsoever to OCS jedrъ ‘strong, quick’, Russ. jadrо ‘kernel, core’) is celebrated in as many as 250 hymns, by far the largest number dedicated to any deity. He is the slayer of the dragon Vṛtrá-, and many linguists see in this a reflex of the Indo-European dragon-slaying myth. In Avesta, there is a minor daëvæ figure of Indara, about whom very little is known, but the form of his name, as well as the corresponding form In-da-ra in the Mitanni contracts, show that the Proto-Indo-Iranian form of the theonym was *Indara-. Indra is also praised for having killed the demon Vala and set free the cows which he had hidden in a cave (RV 2.12.3, 2.158), a myth that has been compared to Heraclæs’ taking the cattle of the giant Geryon. If Indra is a typical warrior god, Mitra is a much more peaceful figure. The name Mitra- comes from the abstract noun mitrām ‘contract’, from the PIE root *mey- ‘exchange’, OCS mîntti ‘pass’, Latv. mīju ‘exchange’, Ved. mi- ‘exchange’. He is a deity with chiefly social function, closely parallel to Avestan Mitra. He is often associated with Varuṇa-, and only one hymn is dedicated exclusively to him (RV 3.59). On the other hand, Varuṇa- is a very important deity. He is the god who binds the souls of the dead, but he is also a healer and a watcher over the social order. He is the protector of the cosmic truth, the ṛta-, and a guarantor of oaths (RV 7.86-88). Since oaths are sworn near waters, Varuṇa is also a deity reigning over waters. His name probably comes from the root *wel- ‘to close, cover, ensnare’, Gr. élytron ‘covering, case’, Skr. vṛṇōti ‘close, ensnare’; contrary to the opinion of many famous linguists, it bears no relation whatsoever to Slav. Velesъ. The Āśvinā(u) are the divine twins, comparable to Greek Dioskouroi Castor and Polydeuces. The adduced form of their name is the dual, literally meaning ‘horsemen’, from *hųk’wo- ‘horse’, Skr. āśva-. They are called nāsatvā ‘true’ (perhaps originally ‘saviours), as they are the physicians of the gods and, more generally, the deliverers from all kinds of distress (for example, it is said that they rescued Çavāna from old age and rescued Atri from darkness in RV 7.71.5). Uṣās- is the dawn-goddess and, apparently, the sister of the Āśvins, and her name is the word for ‘dawn’, PIE *h2ewsōs, Gr. ēōs, etc. She is one of rather few goddesses in a very macho Pantheon of Vedic India. Like her Greek relative Eos, she is called *potnih2 ‘lady’ (e.g. RV 3.61.4b, uṣāḥ... pātnī, cf. Gr. Hom. Hymn. 5.223, 230 pōtnia ēōs).

Rudrā- is the god of the disease (which, like Apollo, he dispenses with his arrows, cf. RV 7.46.3ab), and of healing. His name may be derived from PIE *(H)rewd- ‘be coarse’ (Lat. rudis), and he has been also connected with ORuss. pagan theonym Rúg’h (which may be from *Rudlo-). In later Hinduism, he became one of the most important gods, Śiva- (originally an euphemistic attribute of Rudra, meaning ‘the auspicious one’). Rudra’s sons are the Maruts (RV 2.33), who often accompany Indra; their exact number is unknown, as they always form a troop (sārdhas) and they are armed with lightning spears (jśti-vidyut). Their name is still unexplained. Some linguists connect it with Lat. Mārs (though this is actually from older Mavors), while others connect it with the name of the young warriors, the marya-, or with the PIE word for ‘sea’ (*mori- > Lat. mare); since the Maruts are connected with the wind, the form mar-ut could have originally meant something like ‘(the wind) from the sea-
side’, but I don’t find this very convincing. Otherwise, the god of the wind is Vāyu- (also the Sanskrit word for ‘wind’, PIE *weh₂-ye-, cf. Lith. vėjas, Lat. vēnus). In some hymns (e.g. RV 10.168) he is also called vātā- (< *weh₁-to-). The name of Parjanya- has unclear etymology; he is often connected to Lith. Perkūnas etc., but this may be just a chance correspondence; as a common noun, parjanyā- means ‘rain cloud’, and the god Parjanya is most properly defined as a god of rain storm, ‘roaring like a lion... and filling the sky with rain clouds’ (RV 5.83). On the other hand, Dyaus- is clearly the sky-god, and his name is also the word for ‘sky’, PIE *dyēw-, cf. Gr. Ζευς. Agni- is the deified fire (= agni- ‘fire’ < *ngʷni-, Lat. ignis), while Rātri- ‘Night’ probably derives her name from the root rā- ‘to bestow’, rāti- ‘gift’ < PIE *(H)reh₁-, (cf. Lat. rēs ‘thing, wealth’). There is an alternative etymology relating Rātri- to Gr. Λέτο, the mother of Apollo, but the semantic connection is too weak to support this. The name of the divine drink Sōma- literally means ‘what is being pressed, from *sēwH- ‘to press’, Ved. su-. Viṣṇu-, who latter became one of the chief Hindu deities, bears a name of unclear etymology, despite attempts to derive it from viṣ- ‘village’, (Lat. vicus, OCS víč, etc.); he is said to have measured the world in three steps (RV 1.154.1), corresponding to the three spheres in the Vedic cosmology: the sky, the earth, and the space in between (antārikṣa-). The name of Savitār- has been rather plausibly interpreted as ‘the impeller’, from the root *sēwH- ‘to impel, drive’ (Hitt. šuwezzi ‘drive (to exile), Skr. sautī). All creatures are said to rest in his lap, which consists of two heavens (RV 1.35.5-6). The sun-god, Sārya-, bears the name identical to the Vedic word for ‘sun’, from PIE *sēh₂-wōl- ‘sun’ (Lat. sól, Lith. saulė, etc.); like his Greek counterpart, Hēlios, he is often depicted as driving a golden chariot across the sky. The divine twins, Yama- and Yamī- derive their names from the PIE word for ‘twin’ (*yemo- > OIr. emain, perhaps Lat. geminus). Their mother is Saranyā- ‘the swift one’ (RV 10.17.1-2), and their father is Tvāṣṭar-, the divine carpenter (his name is derived from *twerk- ‘cut’, cf. Gr. sárks ‘meat’). Like Yama and Yamī, several deities in the Rig-Veda are usually mentioned as couples, e.g. Mitrā-Varuṇā- (or simply Varuṇā, in the dual) ‘Mitra and Varuna’, Dyavā-Prthivī ‘heaven and earth’, etc.

There are also abstract deities, such as Vāk- ‘the Word’ (cf. Lat. vōx ‘voice, sound’), Brhaspāti- ‘lord of the prayer’ (praised together with Vāk- in RV 10.71), Aditi- ‘liberty’, literally ‘un-binding’, whose sons are generally called āditya- ‘descendants of Aditi’ (Varuna, Bhaga, Aryaman, and others). Aryaman-, who is interpreted as the personified Friendship, has been compared to OIr. Éremón, one of the heroes in the mythical account of the peopling of Ireland. The root of these names may be *h₁er-yo- ‘friendly, trusty’ (Skr. aryā- ‘honourable, Aryan’, OIr. airc ‘noble’, cf. also Av. aíryamān- ‘tribal network, alliance’). Finally, Pūṣan-, like Gr. Pān, is a protector of cattle, and his name may go back to PIE *pewh₂sōn, but the root of this formation is unclear (the connection with PIE *pews- ‘thrive, succeed’ > Skr. pūṣyati is improbable because this root does not contain a laryngeal; the connection with *pewH- ‘to stink, rot’ > Skr. pūyati, Lith. pūti is more promising; a compound *peh₂us-h₁on-, from the root *peh₂- ‘to herd’, is also possible).

1. The Praise of Agni, RV 1.1

agnin ḫle purohitam yajñasya devaṁ ṛtvijam |
hotāram rainadhatamam ||
agniḥ pūrvebhir ṛṣibhir īdyo nūtanaṁ uta |
sa devāneha vakṣati ||
agninā rayimaśnavat poṣameva dive-dive |
yāsasam vīravattamam ||
“I Laud Agni, the chosen Priest, God, minister of sacrifice,
The hotar, lavishest of wealth.
2 Worthy is Agni to be praised by living as by ancient seers.
He shall bring. hitherward the Gods.
3 Through Agni man obtaineth wealth, yea, plenty waxing day by day,
Most rich in heroes, glorious.
4 Agni, the perfect sacrifice which thou encompassest about
Verily goeth to the Gods.
5 May Agni, sapient-minded Priest, truthful, most gloriously great,
The God, come hither with the Gods.
6 Whatever blessing, Agni, thou wilt grant unto thy worshipper,
That, Angiras, is indeed thy truth.
7 To thee, dispeller of the night, O Agni, day by day with prayer
Bringing thee reverence, we come
8 Ruler of sacrifices, guard of Law eternal, radiant One,
Increasing in thine own abode.
9 Be to us easy of approach, even as a father to his son:
Agni, be with us for our weal.”

2. The myth of Indra and the dragon Vṛtra, RV I.32 1-5

“1 I WILL declare the manly deeds of Indra, the first that he achieved, the Thunder-wielder.
He slew the Dragon, then disclosed the waters, and cleft the channels of the mountain torrents.
2 He slew the Dragon lying on the mountain: his heavenly bolt of thunder Tvastar fashioned. Like lowing kine in rapid flow descending the waters glided downward to the ocean.
3 Impetuous as a bull, he chose the Soma and in three sacred beakers drank the juices. Maghavan grasped the thunder for his weapon, and smote to death this firstborn of the dragons.
4 When, Indra, thou hadst slain the dragon's firstborn, and overcome the charms of the enchanter, Then, giving life to Sun and Dawn and Heaven, thou foundest not one foe to stand against thee.
5 Indra with his own great and deadly thunder smote into pieces Vṛtra, worst of Vṛtras. As trunks of trees, what time the axe hath felled them, low on the earth so lies the prostrate Dragon.”

3. The hymn to the Dawn, RV 1.48

saha vāmena na uṣo vyuchā duhitardivāḥ |
saha dyumnena bhṛhatā vibhāvari rāyā devi dāsvatī ||
asvāvatirghomaṭirviśvasuvido bhūri cyavanta vastave |
udirāya prati mā sūnṛtā uṣaścoda rādhō mahānām ||
uvāsōṣā uchācca nu devī jīrā rathānām |
ye asvā ācaraṇeṣu dadhrire samudre na śravasyavah ||
ūṣo ye te yāmeṣu yuṇijate mano dānāya sūrayaḥ |
atrāḥa tat kāṇva eṣāṃ kāṇvatamo nāma ghrṇāti nṛṇām ||
ā ghā yoṣeva sūnaryūṣā yāti prabhūṇjatī |
jarayanantī vrjanam padvadiyata ut pātayati paksinah ||
vi yā srjati samanam vyaarthinah padām na vetyodatī |
vayo nakṣ te paptivāṃsa āsate vyuṣṭau vājīnīvati ||
esāyukta parāvataḥ sūryasyodayanānadadhi |
samārthasi bhūhi bhāhunā candrena duhitardivāḥ |
āvahanī bhūryasmabhāyaṃ saubhagham vyuchanī diviṣṭiṣu ||
viśvasya hi prāṇanaṃ jīvanam tve vi yaduchasi sūnari |
sā no ratheṇa bhṛtatā vibhāvari śrūdhī cītāmagghe havam ||
ūṣo vājām hi vamsa vyaścitro mānuṣe Jane |
tenā vaḥa sukṛto adhvarāṇupa ye tvā ghrṇanti vahnayaḥ ||
viśvān devānā vahsa somapītaye.antarikṣāduṣastvam |
sāṃśāsu dhā ghamadasvâdhyumavo vājaṃ suviṃyam ||
yasyā ruṣanto arcayaḥ prati bhadṛā adṛksata |
sā no rāyīṃ viśvāvam supeśasamūṣā dadātu sughyam ||
ye cid dhi tvāṃ rṣayaḥ pūrva itaye juhūre.avase mahī |
sā na stomānabhī ghrṇiḥi rādhasoṣaḥ sukreṇa śociṣa ||
ūṣo yadadaya bhāhunā vi dvārāv rṇavo divaḥ |
pra no yachādavākṣaṃ prthu chordiḥ pra devī ghomatūriṣaḥ ||
saṃ no rāyā bhṛhatā viśvapeśasā nimikṣvā samīlabhirā |
saṃ dyumnena viśvaturoṣo mahī saṃ vājairvājīnīvati ||
“Dawn on us with prosperity, O Ushas, Daughter of the Sky,
Dawn with great glory, Goddess, Lady of the Light, dawn thou with riches, Bounteous One.
2 They, bringing steeds and kine, boon-givers of all wealth, have oft sped forth to lighten us.
O Ushas, waken up for me the sounds of joy: send us the riches of the great.
3 Ushas hath dawned, and now shall dawn, the Goddess, driver forth of cars
Which, as she cometh nigh, have fixed their thought on her, like glory-seekers on the flood.
4 Here Kanva, chief of Kanva's race, sings forth aloud the glories of the heroes' names,-
The. princes who, O Ushas, as thou comest near, direct their thoughts to liberal gifts.
5 Like a good matron Ushas comes carefully tending everything:
Rousing all life she stirs all creatures that have feet, and makes the birds of air fly up.
6 She sends the busy forth, each man to his pursuit: delay she knows not as she springs.
O rich in opulence, after thy dawning birds that have flown forth no longer rest.
7 This Dawn hath yoked her steeds afar, beyond the rising of the Sun:
Borne on a hundred chariots she, auspicious Dawn, advances on her way to Men.
8 To meet her glance all living creatures bend them down: Excellent One, she makes the light.
Ushas, the Daughter of the Sky, the opulent, shines foes and enmities away.
9 Shine on us with thy radiant light, O Ushas, Daughter of the Sky,
Bringing to us great store of high felicity, and bearning on our solemn rites.
10 For in thee is each living creature's breath and life, when, Excellent! thou dawnest forth.
Borne on thy lofty car, O Lady of the Light, hear, thou of wondrous wealth, our call.
11 O Ushas, win thyself the strength which among men is wonderful.
Bring thou thereby the pious unto holy rites, those who as priests sing praise to thee.
12 Bring from the firmament, O Ushas, all the Gods, that they may drink our Soma juice,
And, being what thou art, vouchsafe us kine and steeds, strength meet for praise and hero might.
13 May Ushas whose auspicious rays are seen resplendent round about,
Grant us great riches, fair in form, of all good things, wealth which light labour may attain.
14 Mighty One, who of the Rsis of old time invoked for their protection and their help,
O Ushas, graciously answer our songs of praise with bounty and with brilliant light.
15 Ushas, as thou with light to day hast opened the twin doors of heaven,
So grant thou us a dwelling wide and free from foes. O Goddess, give us food with kine.
16 Bring us to wealth abundant, sent in every shape, to plentiful refreshing food,
To all-subduing splendour, Ushas, Mighty One, to strength, thou rich in spoil and wealth.”

4. The primeval sacrifice of Puruṣa (RV X 90)

sahasraśīrṣā puruṣah sahasrāksaḥ sahasrapāt |
sabhūmin viśvato vṛtvātyatiṣṭhad daśāṅghulam ||
puruṣa evedam sarvam yad bhūtam yacca bhavyam |
utāṃrtatvasyeṣāno yadannenātirohatt ||
etāvānasya mahimāto jyāyā śca pūruṣaḥ |
pādo.asyaviśvā bhuṭāni tripādasyāṃrtaṁ divi ||
tripādārdhvā udait puruṣaḥ pādo.asyehābhavat punaḥ |
tato visvam vyakrāmat sāśanānaśane abhi ||
tasmād virājaḥ adhi pūruṣaḥ ||
yat puruṣenā haviṣā devā yajñamatanvata |
A thousand heads hath Purusha, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.
On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.
This Purusha is all that hath been and all that is to be
The Lord of Immortality that waxes greater still by food.
So mighty is his greatness, yea, greater than this is Purusha,
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
With three fourths Purusha went up: one fourth of him again was here.
Thence he strode out to every side over what cats not and what cats.
From him Viraj was born; again Purusha from Viraj was born.
As soon as he was born he spread eastward and westward o'er the earth.
When gods prepared sacrifice with Purusha as their offering,
its oil was spring, the holy gift was autumn, summer was the wood.
IRANIAN

The Avestan religion, or Mazdaism, is the result of the first great reform in the mankind's religious history, due to the prophet Zarathuštra. The collection of religious texts stemming from his reform is known as the Avesta. The oldest part of the Avesta are the Gāthās, composed, at least in part, by the prophet Zarathuštra himself. The word derives from PIE *geh₂- ‘to sing’ (Ved. gāyati, gāti). It is only fair to say that we do not know the dates of Zarathuštra's life. According to some experts, he lived not too long before the founding of the Achaemenid Empire in the 7th century B.C., and it has even been claimed that the Kavi Vištāspa, the princely patron mentioned by Zarathuštra, was none other than Histaspes, the father of Cyrus the Great. However, another theory posits the period around 1000 B.C. as the more likely time of Zarathuštra’s life,¹ and no consensus about this is in sight.

The Gāthās consist of seventeen hymns, but they are only a part of the great Zarathuštra's liturgy, the Yasna, which is the core of the Mazdaism's sacred canon. They are written in Old Avestan language, which must be significantly earlier than the language of other Avestan books, known as the Young Avestan.² The Yasna is a text with clear function in the Avestan ritual: it is recited during a ceremony performed in the fire-temple, which also includes the drinking of the sacrificial drink haoma (Ved. sōma-).

Zarathuštra was a prophet who undertook a thorough reform of the inherited Indo-Iranian religion with its dozens of gods, whose names were mostly preserved in the Rig-Veda. His religious message was summarized pregnantly by Helmut Humbach (1992: 3): ‘A basic feature of Zarathustra’s religion is the interdependence between material and bodily welfare, on the one hand, and mental or spiritual welfare, on the other. The prophet concerned himself equally with both, and taught maxims which also governed the social life of the Iranian tribes. Young Avestan texts suggest that he introduced new methods of cattle-breeding, and comelled his followers to accept new hygienic and ecological standards, and established rules for avoiding infection in the human body and pollution of fire, water, air, and earth. Further, he integrated all of these material postulates into a great universal religious concept, and in this respect he is unique among the great founders of religions in history’.

The (Younger) Avestan term for ‘god’ is yazata- (cf. Ved. yajatā- ‘worthy of sacrifice’) rather than the inherited Iranian term baga-, which occurs only rarely in Young Avestan, where it is attributed to the Moon (OPers. bāga is used of Ahura Mazda in the Achaemenid inscriptions). Zarathuštra himself does not use either of these terms in the Gāthās: he seems to have been quite obsessed with the divinity of the ‘Wise Lord’, the Ahura Mazda, and there was no place for other divinities in his system.

The daēvas of the old Indo-Iranian religion have been reduced to demons, hence the unusual etymological equation of Av. daēva- ‘demon’ and Skr. devā- ‘god’. The followers of the daēvas simbolize all that is bad and deceitful (dr̥gwaunānt), while Zarathuštra's followers are elated as ‘the truthful ones’ (ašauuan-). The world is seen through eternal struggle between the good principle, represented by Ahura Mazda and the ‘Divine Immortals’, but the struggle

¹ This view is more or less consistent with the dates transmitted by Greek and Roman authors, who relied on ancient Iranian sources, cf., e.g. Pliny, Natural History 30, 2, 3-4: “Eudoxus, qui inter apientiae sectas clarissimam utilissimamque eam intelligi voluit, Zoroastrem huc sex milibus annorum ante Platonis mortem fuisse prodidit, sic et Aristoteles. Most authors think that sex millibus annorum here is corrupted for 600 years.
² Besides the Gāthās, there are a few other short texts written in Old Avestan, such as the prose text of Yasna Haptnhāiti; Old Avestan is not the direct ancestor of Young Avestan, but rather a closely related and more archaic Iranian dialect.
is predetermined, as the Ahura Mazda and the other Ahuras (later ‘Divine Immortals’), supported by the truthful ones, are certain to triumph in the end. Note that the original Zarathustra’s conception seems to have been more monotheistic than dualistic: the arch-enemy of Ahura Mazda, the ‘Evil Spirit’ (Angra Mainyu, later Ahriman) is not even mentioned in the Gathas.

The Younger Avestan texts include the Yašts, 21 hymns to Iranian deities that were included in the orthodox Mazdaism after Zarathustra's period, the Vendidad (a text used in ritual purification) and the Visprat (or Visperad), a collection of supplements to the Yasna.

Like the Vedas, the Avesta was initially transmitted orally, and there are reasons to believe that it was only written down during the Sassanian period (4th - 7th century A.D.). Large parts of the Avestan corpus - including commentaries on the original holy scriptures - exist only in Pehlevi, the Middle Iranian language spoken in the Sassanian Empire. These are the Dēnkard, the Bundahišn (a mythological history of the world), Arda Viraf Nāmak (a book containing elements of Mazdaist eschatology), and others. The Pehlevi parts of the Avesta are generally known as the Zend, or Zend-Avesta. To this day, the Mazdaist religion has been preserved in parts of Iran, where its followers are tolerated (but discriminated), while the largest numbers of them migrated to Bombay during Middle Ages. It is there that the extant manuscripts of the Avesta were preserved.

The chief divine being of Mazdaism, Ahura, bears a name (or title) related to Skr. āsura-‘god’ and derived from Av. ahu- ‘life, existence’, which is from PIE *h₂ensu- ‘god’ (see above); Mazdā ‘lord’ is from the PIE compound *mens-dh₁₁- (cf. Skr. medhā- ‘wisdom’; the name of the Muses (Gr. Moisai) is also usually derived from a similar compound (*mons-dh₁₁-yo-). Amōša Spōnta ‘Holy Immortal’ is the Young Avestan term referring to the six companions of Ahūra Mazda; they are abstract deities introduced by Zarathuštra (he called them collectively Ahuras, the lords). Amōša is the negated participle of the verb *mer- ‘to die’ (Ved. amṛta- ‘immortal’), and Spōnta is from PIE *k’wento- ‘holy’ (OCS světъ, etc.). The six Holy Immortals are Amvrāštātā ‘Immortality’, Aša Vahišta ‘the Best Truth’ (cf. Skr. ṛta- ‘divine order’), Hauruwaatā ‘Integrity’ (from PIE *solwo- (cf. Gr. hólós ‘whole’, Lat. salvus), Spōnta Armātī ‘Holy Devotion’ (the second part of the name is parallel to Skr. aramati-‘obedience’, from Skr. aram ‘enough’), Xšātra Vairīa ‘Desirable Rule’ (from the Indo-Iranian word for ‘rule’, cf. Skr. ksav- ‘to rule’, perhaps Gr. ktáomai ‘gain’; the second part of the name is from PIE *welh₁₁- ‘desire’, Lat. volo, OCS volja, etc.), and Vohu Manah ‘Good Spirit’ (the first part of the name is from PIE *h₁₁wesu- > Gr. eũi, OIr. fó-, etc.).

Angra Mainīiu ‘the Evil Spirit’ is the chief enemy of Ahura Mazda in the Zarathuستrian conception; Angra means simply ‘bad, evil’, and the etymology of this word is uncertain; some relate it to the PIE word for ‘blood’ (*h₁₁esh₂r > Hitt. ešhar, Latv. asins, Gr. ēar). Mainiu is of course the same word as Ved. manyu- ‘spirit’.

Of the Old Iranian deities that slowly infiltrated Mazdaism after Zarathuštra's reforms, Haoma is of course the Avestan equivalent of the Vedic Sōma-, from the PIE verb *s EW- ‘press’ (Ved. sunōti, Av. hunaōiti), and Vāyu- ‘Wind’ is the Vedic Vāyu- (see above). Āpam Napāt is a divinity connected with the waters (his name means literally ‘descendant of waters’ and is parallel to Ved. Apām Napāt , which is usually an epithet of Savitar or Agni, e.g. in RV II 35); Āitar- is the fire deified, derived from the root *h₂eh₁₁- ‘to burn’ (cf. Hitt. hašša- ‘hearth’), and Ardhuvā Sūra Anāhīta is one of the very few goddesses in the Avestan corpus; her name means ‘strong (Sūra) and immaculate (Anāhīta) Ardhuvā’; since she is associated with the rivers, Ardhuvā is usually related to Ved. ardati ‘moves, goes’. Mithra is an old Indo-Iranian
divinity, and his name is the same as that of Ved. Mitra (see above). Rašnu is the divine judge presiding over the dead souls; his name is connected with Av. rāzaieti, Ved. rājati ‘rules’, from PIE *h₁reg- ‘to stretch, direct, rule’. Vīrātrayna ‘Victory’ is a compound name parallel to Ved. Vṛtrahān- ‘the slayer of Vṛtra’, which is an epithet of Indra. Sraoša ‘obedience’ is derived from PIE *k’lēw- ‘to hear’ (Ved. śru-, Gr. klýō, OCS slyšati, etc.). Tištriia refers to the star Sirius, which is associated with rain in the Avesta; its name is related to Ved. tiṣya- ‘divine archer, Sirius’. Finally, Yima is the original Man, the ancestor of all the humans; his name is, of course, the same as Ved. Yāma (see above).

Another important, although late, source for the study of Iranian religion are the legends of the Narts, preserved among the Iranian Ossetians on the Caucasus. These legends were collected by Russian and Soviet ethnographers only in the 20th century, but they show traces of a long history of oral transmission, and it has been claimed (especially by Georges Dumézil, the first western scholar who studied them) that they preserve many Indo-European motives. However, the names of all the leading Nart (e.g. the divine smith Kurdalaegon, the iron-bodied hero Soslan, the brave Wazirmaeg, and the lady Satana) are probably not Iranian. Since Nart heroes are also attested in Circassian folk-lore, as well as in the traditions of other Caucasian peoples, it is difficult to disentangle the various influences that shape them, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European.

1. Zarathuštra’s metaphysical lament, Yasna 29 1-2

\[
xšmaibiā gə:uš uruuā gəraždā kahmāi mā ðbarōdūm ko: mā tašaṭ
\]
\[
ā mā aēšomō hazascā rōmō [ā]hišāiū dōrašcā touīšcā
\]
\[
nōiū mōi vāstā xšmaṭ aniiō aḥā mōi saštā vohū vāṣtriūā
\]
\[
addā tašā gə:uš parāsāt aṣom kathā tōi gauūiī ratiuš
\]
\[
hīaṭ hīm dātā xšaiāntō hadā vāstrā gaudāiīo ɵbaxšō
\]
\[
kə:m hōi uštā ahurom yə: drōguuō dobīš aēšomām vādāiiōt
\]

The soul of the cow complains to You: For whom did You shape me? Who fashioned me? Wrath and opposition, fury, spite and violence, hold me fettered. I have no other shepherd other than You. So appear to me with good pastoral work.

Thereupon the fashioner of the cow asks Truth: What is the nature of thy judgement for the cow? When cow-milking zeal, together with forage, takes possession of her, o you ruling ones, whom do you wish to be her Ahura, one who might break through the wrath caused by the deceitful?

2. A Young Avestan hymn to Victory
XIV.
(Varhrān Yaśt.)

42 porasaṯ zaradvuṣṭro ahurəṃ mazdəṃ: «ahura mazda, mainyō spəniṣṭa, datərə gaθənaṃ astvaitingəṃ aṣəwn, kəv asti vərəθrayəņhe ahurədətəhe nəma.azbaṭiś, kəv upa.stətiś, kəv nišṭətiś?» 43 əaṭ mraot ahurə mazdə: «yat spəda hanjasənte, spitama zaradvuṣṭra, raṣṭəm rəsəm katarəscət, vaṣṭənho ahmyə nəiṭ vəzyənte, jatənho ahmyə nəiṭ jənyənte, 44 cataṃro pəonə vədərayəiš avi pədəṃ katarəscət. yatarə pəurəṃ frəyaṣənte — amə hutaśtə hurədə, vərəθrayənə ahurədətə —, atənə vərəθra haṣənte. 45 əməməça vərəθrayənəməca əfrənəmi dəvə aṭətəra dəvə nipətəra dəvə niškətəra. dəvə fədəwə.ən dəvə fəvidəwə.ən dəvə fəfradəwə.ən dəvə əmərəzən dəvə vəmarəzən dəvə frama-rezən.» 46 zaradvuṣṭra, aṭəm mədərem mə frədəsəyaioš ainyət piθər və pudəi brəθər və haḍə.zətəi adərəvənəi və sərayənə. aətəeça tə vəçə, yəi uəra əs dərəzərə əs uəra əs vəyəxəine əs uəra əs vərəθrayənə əs uəra əs hvaəsəya əs.
42. We worship Ahura-created Wərəθraghna.

Zarathushtra asked Ahura Mazda: Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, righteous Creator of the material world, where is it that one should invoke Ahura-created Wərəθraghna by name? where praise (him)? where call (him) down?

43. Then Ahura Mazda said: When two armies should come together, O Spitamid Zarathushtra, ... (?),

44. you should arrange four feathers on the way. Whichever of the two (armies) shall be first to worship (with the words), “O well-made, well-built Strength, O Ahura-created Wərəθraghna!”; that one shall be accompanied by victory.

45. I propitiate Strength and Wərəθraghna, the two protectors, the two defenders, the two guardians. ... [The remainder is obscure.]

46. O Zarathushtra, do not teach this spell to anyone other than a father or a son or a blood brother or an athrawan student. And these (are) words for you which are strong (and) firm, strong (and) eloquent, strong (and) victorious, strong (and) curative; and these (are) words for you which (can) save even a forfeited head, (can) repel even the arm already unpraised (to strike) a blow.
GREEK

Many people think that Greek religion is thoroughly known and researched. After all, we have so many preserved temples from classical antiquity, we have detailed accounts of Greek mythology not only from Greek, but also from Roman sources, and we are familiar with the way the Greeks depicted their gods from thousands of preserved statues and pictures on Greek vases. Homer gave us vivid stories about the relationships of Gods and humans in his Iliad and Odyssey, and the whole history of the gods and the universe is presented in Hesiod’s Theogony. We can also learn a whole lot about Greek’s attitude to religion from the early lyrics and drama, especially from the solemn hymns of Pindar and the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

However, none of the works mentioned were actually recited or otherwise used in Greek temples during religious services. There is no Greek equivalent of the “Rig Veda”, and we know virtually nothing about how the priests addressed their gods. Many ceremonies are known only from depictions on vases and scarce references in works of ancient authors. Indeed, many of the ceremonies were intended to be secret, and these were called ‘mysteries’, while their participants were the mýstai (from mýŏ ‘to shut’, cf. Hitt. munnaezi ‘to hide, conceal’). Although we know a lot about what was happening during these ceremonies, we do not have any “sacred texts” that were recited during them. Apparently, the Greeks did not need any such texts, there was plenty of room for improvisation. If anything, Greek religion was non-dogmatic and not based on any form of holy scriptures.

The lack of a religious and mythological “canon” explains why we have so many versions of individual Greek myths. Moreover, the Greek mythology was transmitted to us mostly in late sources, especially in works of Hellenistic authors who sought to systematize and preserve ancient and half-forgotten traditions, such as Pseudo-Apollodorus’ “Bibliotheca” (an anonymous account of Greek mythology from the 1st or 2nd century A.D.). We also have some accounts of Greek customs – including religious festivities – in the works of such authors as Herodotus (in his “Histories” from the 5th century B.C.), Pausanias (in his “Description of Greece” from the 2nd century A.D.), or even the Christian author Nonnus, the author of the metaphorical epic Dionysiaca (5th century A.D.). We also have thousands of inscriptions, including laws and contracts carved into stone monuments, public decrees and decrees of religious associations. These documents often record names of ceremonies, priests and priestly families.

Of all the cultic texts, only some fragments used in the Orphic mysteries were preserved. Orphic mysteries became very popular in Greece in the 5th century B.C. and after, but their teaching, involving the belief in metempsychosis and reincarnation, never belonged to the mainstream of Greek religion. Especially numerous are short instructions to the soul of the dead, written on gold leafs, and fragments of Orphic poems. In this field there have been some interesting new discoveries, such as the famous Derveni Papyrus, found in 1962 but published only in 1997. It contains a commentary on a mythological Orphic poem.

Our first written sources for the history of Greek religion are the tablets written in the syllabic Linear B script. These are almost exclusively lists of offerings to various sanctuaries (such as the sanctuary of Pa-ki-ja-ne near Pylos) and gods. Many theonyms found on the tablets are known from the classical period, e.g. Zeus, Hera (who appears to have been already worshipped as Zeus’s consort), Ares, Enyalios, Artemis, Paian (later
Apollo), and, interestingly, Dionysos. There are, however, some theonyms that are unknown in later periods, e.g. Masana, the mysterious Drimios, son of Zeus, or the various female deities called po-ti-ni-ja (= pótnia ‘lady’), of which A-ta-na po-ti-ni-ja (the lady of Atana = Athēnē) and Da-pu-ri-jo po-ti-ni-ja (the lady of the Labyrinthos) and Po-ti-ni-ja i-qi-ja ‘the lady of horses’ are prime examples. Items offered to the gods do not differ from those used in sacrifices in the classical period, e.g. grains, olive oil, wine and spices, but also sacrificial animals, e.g. the sheep, the bull, and the pig on one tablet, reminding one of Roman suovetaurilia. Interestingly, the Greeks seldom sacrificed horses, so there is no true Greek parallel to Vedic aśvamedha. Besides blood sacrifices, there were, of course, libations; those made to the gods (Gr. spondē, usually involving wine, and loibē) were distinguished from those made to the dead (khoē), the latter including a mixture of wine, water, and honey and a strewing of twigs on the place of the libation (closely parallel to the barhis- ‘sacrificial litter’, in the Vedic sacrifice). For the Greeks, the sacrifice included the ritual sharing of food of the slaughtered animal; the master of the sacrifice could, in principle, be anyone, there was no privileged priestly caste in charge of the sacred rites. The Greeks found it funny that the Persians could not sacrifice without a priest. This is not to say that certain individuals were not specialized in particular ways of communicating with the deities. Already in Homer we have evidence for the existence of seers (Gr. mántis, Il. I, 62), interpreters of sacrifices (thyoikós, Il. XXV, 221), the flight of birds (oionopólos, Il. I, 69) and dreams (oneiropólos, Il. I, 62); there is also evidence for priestesses (Gr. hiēreia, Il. VI, 300). The gods loved to communicate with men through signs, and interpreting these signs (thésphata < *dhi₃-s-, as in theós ‘god’ and *bh₂-to-, as in phēmi ‘say’) required specialized knowledge. Oracles (Gr. khrēstēria) were places where specialized seers answered the questions asked by those willing to pay for the service. The most famous oracle was that of Apollo at Delphi, where the prophecies (khrēsmoi, a derivative of khrē ‘one must, one should’) were announced in a trance by a priestess, Pythia.

The sacrifices are publicly made in front of the temple, where the sacrificial fire is burnt; the temple itself is the place where the images and statues of gods are preserved, and the temple is seen as the house of god, just as in the Near Eastern religions. It has been stated that the classical temple evolved from the Mycenaean mégaron, or royal palace. In any case, the existence of temples in Greece is in sharp contrast to their lack in Vedic India, where sacrifices, for all we know, were perfomed out in the open. Moreover, as in the Hittite tradition, sanctuaries are tightly connected with particular places, e.g. the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, or of Zeus at Olympia. Gods are especially powerful in particular places, not necessarily everywhere, which is fairly typical for the religions of sedentary, agricultural populations.

Sacrifices had to be made according to strict rules: the sacrificed animal was brought to the altar in a procession, and it had to be without blemish; male animals were sacrificed to gods, and female to goddesses. The sacrificed animals had to be without blemish (telēōt). The sacrifice itself was preceded by ritual ablation of the sacrificer’s hands in a special vessel (khērniōps, from kheir ‘hand’ and nízō ‘wash’), and usually some hair of the animal was burned before its throat was cut. The slaying of the victim was accompanied by loud cries of women. Only bones and skin, and maybe some fat was offered to the gods, and the rest of the meat and skin was divided among those present at the sacrifice. There were, however, instances where whole animals were burned in honour of gods, usually the underworld deities. This kind of sacrifice was called holōkaustos (from holōs ‘whole’ and kaiō ‘burn’). Some sacrifices were expiatory in nature, i.e. they were made to make good
for a committed sin (míasma, a derivative of the verb miainō ‘defile, stain’, without a PIE etymology). Every shedding of blood had to be expiated, often by blood of a sacrificed animal, especially pig.

Sacrifices were often made as part of more elaborate ceremonies, and some of them were, as we saw above, secret “mysteries”. Probably the most famous of the mysteries were the “Eleusynian Mysteries”, dedicated to Persephone and her mother, Demeter. Only the initiated could participate in the mysteries, but the initiated at some point included the majority of the citizens of Athens, and slaves and foreigners, as well as women, were also admitted. The “Eleusynian Mysteries” took place in the month of Boedromion (in late summer) and lasted for ten days. The festivities, only some elements of which are understood, involved a solemn procession to Eleusys along the ‘sacred way’ (hierà hodós), the consumption of a drink made of barley (kýkeon), an all-night vigil (pannykhís), and the revelation of the sacred objects to the initiates (mýstai) in the great hall called Telesterion; the initiates (mýstai) would recite: “I have fasted, I have drunk the kykeon, I have taken from the kístē (“box”) and after working it have put it back in the kálathos (“open basket”)”. It is unknown what the contents of the box were (since revealing that secret was punishable by death), but Hippolytus of Rome, a Christian writer from the 3rd century, who could not care less about the pagan secrets, claims that the sacred object was “an ear of grain reaped in silence”. The celebration of the mysteries was administered by two families, the Eumolpidai and the Kerykes. The hierophant was always one of the former, and the sacred herald (hierokýryks) was one of the latter. There was also the priestess of Demeter, who lived in the sanctuary.

Other ceremonies are somewhat better known, especially those organized in Athens, such as the “Thesmophoria”, dedicated to Demeter, in which only women could participate, or the “Lenaea” and “Anthesteria”, dedicated to Dionysus. The “Great Dionysia” was a festival during which dramatic performances (both comedy and tragedy) were organized, but some were also held during the Lenaia. Thus, it is from these religious festivities that the Greek (and Western) drama originates.

Greek has a rich terminology for the sacred. The opposition between hierós and hósios, both of which mean ‘holy’, was already mentioned in the introductory part of this book. In Homer, almost anything that belongs to god, or to a divine sphere, can be hierós: votive gifts, temples, the days of ceremonies, a priest and a temple slave. However, gods themselves are never hieroi. The opposite of hierós is bébélós ‘profane’ (from PIE *gʷeh₂- ‘to tread’, as the profane space may be accessed by anyone). The meaning of hósios is to be understood as that which is delimited, set apart, or transformed by some kind of divine or supernatural action. On the other hand, hágios reflects not so much the objective property of being ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’, but the attitude with which a man should properly respect that, which is sacred. The adjective hagnós is derived from the same root (PIE *yag'-, cf. Ved. yájña- ‘sacrifice’), and its meaning contains the implication of ritual purity: it applies to holy groves (témenoi, from the same root *temh₁- ‘cut’ as Lat. tèmpleum), festivals, the sacrificial fire, etc. Its opposite is miarós ‘polluted’ (from the same root as míasma ‘sin’). Finally, there is the adjective sebastós which is usually rendered as ‘august, divine’, but its derivation from sébas ‘divinely inspired fear or awe’ shows the original meaning. The compound eusébeta ‘piety’ derives from *h₁sų- ‘good’ and *tyegʷ- ‘retreat (from danger), shy away’ (Skt. tyaj- ‘abandon, retreat’) and it denotes the proper attitude of mortals towards gods: full of awe and respect, readiness to perform
The Greeks had very vague and contradictory ideas about the afterlife. In Homer’s epics, the souls of the fallen heroes wander like zombies about the Underworld, and have some recollections about their former selves only after drinking sacrificial blood. The very word for ‘soul’, psychē (of non-Greek origin), originally probably meant simply ‘breath’, i.e. that which last departs from a body at the moment of dying. Even the greatest heroes, such as Achilles, end up in the dreary Underworld, and lead a miserable existence. However, apparently not all fates of men after death were exactly equal. Already Homer tells us stories about the dead who have been punished by gods for their hýbris, or transgressing pride, such as Sisyphus and Tantalus, and he knows about the deepest pit of the Underworld, Tàrtaros (of non-Greek origin), reserved for the fallen Titans. He also mentions the Elysian fields, where the souls of the blessed may live a happy afterlife. The dwelling of the dead is always surrounded by water: to reach the Underworld (called Hades, just like the god of the Underworld himself) one has to cross the river (or lake) Akhérn, and in some sources this can be done by paying the ferryman, Khárón. In some myths, the entrance to the Underworld is guarded by a three-headed dog, Kérberos. The Greeks’ conceptions of one’s destiny after death began to change in the 6th century B.C. with Orpheus and Pythagoras, who taught the doctrine of metempsychosis and rebirth, but these ideas were never so widespread as to affect the majority of the Greek world.

The chief god of the Greek Pantheon is, of course, Zeús < *dyēws ‘sky’ (Myc. genitive Di-wo); besides being the chief among the gods, he is also the thunderer (terpsí-keraumós) and cloud-gatherer (nephelēgeréta). His symbols are thunder, oak, eagle and bull. He is also the husband of Héra (Myc. E-ra), whom he cheated on with several gods and mortals (his illegitimate children include Artemis, Perseus, Heracles, Helen of Troy, etc., while his official offspring are Ares, Hebe and Hephaestus, by far the least interesting lot). The Mycenaean form of Hera’s name shows that it cannot be related to the PIE word for ‘year’ (*yeH-ro- > Germ. Jahr ‘year’, Russ. jar ‘warm part of the year’), because Mycenaean would have preserved the word-initial *y-. Therefore, the etymology of this name is unknown. She was the protector of marriage and the women in Greek society. Her sacred animal was a cow, and her standing epithet in Homer is boōps ‘ox-eyed’. The original wife of Zeus was probably Diônē, who shared a sanctuary with him in Dodone. She was considered as one of the Titans in later Greek mythology, but her former importance is shown by her name, which is derived from the name of Zeus (PIE *diw-h₂-en-). The noun Titānes, Tītēnes is itself without etymology, just like the names of the gods belonging to this generation, e.g. Krónos, Rhéa (Rheiē) and Gaia ‘Earth’.

If Zeus was originally the Sky-god, one would expect his consort to be the Earth; however, in Greek mythology things are never so simple. Gaia was actually an adversary of Zeus in the fight against the Titans. Another candidate for the earliest Earth goddess is Demeter (Dēmētēr, Doric Dāmātēr). She was the daughter of Kronos and Rheia, and she bore Zeus the daughter Persephone. The second part of her name (-mētēr) means ‘mother’, but there is no indication that the first part (Dē-) ever meant ‘earth’. Besides, she is primarily a fertility goddess associated with grain, rather than with the earth itself, and in at least some texts her consort is said to be Poseidon, whose name also contains the element -dā- (on which see below). In Arcadia, Demeter was called Erīnīs (Pausanias, 8.25.6), which is otherwise the name of the avenging, snake-haired goddess who pursues criminals. In the later Greek tradition, there are three Erynies, the children of Gaia born from the blood of Uranus; in Latin, they are called Furiae, from furo ‘be mad, rave’.
Although some linguists have tried to connect the name *Erīnys* to Ved. *Saranyā-,* the mother of Yama, this etymology is formally very difficult, and the connection with *ēris* ‘strife, quarrel’ is no better (plus, the etymology of *ēris* is unknown).

The castrated father of Kronos, *Ouranós* ‘sky’, may have originally been ‘the rainer’ (cf. Skr. vārṣati ‘rains’). *Apollōn* was the protector of the arts, especially poetry, but he was also the god of medicine and healing. He dispenses the plague on the Greeks in Ilíiad by shooting arrows. He killed the *Pythōn* (< PIE *bhudh₂*- ‘bottom’), cf. Ved. *āhi budhnya- ‘the serpent of the abyss’), a mythical dragon, in Delphi, where his major sanctuary was located. Though his name (also attested as *Apellōn*) is sometimes compared to ON afl ‘strength’ its etymology is ultimately unknown; the name of this “most Greek of gods” is probably borrowed from Anatolian, cf. the theonym *Apalliunaš* attested in Hittite documents dealing with Wiluša/Troy. In Homer’s epics, he is the protector of the Trojans, and his cult was certainly very widely known in Asia Minor.

In contrast to the male-dominated Vedic religion, Greeks worshipped quite a number of powerful goddesses. *Athēnē* was attested in Linear B tablets (Myc. *A-ta-na*), but it seems to have been the general noun, perhaps meaning ‘lady’. It is of pre-Greek origin. Athene was depicted as a virgin, the protector of arts, but also a warrior goddess dressed in full armour. Another independent-minded virgin of non-Greek origin was *Artemis*, the huntergoddess, (Myc. *A-ti-mi-te*, dat.), cf. Lyd. *Artimus*, Etruscan *Arītīmi*. Attempts to derive her name from Gr. *ārktoς* ‘bear’ are futile. The name was probably borrowed from some Anatolian language. Likewise, *Hēphaistos*, the blacksmith god, has a name of unknown origin. Although he was certainly worshipped by the professional smiths, few of the myths about him have been preserved, and he is chiefly known as the husband of the unfaithful *Aphrodīōn*, the goddess of love. Her name is also obscure, though her bimo-like appearance and many attributes (e.g. *khrysēē* ‘golden’, or *thygātēr Diós* ‘daughter of Zeus’) make her comparable to the Vedic Dawn Goddess, *Uṣās*. Aphrodite's name bears no relation whatsoever with *aphrōs* ‘foam’, despite the folk-etymology; the true origin of the name is unknown. Her cult seems to have spread from Paphos on Cyprus, where she had her oldest sanctuary, and Greeks sometimes called her Cypris, ‘the Cyprian’. On the other hand, the Greek Dawn Goddess, *Ēōs*, whose name is identical to *Uṣās*, is somewhat eclipsed already in Homer. She is mentioned rarely, though, and her name is often modified by the beautiful poetic epithet *rhododáktylos* ‘rose-fingered’. In Greek myth, she does not do much, except abducting young and pretty boys such as *Tithōnōn* (of pre-Greek origin), whom she kept as an eternally living but also ageing lover (allegedly, he turned into a cricket after all). *Ārēs*, the god of war, is a personified abstraction – his name is obviously derived from *arā* ‘curse’. Likewise, *Hermās* (Myc. *E-ma-ha*) seems to have been, originally, ‘the binder’; his name has been derived from *ser- ‘fasten together’ (Gr. *eirō*, Lat. *sero* ‘link together’, *sermo* ‘speech’, Skr. *sisartī* ‘stretches, extends’, which is often predicated of Mitra’s hands. However, the word formation of Hermes’ name is unclear. He can be compared to Varuna, who binds the sinners in the RV (Hermes is the *psychopomp* in the Greek religion), and also to Vedic *Pūśan*, who is connected to cattle and cattle-raiding (it was Hermes who stole Apollo’s cattle). Hermes is also a god of boundaries and the protector of thieves and heralds. The daughter of Zeus and Hera, *Hēbē*, was the cupbearer of the Olympian gods; her name simply means ‘youth’ (< PIE *yeh₁gʷeh₂*, cf. Lith. *jēgā* ‘power’); *Baba Jaga*, a figure from the Russian folklore, has a similar name (*Jaga* may be derived from *yeh₂gʷeh₂*), but in many respects she is the very opposite of *Hēbē* (she is an ugly old hag). *Poseidōn* (also *Poseidon*, Myc. *Po-si-da-wo-ne*, dat.), the lord of the sea and Zeus’ brother, was originally called *potey-dāwōn* ‘the lord (*potis*) of *dā*, whatever that is; the comparison with Varuna’s epithet *pāti- dāmunas*
‘the lord of waters’ (RV 1.136.3) makes one think whether Poseidon was originally ‘the lord of waters’ as well. Besides ruling the sea, armed with a trident, Poseidon is also the earth-shaker (elelíkhthón) causing earthquakes. He is also connected with horses and honoured at chariot-races. According to one tradition, he was actually the progenitor of horses: he is said to have spilled his semen on a rock from which the first horse was shaped, and with his wife Demeter (or with the wrathful goddess Erynis) he fathered the famous horse Areion. In a rare account of horse-sacrifice among the Greeks, Pausanias (8.7.2) tells us how horses were drowned for Poseidon near Argos.

There were other gods who never made it to the Olympus. Pán, the protector of roads and shepherds, is probably related to Ved. Pūsan- (< *pewh₂son-, see above), and the name of the god of wine, Diónysos (Myc. Di-wo-nu-so) is derivable from *diwos nuso- ‘the nuso-of the Sky’, whatever nuso- originally meant. He is also called Bákkhos, but this name is also etymologically unclear. His sacred wand made of vine, thýrsos, may be a loanword from Anatolian (cf. Hitt. tuwarša- ‘vine’), while the cult hymn in the praise of Dionysus, thríambos (whence Lat. triumphus and Eng. triumph) is without etymology. Finally, the name of Órpheus, the mythical divine singer, may be related to Ved. Ṛbhū-, the craftsman among the gods. Both names may go back to PIE *h₁rb₃ėw-.

_Persephónē_ was the abducted wife of the god of the underworld, Hades (Hesiod, Theog. 912f.. Her name is probably derivable from _petrein_ ‘pierce’ and _phōės_ ‘light’, but she is often called simply Kórē ‘girl’, especially in her function of a vegetation goddess (she was often depicted with a sheaf of grain); in Arcadia she was worshipped under the title of _déspoiña_ ‘mistress’. The name of her spouse, Haídēs, according to some linguists, may be from *sm-wid- (?) ‘the place where one sees his ancestors again’, but it is more probably from *Haywid- < *sh₂ey-w-, cf. Lat. _saevus_ ‘cruel’, from the root *sh₂ey- ‘to bind’, cf. Ved. _sétu_, the fetter of Varuṇa. The name of the Muse, Moûsa, is from PIE *montyeh₂ (or *mon-d’h₁yeh₂) ‘memory’, from the root *men- ‘think’ (Lat. _mens_, OCS _měniti_, Skr. _māṇyate_, etc.). There was originally only one Muse, and their classical number of seven has been fixed only during the classical period. There are some other goddesses of lesser standing. The name of the domestic goddess _Hestia_ is the word for ‘fireplace, hearth’, Gr. _hestía_ < *westi-, cf. Lat. _Vesta_, who is more important as a virgin keeper of domestic fire. The goddess of childbirth, _Eileíthya_ (earlier _Eleúthya_, Myc. _e-re-u-ti-ja_); her name is usually related to Gr. _élýthon_, _élthon_ ‘I came’ (< PIE *h₁lew₂dh-, Ofr. _luid_ ‘came’), because she comes to the help of women at childbirth, but this may be just folk etymology. The goddess _Hekáthē_ is not yet mentioned in Homer, and may have been imported from Asia Minor (her cult was widespread in Caria); she was the goddess of paths, but she has also ties with the underground, as the leader of ghosts and witches. The etymology of her name is unknown. The dark goddesses of death, _Kêres_, might be etymologically connected to Olnd. _Kālī_, who becomes the goddess of death only in later Hinduism, but whose name was initially an epithet of _Rātrī_, the goddess of night.

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1. An inscription in Linear B from Pylos (PY Fr 343-1213)

_e-ti-we po-][se-da-o-ne re-ke-to-ro-te-ri-jo OIL[

For Poseidon, festival of the Spreading of the Couch, oil perfumed with _e-ti-_.

2. Chryses' Prayer to Apollo (The Iliad, I, 33-42)

οδός ἐφατ’, ἔδεισεν δ’ ὁ γέρων καὶ ἐπείθετο μύθῳ:
βῆ δ’ ἀκέων παρὰ θύανα πολυφλοισθείον θαλάσσης:
pολλὰ δ’ ἐπειτ’ ἀπάνευθε κυών ἡράδ’ ὁ γεραῖος
Ἀπόλλωνι ἀνακτὶ, τὸν ἡδυκομος τέκε Λητῷ:
κλάθι μεὺν ἀργυρότος’, ὡς Χρύσην ἀμφιββήκας
Κυλλάν τε ζαθέθην Τενέδιοι τε ἵπτε ἀνάσσεις,
Συμπέθεό εἰ ποτὲ τοι χαριντ’ ἐπὶ νηὸν ἐρευνα,
ἣ ἐὶ δὴ ποτὲ τοι κατὰ πίονα μηρὶ ἐκῆ
ταῦρων ἦδ’ αἰγῶν, τὸ δὲ μοι κρήνην ἐξεδώρω:
τίσεαι Δαναι έμει δάκρυα σοι σέβεσσιν.

“He went forth in silence along the shore of the loud-resounding sea, and earnestly then, when
he had gone apart, the old man prayed to the lord Apollo, whom fair-haired Leto bore: ‘Hear
me, god of the silver bow, who stand over Chryse and holy Cilla, and rule mightily over
Tenedos, Sminthian god, if ever I roofed over a temple to your pleasing, or if ever I burned to
you fat thigh-pieces of bulls and goats, fulfill this prayer for me: let the Danaans pay for my
tears by your arrows’”

(Translated by Samuel Butler, 1924)

3. Homeric Hymn 6 to Aphrodite

αιδοῖν, χρυσοστέφανον, καλὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἄσομαι, ἤ πάσης Κύπρου κρήδεμα λέλογχεν
eινάλης, δὴ μοι Ζέφυροι μένος ὕγρων ἀέντος
ηγεικεν κατὰ κύμα πολυφλοισθεὶον θαλάσσης
5 ἀφρόν ἕνι μαλακῷ: τὴν δὲ χρυσάμπυκες Ὄμαι
dέξαντ’ ἀσπασίως, περὶ δ’ ἀμβρότα εἰμιᾶ πόσαν:
κρατὶ δ’ ἐπ’ ἀθανάτῳ στεφάνῳ εὔτυκτον ἔθηκαν
καλὴν, χρυσέθην: ἐν δὲ τριτοποί λοφοῖσιν
ἀνθεμ’ ὑγραπλέκου χρυσοῖο τε τιμήντος:
10δειρή δ’ ἀμφ’ ἀπαλῆ καὶ στηθεσίν ἀργυφέσιν
ὄμησι χρυσάμπυκι εκόσμεον, οἱσὶ περ αὐταὶ
Ὡμαι κοσμεῖσθην χρυσάμπυκες, ὡπότ’ ἵοιν
ἐς χορὸν ἰμερόντεα θεῶν καὶ δῶματα πατρός.
αὐτὰρ ἑπείδη πάντα περὶ χροὶ κόσμον ἔθηκαν,
15ἵθ’ον εὶς ἄβανατος: οἱ δ’ ἀσταλάζοντα ἴδοντες
ρησαὶ τ’ ἐξεδίωστο καὶ ἠρήσατο ἐκαστὸς
ἐναι κοινοθην ἄλοχον καὶ οἰκαδ’ ἀγεσθαι,
ἐξδος θεμαμάζοντει ἣστεφάνου Κυθηρείς.
χαϊρ’ ἐλικοβλέφαρε, γλυκυμείληε: δὸς δ’ ἐν ἄγωνι
20νίκηκ τὸδε φέρεσθαι, ἐμὴν δ’ ἐντυνον ἄοιδῆν.
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ σείο καὶ ἄλλης μνήσομ’ ἀοιδῆς.

“I will sing of stately Aphrodite, gold-crowned and beautiful, whose dominion is the walled
cities of all sea-set Cyprus. There the moist breath of the western wind wafted her over the
waves of the loud-moaning sea [5] in soft foam, and there the gold-filleted Hours welcomed
her joyously. They clothed her with heavenly garments: on her head they put a fine, well-wrought crown of gold, and in her pierced ears they hung ornaments of orichalc and precious gold, [10] and adorned her with golden necklaces over her soft neck and snow-white breasts, jewels which the gold-filleted Hours wear themselves whenever they go to their father's house to join the lovely dances of the gods. And when they had fully decked her, [15] they brought her to the gods, who welcomed her when they saw her, giving her their hands. Each one of them prayed that he might lead her home to be his wedded wife, so greatly were they amazed at the beauty of violet-crowned Cytherea.

Hail, sweetly-winning, coy-eyed goddess! Grant that I may gain the victory in this contest, [20] and order you my song. And now I will remember you and another song also.”

4.Hera swears to Zeus by the waters of the underground river Styx (Homer, The Iliad 15, 37-41)

"Hereto now be Earth my witness and the broad Heaven above, and the down-flowing water of Styx, which is the greatest and most dread oath for the blessed gods, and thine own sacred head, and the couch of us twain, couch of our wedded love, whereby I verily would never forswear myself:"

5. Sappho, fr. 1 (Hymn to Aphrodite)

"..."
δηντε κάλημι

κόττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι μαϊνόλα θύμω τίνα δῆντε Πείθω μαίς ἄγην ἐς σάν φιλότατα, τίς σ’, ὦ Ψάπφ’, ἀδικήμει;

καὶ γὰρ αἱ φεῦγει, ταχέως διώξει, αἱ δὲ δόρα μη δέκετ’ ἄλλα δώσει, αἱ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει κοῦκ ἐθέλοισα.

ἐλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλεπὰν δὲ λύσον ἐκ μεριμνῶν, δῶσα δὲ μοι τελέσσαι θέμος ἴμερρει, τέλεσον’ σὺ δ’ αὕτα σύμμαχος ἐσσο.

“Immortal Aphrodite of the broidered throne, daughter of Zeus, weaver of wiles, I pray thee break not my spirit with anguish and distress, O Queen. But come hither, if ever before thou didst hear my voice afar, and listen, and leaving thy father's golden house camest with chariot yoked, and fair fleet sparrows drew thee, flapping fast their wings around the dark earth, from heaven through mid sky. Quickly arrived they; and thou, blessed one, smiling with immortal countenance, didst ask What now is befallen me, and Why now I call, and What I in my mad heart most desire to see. 'What Beauty now wouldst thou draw to love thee? Who wrongs thee, Sappho? For even if she flies she shall soon follow, and if she rejects gifts shall ye give, and if she loves not shall soon love, however loth.' Come, I pray thee, now too, and release me from cruel cares; and all that my heart desires to accomplish, accomplish thou, and be thyself my ally.”

6. Instructions on how to make a libation: Sophocles, “Oedipus at Colonus”

Οἰδίπους
465δ ὕλησθ’, ὡς νῦν πᾶν τελοῦντι προξένει.
Χορός
θοῦ νῦν καθαρμὸν τῶν διαμόνων, ἕφ’ ἂς τὸ πρῶτον ἱκοῦ καὶ κατέστησας πέδον.
Οἰδίπους
τρόποις ποιοῖς; ὦ ξένου, διδάσκετε.
Χορός
πρῶτον μὲν ἰερᾶς ἐξ ἀειρύτου χοῦς 470κρήτης ἐνεγκόου, δι’ ὁσίων χειρῶν θηγῶν.
Οἰδίπους
ὅταν δὲ τούτο χεῖμ’ ἀκήρατον λάβω;
Χορός
κρατηρέσ εἰσιν, ἀνδρῶς εὐχερος τέχνη, ὅπ πράτ’ ἔρευνον καὶ λαβάς ἀμφιστόμους.
Οἰδίπους
θαλλοἴσιν ἡ κρόκασιν, ἡ ποίῳ τρόπῳ;
Χορός
475οίος γε νεαράς νεοπόκω μαλλῇ λαβὼν.
Οἰδίπος
εἶεν: τὸ δ’ ἐνθὲν ποὶ τελευτήσαι με χρή;
Χορός
χοάς χέασθαι στάντα πρός πρώτην ἐω.
Οἰδίπος
ἡ τοῖς δὲ κρωσσοῖς οἷς λέγεις χέω τάδε;
Χορός
τρισάς γε πηγάς: τόν τελευτάδου δ’ ὅλον.
Οἰδίπος
480τοῦ τόνδε πλήσας θῶ; δίδασκε καὶ τόδε.
Χορός
ὐδάτος, μελίσσης: μηδὲ προσφέρειν μέθυ.
Οἰδίπος
ὅταν δὲ τούτον γῆ μελάμφυλλος τύχῃ;
Χορός
τρίς ἐννε’ αὐτῇ κλόνας ἐξ ἁμφοῖν χεροῖν
tίθεις ἐλαίας τάσο’ ἐπεύχεσθαι λιτάς.
Οἰδίπος
485τούτων ἀκούσας βούλομαι: μέγιστα γάρ.

“Οἰδίπος
[465] Dearest friends, be my patrons, and I will bring everything to completion.
Chorus
Then make atonement to these divinities, to whom you have come first, and on whose ground
you have trespassed.
Οἰδίπος
With what rites? Instruct me, strangers.
Chorus
First, from an ever-flowing [470] spring bring sacred drink-offerings, borne in ritually pure
hands.
Οἰδίπος
And when I have gotten this unmixed draught?
Chorus
There are bowls, the work of a skilled craftsman; crown their edges and the handles at either
side.
Οἰδίπος
With olive branches, or woollen cloths, or in what way?
Chorus
[475] Take the freshly-shorn wool of a ewe-lamb.
Οἰδίπος
Good; and then to what last rite shall I proceed?
Chorus
Pour the drink-offerings, with your face to the dawn.
Οἰδίπος
Shall I pour them with these vessels of which you speak?
Chorus
Yes, in three streams; but the last vessel—
Oedipus  
[480] With what shall I fill this, before I set it down? Teach me this also.  
Chorus  
With water and honey; but add no wine.  
Oedipus  
And when the ground under the dark shade has drunk these?  
Chorus  
Three times lay on it nine branches of olive with both your hands, and meanwhile make this prayer.  
Oedipus  
[485] I wish to hear this prayer; it is the most important part.”

(Translated by Sir Richard Jebb, 1899)
In sharp contrast to the rich literary and epigraphic sources for the study of the Greek religion, the early sources on Latin religion are very modest. A few fragments of the ancient cultic songs, such as the famous *Carmen Arvale* (found on an inscription from 218 B.C., but presumably much older) and the *Carmina Saliaria*, and a handful of inscriptions earlier than the 3rd century B.C. is all that is left before the Hellenistic period, when the original Roman religion underwent a profound influence of the Greek religion. Names of many Greek mythological figures were transmitted to Rome through an Etruscan or Italic intermediary, e.g. *Hercules* (from Greek *Heracles*) or *Proserpina* (from Greek *Persephone*). In the second century B.C., many cults from the Orient spread in Rome, and it took a formal decision by the Senate to prohibit the orgiastic cult of Dionysus (*Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*, the text of which is preserved in full). It was Augustus who sought to restore the original Roman piety in the late 1st century B.C. and in the early 1st century A.D., and the literary mythological works of Virgil (*The Aeneid*) and Ovid (especially *The Metamorphoses*) should be viewed in the light of Augustus's reforms. Whatever ancient lore is preserved in these works, we have to bear in mind that much of the mythology contained in them is an artificial creation of their authors.

We have a fair idea about the ancient Roman piety from references made by classical authors to sacrifices, priestly offices, and the organization of the temples; moreover, a number of authentic prayers have been preserved, including famous Cato's prayer from *De re rustica*. We also have a good knowledge about the ancient Roman festivities, especially those that occurred during the first half of the year, since Ovid was only able to write the first half of his calendar in verses (*Fasti*) before being banished to the Black Sea by Augustus. There are, however, no original and integral sacred texts comparable to the Rig-Vedic hymns, but the practical, down-to-earth nature of Roman religion teaches us that Romans probably never had anything similar to the Rig-Veda. However, since we know so much about the daily lives of ordinary Romans, thanks to the abundance of our sources, we also know a lot about their piety and attitude towards religion: we can easily vividly imagine Horace making an offering to the source of Bandusia, just as we find numerous references to superstitions and silly customs in Cicero's letters to his friends. From all this we can easily conclude that the Roman's approach to religion was practical; Cicero says (*De natura deorum*, III, 87) that 'Jupiter is called Best and Greatest because he does not make us just or sober or wise but healthy and rich and prosperous'. The favour of the gods can be won by careful and regular observance of rites (*disciplina*), and this was mostly delegated to priests, organized as *flamines* and *pontifices*, as well as to priestesses (the best known were the Vestal Virgins who were in charge of the sacred fire in the temple of Vesta). The priests were not a caste, separated from the rest of society, but rather influential and wealthy citizens; the highest priests were often the most powerful politicians, so that, for example, Caesar was during his career a *pontifex maximus* (the chief priest of Jupiter). Since the *pontifices* were in charge of public worship, it was a sensible thing that they were chosen among the rich citizens (unlike contemporary politicians, who tend to raise taxes as they like, the Roman dignitaries had to provide the money for public services and festivities from their own pocket). In contrast to the *pontifices*, the *flamines*, devoted to the Capitoline triad (Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus) had little public influence, since their office was subject to severe taboos. The chief priest of Jupiter, the *flamen Dialis*, could not ride a horse and could not spend more than three consecutive nights outside Rome. The general term for a 'priest' was *sacerdös*, a compound of *sacer* ‘holy’ and *dōt-* < PIE *deh₁-t-* ‘give’ (Lat. *dō*, *dare*); the original meaning was presumably ‘the one with sacred endowments’. Ordinary people had to observe their own private rites, mostly in relation to their ancestors, but they were not obliged to participate in public worship. Horace
tells us how he dropped in on a service in a temple (Sat. I, 114), more from curiosity than from piety, and Horace tells us that he was a parcus deorum cultor et infrenquens (Od. I.34) ‘a sparing and occasional worshipper’.

The Roman sacrifice was similar to Greek, but it was also peculiar in some respects. The favourite sacrificial animals were the pig, the sheep and the ox (the suovetaurilia included all three), and in contrast to the Greeks, the Romans also sacrificed horses to Mars on October 15 (the October Equus). The sacrificial animal was brought to the temple, and its forehead was sprinkled with a mixture of salt and flour (mola salsa, hence the term immolatio); the slaying of the victim had to be done in complete silence, except for the sound of the flute played by a tibicen. Sacrifices were often promised as vows (vota) to the gods, but other vows might include gifts to temples or building of various monuments. The formula votum soluit libens merito is one of the most common phrases found on Roman inscriptions. The methods of divination employed by the Romans were similar to those of the other ancient peoples, but there were also some local fashions, especially in procedures for examining the entrails of victims, performed by haruspices (from PIE *rHu- ‘intestines’, Lith. žarnâ, Skr. hirâ-‘vein’, and *-spek- ‘to watch’, Gr. sképtomai). There were also curious methods of divination from the flight of birds (performed by augures, from avis ‘bird’, and the root found in gustus ‘taste’, or rather from the root of augeo ‘increase’ < PIE *h₂éw-, Lith. augti ‘grow’), or the pecking of chickens.

It has been claimed by Georges Dumézil and his followers that the original mythology of Rome is preserved, but camouflaged, in Titus Livius’ account of the history of the early Rome. For example, the story of the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus is interpreted as the original (Indo-European) cosmogonic myth, in which the world is created from the body of the primeval man, who had been sacrificed by his twin brother; the name of Remus is then derived from *Yemos, and compared to Skr. Yama-, and the initial R- is explained on the analogy with Rômulus, whose name is certainly eponymous with Rôma. There are certainly other elements of ancient mythology spread and concealed in Livius’s work, but it is difficult to gain any certainty in these matters.

Finally, the least reliable sources for the study of the Roman religion are the Christian writers, such as St. Augustine, or Arnobius (Contra Paganos) who often deliberately ridiculed the rites and customs of the pagans. However, they sometimes corroborate hypotheses established independently on the basis of other sources. Thus, while Arnobius (Contra Paganos II. 15.5) claims that there was a deity presiding over the threshold (Limentinus), a deity in charge of the hinges (Cardea) and one protecting the leaf of the door (Forculus), we know from authors such as Aulus Gellius and Servius (who wrote and important commentary on the Aeneid), that there were pontifical books containing detailed lists of indigitāmenta formulas used to invoke the dīi indigetes, or deities responsible for little everyday activities and objects (the epithet indiges is derivable from endo ‘within’ and ago ‘act’, so these were the deities working within objects of the natural world and the social community). For example, Aulus Gellius (XIII, 23) lists Lua Saturni, Salacia Neptuni, Hora Quirini, Virites Quirini, Moles Martis, and others. These were the numina, or various aspects of divinity (from -nuo, adnuo ‘give a sign, nod’). The universe was full of divinity, or, as Virgil says (Georg. IV, 221f.) “God passes through all lands, all tracts of sea and the depths of the sky”.

The chief god of the Roman pantheon, and the head of the Capitoline Triad is Jūpiter (or Juppiter); his name is actually from the PIE phrase *dyēws ph₂tér ‘father Sky’ (see above); his consort, Jūno, bears the name of Etruscan Uni, but perhaps it is originally from the PIE root *dyew-/*diw- ‘sky’ (Lat. deus ‘god’, Gr. Zeús, see above); if her original name was
*Diwō (Gen. *Diwōn-es), it can be compared to Gr. Diōnē, who was also the original wife of Zeus. In that case, the name of Luna must have been borrowed in Latin through some intermediary language, since it is never written as *Diuno, even in the archaic monuments. Another etymology relates her name to Lat. iuvenis ‘young’ and interprets it as ‘the young wife’; she would have been the woman's counterpart to the genius, the personal spirit of every man. In her epiphany as Iuno Lucina she was especially worshipped as the goddess of birth (parallel to Gr. Eileithyia). The somewhat obscure god Quirīnus was an agricultural deity whose name is easily derived from *co-virīnus (from vir < PIE *wihro- ‘man’, Skr. vīrās, Lith. vīras). He was originally the protector of the community, cf. also cūria < *co-viria. Besides Jupiter and Quirinus, the third member of the Capitoline Triad was Mars, who was rather clumsily identified with Gr. Ares. He was also originally an agricultural deity rather than the god of war. His name is known in its older forms Mavors, Māmers, and Marmar, and, unsurprisingly, it is of unknown origin. The name of Venus is originally an abstract numen, from the neuter *wenos ‘desire, lust’, Skr. vānas. She was identified with Gr. Aphrodite, and the name of Apollo was directly borrowed from Greek. The god of trade and the protector of roads, Mercurius (identified with Gr. Hermes), was likewise originally an abstract numen, and his name was derived from merx ‘commodity’, of unknown, perhaps Etruscan origin. Another possibility would be to derive merx from *merg- ‘divide’ (Hitt. mārk- ‘divide, separate’), from which we also have margō, marginis ‘border, limit’. A proto-form *merg-s would have assimilated to merx, and it would have been an abstract root noun meaning ‘a division, a sharing’, just as its formal parallels such as pāx, lēx, nex, etc. The semantic development would have been from ‘what is divided, a share’ to ‘goods, merchandise’.

The two-faced god Jānus, who protected the entrances of Roman houses and the beginnings of all endeavors, bears the name identical to the noun iānus, ‘arched passage, doorway’ < PIE *yeh₂-no-, cf. Skr. yāti ‘goes’, Lith. jōti ‘ride’). The name of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom (identified with Athena) was probably borrowed from Etruscan; in that language, it could also be a borrowing from some IE dialect. It might ultimately be from *Mēneswā, a derivative of PIE *mēr₁nos- ‘moon’, Lith. mēnuo, or from PIE *menos ‘mind’ (Ved. mānas). The name of Saturnus is of uncertain origin. It is sometimes compared to Ved. Savitär- (see above), but a more likely source is Etruscan Satre; he was certainly a god of agriculture and fertility, and his wife was Ops ‘wealth’ (< PIE *h₁ep₁-, cf. Hitt. happinat- ‘rich’). The legends associating Saturnus with an early golden age of abundance (Saturnia aetas) led to his rather clumsy identification with Greek Krōnos. Another ancient fertility god was Consus, to whom the feast of Consualia was dedicated. He was represented as a grain seed and was meant to be the protector of grains. The origin of his name is unknown, and the sometimes proposed derivation from condō, condere ‘to store (grain)’ is unlikely. The name of the wild forest divinity Faunus is also unclear; it is sometimes derived from *b₂h₂-u₁-no-, from the root ‘to be, become’ (cf. OIr. bían ‘good, favourable’). The goddess of the hearth, Vesta, is of course identical to Gr. Hestia (see above), and Liber is from PIE *h₁lew₁d₁-ro- ‘free (man)’ (OCS ljudše, Germ. Leute, etc.). The god of the blacksmiths Volcanus bears the name of unknown origin. It may have been derived from the Etruscan gens Volca, if he was originally their protector deity. Tellus, of which little is known from classical sources, may have been the original Roman Terra Māter, ‘Mother Earth’ (Virgil calls her prima deorum in Aen. 7.136). Her name is, of course, the normal Latin word for ‘earth, ground’ < PIE *tēl₂-ro- ‘ground’ (Skr. tala- ‘surface, bottom’, ORuss. tslo, OIr. talam ‘ground’). She is often identified with Cerés, the goddess of grain and fruits (from *kʰerH- ‘nourishment’, Lith. šerti ‘feed’, OHG hirso ‘millet’). The name of the protectors of the household (in particular of the hearth) was Lāres < Lāses in Carmen Arvalis. It is of unknown origin, but perhaps it may be derived from PIE *deh₂-es- ‘divide, apportion’ (with the common development of *d > i, and rhotacism of *s-
from the original s-stem). The other household deities, the Penātēs, have the name derived from *penus, ‘food, provisions’, cf. Lith. penėti ‘feed’. The etymology of Manēs (pl., Roman ancestor spirits) is unknown as well as of Palēs (sg., a goddess of shepherds) and of Lemures (malevolent spirits of the dead). The Lārvae, another word for ancestor spirits, has been derived from *gʰ₁h₂r-wo- ‘the bleak ones’ (Gr. khlōrós ‘greenish’, OCS zelenъ ‘green’). Bona Dea was, of course, ‘the good goddess’, and the name of Fortūna is derived from *fors ‘destiny, fate’, from the root *bʰer- ‘carry’. The name of the wood goddess Diāna is presumably derived from *dyēw- ‘sky, day’ (Lat. diū ‘by day’, cf. also the name of Greek Diônē above). The Roman god of the sea, Neptūnus, is usually related to Skr. Apām Nāpāt ‘the descendant of waters’, an epithet of Agni, but a different etymology is also viable: Neptūnus can be from the root *nēbʰ-tu- > *neptu-, with the typical suffix characteristic of other theonyms (e.g. Portūnus, the protector of gates, Lat. porta) and terms for officials (e.g. tribūnus, dominus).

Religions of other Italic peoples are considerably less well-known, but luckily enough we have a rather large religious text in Umbrian, the famous Tabulae Iguvinae, bronze tables found in 1444, in Gubbio (ancient Iguvium). They contain a description of a ritual involving a procession and several sacrifices to various deities, e.g. Mars Grabovius. Ethnographers have claimed that the ritual shows certain resemblances to the worship of Catholic saints still taking place in Gubbio today.

1. Cato's prayer (Suovetaurilia, from De re rustica, 2.1.10)

Mars pater, te precor quae soque uti sies volens propitius mihi domo familiaeque nostrae, quoius re ergo agrum terram fundumque meum suovitaurilia circumagi iussi, uti tu morbos visos invisosque, viduertatem vastitudinemque, calamitates in temperiasque prohibessis defendas averruncesque; utique tu fruges, frumenta, vineta virgultaque grandire beneque evenire siris, pastores pecuaque salva servassis duisque bonam salutem valetudinemque mihi domo familiaeque nostrae; harumce rerum ergo, fundi terrae agrique mei lustrandi lustricque faciendi ergo, sicuti dixi, macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus inmolandis esto; Mars pater, eiusdem rei ergo macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus esto

‘Father Mars, I pray and beseech thee that thou be gracious and merciful to me, my house, and my household; to which intent I have bidden this suovetaurilia to be led around my land, my ground, my farm; that thou keep away, ward off, and remove sickness, seen and unseen, barrenness and destruction, ruin and unseasonable influence; and that thou permit my harvests, my grain, my vineyards, and my plantations to flourish and come to good issue, preserve in health my shepherds and my flocks, and give good health and strength to me, my house, and my household. To this intent, to the intent of purifying my farm, my land, my ground, and of making an expiation, as I have said, deign to accept the offering of these suckling victims; Father Mars, to the same intent deign to accept the offering of these suckling offering.’

2. Augustine on the pagan beliefs (De civitate dei, 6.9.3)

Cum mas et femina coniunguntur, adhibetur deus Iugatinus; sit hoc ferendum. Sed domum est ducenda quae nubit; adhibetur et deus Domiducus; ut in domo sit, adhibetur deus Domitius;

“When a man and a woman get together the god Jugatinus is invoked. This may be borne, but the bride must be taken to one's house, and thus the god Domiducus is invoked, and the goddess Manturna so that she would stay with the man. What else is needed? Let human shame be spared; let the carnal desire finish the rest, in the secrecy demanded by decency. Why fill the marriage bed with the mob made of deities, when the wedding companions are getting away? And they gather there, not in order to cause more concern for decency, but so that the woman, who is of the weaker sex and scared by the new situation, should be deprived of her virginity through their assistance. There is also the goddess Virginensis, the fatherly god Subigus, the motherly Prema and the goddess Pertunda, as well as Venus and Priapus. What is all that? If the husband, labouring in these matters needs any help at all, would it not suffice only one of them, male or female? Would only Venus not be enough, who is called that way, because a woman does not cease to be a virgin without force? If there is any shyness in men (since there is none among gods), and since the newly weds believe that so many deities of both sexes are present and engaged in the act, will they not be too overwhelmed by shame, so that he will lose all lust, and she will be more resilient? And really, if the goddess Virginensis is there to unleash the virgin's belt, if the god Subigus is also present to make her submissive to the husband, if the goddess Prema is there to make her motionless, when she submits, what is the goddess Pertunda doing there? May she blush with shame and get out! Let the husband do something!”

3. Horace promises a sacrifice (Odes 3.13)

O fons Bandusiae splendidior vitro,
dulci digne mero non sine floribus,
cras donaberis haedo,
cui frons turgida cornibus

primis et venerem et proelia destinat;
frustra: nam gelidos inficiet tibi
rubro sanguine rivos
lascivi suboles gregis.

te flagrantis atrox hora Caniculae
nescit tangere, tu frigus amabile
fessis vomere tauris
praebes et pecori vago.

fies nobilium tu quoque fontium
me dicente cavis inpositam ilicem
saxis, unde loquaces
lymphae desiliunt tuae.

Bandusia's fount, in clearness crystalline,
O worthy of the wine, the flowers we vow!
Tomorrow shall be thine
A kid, whose crescent brow

Is sprouting all for love and victory.
In vain: his warm red blood, so early stirr'd.
Thy gelid stream shall dye,
Child of the wanton herd.

Thee the fierce Sirian star, to madness fired,
Forbears to touch: sweet cool thy waters yield
To ox with ploughing tired,
And lazy sheep afield.

Thou too one day shalt win proud eminence
'Mid honour'd founts, while I the ilex sing
Crowning the cavern, whence
Thy babbling wavelets spring.

(Translated by John Conington, 1882)
This rite shall start with the observation of the birds *parfa* (?owl), *dersua* woodpecker, *peica*, *merstu* He who will go to observe the messages (of birds) should, sitting at the *tremnu* ask the priest (*arfertur*): Ascertain that I am observing the owl, the *dersua*, the horned one *lersua* the woodpecker *merso* the peica *mersta*
mersta birds
mersta divine messengers.
The arfertur ascertains in his answer:
There you should observe
the owl, the dersua, the horned one dersua
the woodpecker merso
the peica mersta
mersta birds
mersta divine signs
for me,
for the city of Iguvium
in this stahmo stahmito.
When one who went to watch the messengers
will have sat on the seat,
no sound should be made,
and others should not sit at the same time (with him)
until he who went to watch the messengers
shall have returned.
If any sound is made
or if anyone sits in the meanwhile (with him)
the rite is void.

5. Carmen Arvale (Old Latin)

enos Lases iuuate
enos Lases iuuate
enos Lases iuuate
neue lue rue Marmar sins incurrere in pleores
neue lue rue Marmar sins incurrere in pleores
neue lue rue Marmar sins incurrere in pleores
satur fu, fere Mars, limen sali, sta berber
satur fu, fere Mars, limen sali, sta berber
satur fu, fere Mars, limen sali, sta berber
semunis alternei advocapit conctos
semunis alternei advocapit conctos
semunis alternei advocapit conctos
enos Marmor iuuato
enos Marmor iuuato
enos Marmor iuuato
triumpe triumpe triumpe triumpe triumpe

The translation is tentative, since the text is corrupted and was no longer understood when it
was written down (in 218. B.C.): “Help us, Lares (3x); do not let Mars or plague overtake the
fields (3x); be content, come, Mars, jump over the threshold, stop (?); he will call all the
Semones (sowing deities?, 3x). Help us, Mars (3x); triumph (3x)”.

The study of Celtic religion is difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, it is quite uncertain whether there was ever “the Celtic religion” in the first place. All we have from the Roman and pre-Roman periods are local cults devoted to many deities, very few of which have pan-Celtic character. Besides that, our sources for the study of pagan Celtic rites and beliefs are very limited. Besides archaeological data, all we have about the subject from the period when Celts were still pagan, are references by Classical authors, such as Caesar, who are biased in their approach. Caesar, for example, in his De Bello Gallico, does give an account of the Gaulish religion, but his purpose is not so much to teach his audiences in Rome about what the Gauls actually believed, but rather to convince them that their beliefs were not so dissimilar from the Roman ones, and that therefore Gaul is worth conquering after all. Other Classical references to Celtic religion are scarce and too fragmentary to be of any use, e.g. the mention of three Gaulish gods (Teutates, Esus, and Taranis) in Lucan (De Bello Civili I, 444-6).

There are a few Gaulish inscriptions in Roman alphabet dealing with magic, e.g. the ‘Plomb from Larzac’ and the ‘Inscription from Chamalières’. Most of these documents are poorly understood, since the Gaulish language is not well attested, and its grammar appears to have been quite different from the grammars of the Insular Celtic languages. The druidic ‘Calendar from Coligny’ also dates from the early years after the Roman conquest, but it preserves only names of months and of some religious festivities.

The post-classical sources are most numerous, but they all come from the period when the Celtic peoples were already Christianized. To what extent the old traditions may have been preserved, and transmitted in the Insular Celtic oral literature, is a matter of dispute among scholars. In Old Irish, we have several dozens of sagas, prose texts written down in the Middle Ages, but certainly going back to an oral tradition stretching back to the first centuries A.D. In the nineteenth century, scholars classified the Old Irish sagas into four “cycles”: “The Ulster Cycle”, dealing with the heroes of the eponymous tribe of Ulaí (the Old Irish name for Ulster is Ulad), the “Mythological Cycle”, dealing with the mythical prehistory of Ireland, “The Leinster Cycle”, which focuses on the pseudohistorical early kings of Lagáin (the Irish name for Leinster and the “Fenian Cycle”, whose main character is Find mac Cumaill, the leader of the wild group of youthful warriors, the fiana. However, mythological elements are present in sagas belonging to all four cycles, and the native Irish tradition classifies the sagas not in cycles, but according to their subjects: wooings (tochmarca), destructions (togala), cattle raids (Tána), deaths of prominent chiefs (aídeda), etc. The most famous of the sagas are Táin bó Cuailnge ‘The Cattle Raid of Cuailnge’, which tells about a war between two tribes (the Ulaí and the Connachta) over a wondrous bull, Tochmarc Étain, in which a fairy called Etain serially changes husbands and forms, and Aislinge Óenguusso, in which the young hero is incapacitated by his love for a fabulous fairy who visits him in his sleep in the form of a swan. Lebor Gabála Érenn ‘The Book of the Conquests of Ireland’ is not properly a saga, but rather a pseudohistorical account of several invasions that allegedly brought different “races” to Ireland before the arrival of the Irish. One of them were the Tuatha Dé Danann, the tribe of the goddess Danu’ which conquered the island and replaced the demonical Fomóire and the Fir Bolg. The earliest manuscript containing Irish sagas is Lebor na hUidre (‘The Book of the Dun Cow’) from the late 11th century, but it is certain that earlier manuscripts with this material existed. Old Irish sagas were written down, and latter copied, by Christian monks, and there is little doubt that all pagan content passed through Christian censorship. The same holds for the early Welsh prose stories, which are much less numerous. Mythological
elements are especially prominent in the ‘Four Branches of the Mabinogi’ (Pedeer Ceine y Mabinogi, 12th century).

It is difficult to reconstruct the Celtic pantheon, and there is no proof that “the pantheon” ever existed among the Celts. Most deities attested in ancient Gaul were local, and there is no evidence that they were widespread in the whole of the Celtic world. The medieval sagas in Welsh and Irish are late sources, and as such often unreliable, especially if one attempts to relate the mythological elements contained in them with what is known about Gaulish religion. Perhaps the only Celtic god attested in all Celtic-speaking countries is *Lugos. In Gaulish inscriptions from the Roman period, he is known as Lugus, while his Welsh name was Llew and OIr. Lug. The name is of unknown origin; it is sometimes compared to Gr. ἵ λυνκς ‘lynx’, but it could also be derived from the root *lewg- ‘to bend, twist’ (Goth. ga-līkan ‘close’) or *lewgh- ‘lie’ (OCS йз, Goth. iugan). Lug’s association with the arts can be deduced from his OIr. epithet samildānach ‘having all the skills’. He was admitted to the feast in Tara (OIr. Temair), the pagan sanctuary of Ireland, after bragging that he was a wright, as mith, a champion, hero, historian, sorcerer and leech. The Irish thought he was also the inventor of the board-game fidchell (literally ‘wood-sense’). In Gaul, Lug seems to have been identified with Roman Mercurius, of whom Casuar (De bello Gallico, 6.17) says he was the most revered Gaulish deity. In Gaulish art, he is depicted as young, beardless, and carrying a caduceus and purse. He is sometimes accompanied by cock, goat or tortoise and is often associated with the goddess called Maia or Rosmerta (on which see below), who may have been a goddess of abundance.

Gaul. Maponos (from PCelt. *makkwo- ‘son, boy’, OIr. macc) was probably an underworld god; he is identical with OIr. Macc ind Óc ‘the young son’, the son of Dagdae, the ruler of the Tuatha Dé Danann. An inscription from Roman Britain calls Maponos a citharoedus ‘the harper’, which means that he was associated with the arts. Taranis may have been the Celtic Thunderer. His name is probably from the same root as OIr. torann ‘thunder’, ON Thórr, etc. Gaul. Borvo (also Bormo), known from a number of Roman inscriptions, was a god of thermal springs, whose name is from the root of OIr. berbaid ‘brew’ (PIE *bʰerw-, cf. Lat. fervo, Eng. brew). Gaul. Teutates seems to have been the protector of the tribe. His name is form PIE *tewto- ‘tribe’, cf. OIr. tūath, Goth. þiuda ‘people, tribe’. Lucan’s Teutates, Esus, and Taranis may have actually represented a three-part name of a single deity, since Esus is nicely derived from PIE *h₁es₂h₂os ‘lord’ (Lat. erus, Hitt. išaš), so the three names quoted by Lucan may simply reflect ‘Taranis, the lord of the tribe’.

The god Grannos, associated with thermal springs at Aquae Granni (present day Aachen) seems to have been identified with Gallo-Roman Apollo. His name may have meant ‘the bearded one’, cf. OIr. grend ‘beard’, W gran ‘chin, beard’, OHG grana ‘moustache’. In inscriptions from Noricum Apollo bears the epithet Belenus, which may have meant ‘shining, brilliant’ (cf. the pagan Irish feast of beltene on the 1st of May, which is interpreted as ‘the shining fire (tene), but this is far from certain).

The Gaulish goddesses include Sirona (probably from the PIE word for ‘star’, PIE *h₂stēr > OIr. sir, Lat. stēlla, Gr. astēr). Rosmerta (whose name is probably formed with the prefix *ro- ‘very’ and the root *smer- ‘think, remember’, cf. Ved. smārati, Gr. himeirō ‘wish for’, perhaps also Croat. mārīti ‘take care of’) and Epona, whose name is derivable from Gaul. *epos ‘horse’ < PIE *h₁e₂k’wos, Lat. equus. Her Welsh equivalent may have been W Rhiannon < *Rigantōnā ‘the great queen’, a disobedient lady forced to serve as a mare in the ‘Four Branches of the Mabinogi’.
Gaulish Sucellus, who is depicted as a middle-aged man carrying a club or mallet, is sometimes identified with Caesar’s Dis Pater, the otherworld deity from which the Gauls were thought to be descended. His name may have meant ‘the good striker’ (from *h₁su- ‘well’ and *k’elh₂- ‘strike’, cf. Lat. per-cello ‘strike’), but it has also been interpreted as *h₁su-k’el-mno- ‘protecting well’ (from the root of Lat. celo ‘hide’, Ofr. celid) and parallel to the OInd. name Suśarman-. Sucellus is often paired with the goddess Nantosvelta, whose name contains the root nant- ‘brook’ (W nant); the second element of her name may be from P Celt. *swel- ‘turn’ (Ofr. sel ‘turn, moment’, MW chwyl ‘destiny, course’), or from PIE *swel- ‘burn’ (OHG swellen).

Cernunnos is perhaps the best known of the Gaulish deities with theriomorphic features. He is depicted as a deity with antlers, or horns. His name is similar to the epithet Cernach born by one of the heroes of the Old Irish Ulster cycle of tales, Connacht Cernach. Gaul. Damona ‘the great cow’ (cf. OIr. dam ‘ox’ < P Celt. *damo-) was a companion of the aforementioned god of the thermal springs, Borvo.

The name of Dagdae, the chief of the Túatha Dé Danann, is an old compound (as we saw above), consisting of the prefixed adjective P Celt. *dago- ‘good’ (cf. W da ‘good’, otherwise the etymology is unknown) and P Celt. *dēwo- < PIE *deywo-, the term for the celestial god (Lat. déus, Skr. devī-, etc.). He is sometimes also called Echu Ollathir ‘Echu, the father of all’; Echu is, of course, derived from Ofr. ech ‘horse’, so he has been compared to deities connected with horses in other traditions, such as Greek Poseidon. Some scholars see in him the Irish equivalent of Caesar’s Gaulish Dis Pater and of Sucellus, because he had a club, with which he killed the living and revived the dead. He was also called Ruad Rofessa ‘The Mighty One of Great Knowledge’ and he had a magical cauldron that was always full. Ofr. Óengus, who figures as the son of Dagdae, is also called Macc ind Oc, ‘the young son’ (see above); his name comes from P Celt. *oyno-gusto- ‘the only strong one’, cf. OIr. gus ‘power, strength’.

Nuada Argatlám ‘Nuada of the silver arm’ is also one of the Túatha Dé Danann. He is the Irish equivalent of Welsh Lludd Llaw Ereint ‘Lludd of the silver arm’ who figures in the medieval tale Lludd ac Llefelys. The original form of the Welsh name began with a N- (changed to L- by analogy with llaw ‘arm’), and it is attested in a Romano-British dedication to the god Nodons at Lydney Perk in Gloucestershire. The PIE etymology is unknown, but a derivation from the root *newd- ‘strike’ (Ved. nudāte) is possible. The god of blacksmiths was Ofr. Goibniu, doubtlessly identical with Welsh Gofannon, who occurs in the ‘Four Branches of the Mabinogi’; both figures bear the name meaning ‘great smith’ (cf. OIr. gobae, gen. sg. gobann ‘smith’, perhaps related to Lat. faber < PIE *gʰwobʰ-). As one of the Túatha Dé Danann, Goibniu forged weapons no one whom they wounded could survive. Another god related to the crafts was Ogmae (presumably the same as Gaul. Ogmios, whom Lucian, writing in the 2nd century A.D., identified as a Gaulish Hercules). He is traditionally credited with the invention of the Ogam script, but the etymology of his name is unclear. Ogmios, on the other hand, was a figure armed with a club and bow, and also as an old man who was associated with eloquence (he was depicted as drawing behind him men attached to him by thin chains to the tip of his tongue).

Other prominent mythological figures in the OIr. sagas include the goddesses Étain (of unknown etymology), Macha (of unknown origin), Danu (of unknown etymology, but presumably related to W Dôn), Anu (of unknown origin, but perhaps originally identical to Danu), as well as Brigit, who may have been the goddess of poetry (Cormac’s dictionary, from the 10th century, says that she was deam...esse poetarum). Later she was euhemerized as
the Christian St. Brigid from Kilkenny. Her name comes from PCelt. *briganțī < *PIE *bʰrgʰn’ti₂h ‘the exalted one’, cf. Ved. bhṛ|h (an epithet of Uṣās, the Dawn). A goddess Brīgantīa (the patron of the tribe Brīgantes) is known from a votive inscription in Roman Britain. She may be the same figure that Caesar calls Minerva in his account of the Gaulish religion (De bello Gallico, 6.17); Solinus, writing in the 3rd century A.D. says that perpetual fire burned in the sanctuary of Minerva in Britain, and her standing epithet was Belisama ‘most brilliant’. This fits well with the information about Brigit, supplied by Giraldus Cambrensis in the 12th century, who says that she and her nuns guarded a sacred fire in her sanctuary-turned-convent. Her feast-day was February 1, coinciding with Imbolc, the pagan Irish festival of spring.

OIr. Bodb is the female demon of war in several medieval sagas. She sometimes appears on the battlefield as a crow, so as a common noun bodb means simply ‘crow’. The name is connected to OE beadu ‘fight, battle’ and probably derived from PIE *bʰodʰ- ‘pierce, fight’ (Lat. fodo, OCS bosti).

A somewhat mysterious figure of OIr. Lir seems to be comparable to W Llyr from the ‘Four Branches of the Mabinogi’; his name (OIr. lir, W llyr ) means simply ‘the sea’, perhaps from the root *leyH- ‘to pour’, but this has been doubted on both semantic and formal grounds. His son is called Manannán in Irish and Manawydan in Welsh, but the Welsh name may have been borrowed from Irish. In the OIr. saga Emmram Brain ‘The Voyage of Bran’ Manannán is represented as traveling over the sea in a chariot.

1. Caesar, De Bello Gallico VI, 17, On the Gaulish Religion


Among the gods they worship Mercury most of all. He is most often represented in pictures, and they think of him as the inventor of all the arts and a guide on the roads and on journeys and the most influential for money-making and commerce. After him, they worship Apollo, Mars, Jupiter and Minerva. They have almost the same opinion of them as the other peoples do: they think that Apollo drives away diseases, that Minerva takes care of the works and arts, that Jupiter holds the empire of the sky and that Mars rules over war.

2. Inscription from Chamalières

Andedion uediium diiuion risun / aritumapon arueriati / lopites sniedđic sosbrixiaanderon / clucionfloronmigrin adgarion aemili / on paterin Claudion legittum / caelion / pelign Claudio pelign margion victorin asiaticonaddedilli etic secou toncnaman toncsliontio meion toncesei buetid ollon reguccambion exops pissiumtsoccati rissuis onson bissiet luge dessummiis luge dessumis luge dessumis luge dessumis lux.

Tentative translation: ‘I invoke Maponos Arveriatis among the infernal deities; may you punish (?) and torture them with infernal magic: Caius Lucius, Florus Nigrinus, the adgarios
(‘accuser’), Aemilius Paterinus, Claudius Legitumus, Caelius Pelignus, Claudius, Pelignus, Marcus Victorinus, and Asiaticus Addedili. And those who swear by such false oaths, moreover, he swore: ‘May everything be crooked (?) to him! I see it blind (?). It will be good (?) for us (?). O Lugus, take them (?), take them, Lugus, take them, Lugus (?)’

4. Old Irish saga ‘The Voyage of Conlae’

Echtrae Chonnlae mac Cuinn Chètchathaig in so.

[1] Connlæa Rúad mac do Chunn Chètchathaich, a mboic laa n-and for láim a athar i n-uachtna Uisg, co.n-acca in mna i n-éacht anetargnad.


[3] Mulier respondit:

“Do.dechad-sa a türb bío, i-anna bi báis na peccad na inarumus.
Do.melom fìe da bua cén frithgnam.
Caichaomar lenn cén deubh.
Sid már i taam, conid de suidh no n.aìmnighe ràs side.”


[5] Mulier respondit:

“Ad:glàdaud mnaì n-oic n-àlaid sochendòil
nad:frescì bás na sentaid.
Ró:carus Conne Rúad.
Co-t:ngairim do Maig Méd
duid ri Bòiad hitssuithain
cen gol cén maire inna thuir
ó gabhaí flaith.
Tair leann,
a Chonnlaí Rúaid muinbric caindildeire.
Barr buide for-du:ta òas gnús chorcordái,
bid ordan do rigdelbae.
Ma cho-tumèitéis, ní:chrafà do delbae oidiu áilde
có brath mbruidach.”

na-che:n-acatar:

“No:t-álim, a Chorim
mórchéil áit mòrdánaid.
Forbhad do-do:ómànic
as-dom moo airí, as-dom moo cumachtu,
nith na-chan:thànic
ó gabshu flaith.

This is the voyage of Connlæ, the son of Conn Cètchathaich.
I. Connlae the Red, the son of Conn Cétchatach, was standing once before his father on the heights of Uisnech, when he saw a women in unusual clothes.

II. Connlae said: ‘Whence do you come, woman?’

III. Mulier respondit:

‘I come from the Land of the Living, where there is no sin or transgression. We eat in constant feasts without exertion. We have peace without strife. We live in a śid and therefore they call us 'people of the śid’.

IV. ‘Who are you talking to?’ asked Conn Cétchathach. Nobody saw the woman except Connlae.

V. Mulier respondit: ‘He is speaking to a young, lovely woman from a good family, who does not expect either death or old age. I have fallen in love with Connlae the Red. I call him to Mag Mell, where the eternal Bóadag reigns, without cry or laments he is in his land since he had assumed his throne. Come with me, Connlae the Red, o speckled-necked, candle-red one. The red hair on your purple face will be the ornament of your royal appearance. If you come with me, the youth and beauty of your appearance will not be lost until the Judgement.’

4. The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi (Math mab Mathonwy), p. 176ff.:

*Sef a wnaeth ynteu: edrych ym blaen y prenn; a phan edrych, ef a welei eryr ym blaen y prenn. A phan ymysgytwei yr eryr, y syrthei y pryuet ar kic pwdyr ohonaw, ar hwch yn yssu y rei hynny. Sef a wnaeth ynteu: medylya, mae Lleu, oed yr eryr; a chanu eglyn:

*Dar a dyf yrwng deu lynn;
Gordu-wrych awyr a glyn:
Ony dywetaf i eu,
Oulodeu Lleu pan yw hynn.

‘Then he looked at the top of the tree and saw an eagle; whenever the eagle shook, worms and rotten flesh would drop off, and the sow would eat them. Gwydion thought that the eagle was Lleu, and he sang an englyn:

An oak-tree grows between two lakes:
dark sky and a plain;
If I should not tell a lie,
these are Lleu’s feathers.’
Our first written source for the study of Germanic religion is a brief account of it in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (6.21); Caesar contrasts the Gaulish religion with Germanic, which he believes to be much more primitive, concentrating on the ‘visible’ gods such as the Sun and the Moon, and neglecting institutionalized priests, temples and sacrifices. The second important Roman source is Tacitus’ *Germania*. It is a thorough account of the Germanic tribes known to Romans in the 1st-2nd century A.D., and it includes several passages dealing with Germanic religious beliefs and customs. He even captures their cosmological story, according to which all Germans were descended from the earth-born god Tuisto (or Tuisto ‘twin’) and his son Mannus ‘man’: *Celebrant carminibus antiquis, quod unus apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est, Tuistonem deum terra editum, ei filium Mannum originem gentis* ‘In old songs, their [sc. the Germans’] only form of history and annals, they praise Tuisto, the earth-born god, and Mannus, his son and originator of the [German] race’ (Tacitus, *Germania*, 2.3).

However, we should bear in mind that the main purpose of Tacitus’ writing was to show example of the barbarians’ vices and virtues to his fellow Romans, rather than to give a scientific account of the Germans’ customs and beliefs. Late Classical authors, such as Jordanes, who wrote the history of the Goths based partly on native traditions, also contain references to pagan Germanic religion.

The Runic inscriptions, found in Scandinavia and Britain in the Early Middle Ages, are mostly short and contain proper names, with few references to pagan worship. We do have, however, ecclesiastical authors, who wrote in Latin, and made several references to Germanic and Slavic peoples who were still pagan, or only recently baptized, during their lifetime, e.g. Adam of Bremen (*Gesta Hamburgensis Ecclesiae*, around 1080) and Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, early 13th century).

The only written source for the study of Germanic paganism preserved on the Continent are the Old High German *Merseburg Incantations* (Germ. *Merseburger Zaubsprüche*); they contain references to the sun-goddess Sunna, her sister Sinthgunt, and some other theonyms familiar from the Scandinavian sources.

The main source for the study of the Scandinavian paganism is the *Poetic Edda*, an anonymous collection of pagan poems that had probably been transmitted orally before being written down in the only surviving manuscript, the *Codex Regius* from the 13th century. The name *Edda* probably meant simply ‘poetry’ and is a derivative of óðr ‘poem, poetry’. The best known of the poems in the *Poetic Edda* are the Völuspá ‘The Vision of the Prophetess’ (an account of the origin and the fate of the world) and Hávamál, a collection of the wise advices by the god Óðinn himself. *Skírnismál* (‘The words of Skírnir’) tells a story about the love of the god Freyr for the beautiful female giant Gerd.

*The Prose Edda* (or *Snorra Edda*) was written in early 13th century by the learned Icelandman, Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241). Snorri was a bishop and a very important politician, but his interest as an author is chiefly antiquarian. He wanted to contribute to the preservation and understanding of the old, mostly pagan Norse poetry, and a necessary precondition for this was the understanding of the pagan mythology which permeated these texts. Of course, as a Christian, Snorri euhemerized his material, stating, for instance, that the ancient Norse gods were Trojan heroes who came ‘from Asia’, which is why they were called *Aesir*. This ingenious, but utterly false etymology is just an example of his pseudo-historical approach to Norse mythology.
Snorra Edda has three parts: Gylfaginning (‘The delusion of Gylfi’), Skáldskaparmál (‘A word on Poetry’) and Háttatal (‘A list of verses’). Gylfaginning is the most important source for the pagan Norse mythology. It contains a dialogue between the mythical king of Sweden, Gylfi, and three pagan deities (Har ‘the High’, Jafnhar ‘the equally High’ and Tridi ‘the Third’) who tell him about the pagan Norse mythology. The history of the world is seen through the clash between the heavenly gods (Áss, pl. Aesir) and the earthly gods (Van, pl. Vanir). Snorri lists all of the major gods of both groups and usually gives several names of each figure; this was necessary in order to understand many poetic riddles (kennings) of the Norse poets (skalds) who referred to them. In many instances Snorri harmonized different traditions which contradicted each other: for example, in telling the story of Thor’s fishing of the sea-serpent Miðgardsormr, Snorri let the serpent survive, because he knew that Thor would fight it again during Ragnarök, the mythical ending of the world. We know, however, that there was a different version, according to which Thor killed the serpent; this is implied in a skaldic poem by Ulfr Uggason, but for most mythological stories Snorri’s is the only version we have.

The chief among the Aesir was Óðinn, together with his brothers Vili ‘Will’ and Vé ‘Holy’, who are both less prominent in the extant mythological texts. The most important of the Vanir were Njóðr and his children Freyr and Freyja, who were taken hostages by the Aesir. The euhemerization of the conflict between the Aesir and Vanir is reminiscent of the similar procedure in Livy’s history of Rome, where ancient deities are represented as pseudohistorical figures. It must be remembered that Snorri was a Christian, and that the Scandinavian peoples were in contact with the Christians for centuries before the two Eddas were written down, so that it is reasonable to assume that Christianity in many ways influenced our sources. This can be seen, for example, in the myth of the Ragnarök as told in the Völsespá and, especially, by Snorri. Baldr, the beautiful son of the chief god Odin, will be killed by his blind brother, Hod, who will shoot him by an arrow made of mistletoe. This will be provided by the evil god Loki, who will then be punished by the gods: he will be tied with his sons’ guts to a stone, where a snake’s venom will drop in his face. Then the wolf Garm will be set free, and all hell will break loose: ‘brother will fight brother and be his slayer, brother and sister will violate the bond of kinship, hard it is in the world, there is much adultery, ax-age, sword-age, shields are cleft asunder, wind-age, wolf-age, before the world plunges headlong. No man will spare another’ (Völsespá 45). Then Odin will be killed by the wolf, and the giant Surt will murder Freyr; finally, Thor will be killed by Miðgardsormr, but after the sun turns black and the earth sinks into the sea, there will be a revival: the earth will rise again and a new, better world will be created. In this account of the Ragnarök commentators have seen the influence of the Christian Apocalypse, as well as the figure of Christ, who was sacrificed innocent just like Baldr. Likewise, the resurrection of the world prophesized by the Völsespá has been compared to the Christian conception of the Second Coming.

Besides the Eddas, the Norse texts in which we find some evidence of pagan beliefs include the Icelandic sagas - stories telling mostly about the period of the settling of Iceland - and the scaldic poetry - the poems of the court poets, partly stemming from the pagan period and transmitted orally before they were written down.

None of the mythological texts actually tell us much about the religious practices of pre-Christian Scandinavians, or other Germanic peoples. For this, we have to rely on archaeological evidence, which is not as rich as we would have wished. A temple unearthed at Uppåkra, in Sweden’s province of Scania, has been in continuous use from the 3rd until the 9th century A.D. Many animal bones were found there, and some human ones, implying that humans were sacrificed along with animals; weapons and gold leaflets (guldgubbar) were
also found in a context suggesting that they were sacrificial offerings. From other sources we know that Vikings used to sacrifice the weapons of the vanquished enemies by throwing them into lakes, and that gold and other precious objects used to be buried in underground hoards for use in the sacrificer’s afterlife. Adam of Bremen, writing about 1070 (in Latin), claims that huge sacrifices were organized at the great pagan temple in Uppsala (in Sweden), and that men, along with dogs and horses, were ritually hanged from the trees there. However, no temple was found in the archaeological remains in Uppsala so far.

The Norse divine family consists of Öðinn (OE Woden, OHG Wotan, from PIE *weh₂tus- ‘insight, inspiration’, cf. Lat. vītēs ‘sooth-sayer’, OIr. fāith ‘prophet’) and his wife Frigg < *priHyō- ‘dear’ (Croat. prijatelj ‘friend’, Skr. priyā- ‘dear’). Their son is the beautiful Baldr (from PGerm. *balda- ‘brave’, OE beald, OHG bald), whose death will eventually bring about the destruction of the world (Ragnarök). The trickster god who actually causes Baldr’s death was Loki (of unknown etymology, sometimes derived from PIE *lewg’- ‘break, crush’, cf. OE to-lūcan ‘destroy’, Skr. rujāti ‘breaks’). A very important god was the thunderer Thörr whose name originally meant simply ‘thunder’ (Eng. thunder, Germ. Donner), from PIE *tonh₂ro-, (cf. Gaul. Taranis above). He is the one who fished the ‘dragon of the deep’, Miðgardssormr. In this endeavour, he was paired with the giant Hymir, ‘the dark one’, whose mile-wide burning cauldron Thor took from him. His importance can also be seen in the Scandinavian toponymy, where the number of placenames containing his name far exceeds all other divine names, including Öðinn’s, and he is most often invoked in runic inscription left by Viking expeditions (e.g. ‘May Thor hallow these runes!’). Heimdallr was also called ‘white Áss’ (hvìti âss), and Snorri says that he was born by nine sisters and that he is the guardian of the gods, with excellent sight and hearing. His name is probably derived from Germanic *hayma- ‘home’ < PIE *k’oymo- (Lith. šiema ‘family’).

Njörðr was one of the Vanir, and his name is derived from PIE *nertu-, most probably a derivative of *ner-to- ‘under, deep’, Gr. nérteros, Oic. norðr ‘north’. Njörðr is probably the same figure as Tacitus’ Nerthus, who is, however, represented as female in “Germania”. Ullr, who was claimed to be a bow-god by Snorri, has a name that originally meant ‘glory’ (OE wuldor) < PIE *wltu- (Lat. voltus, vultus ‘face’). The name of the goddess of spring was preserved only in OE (Èostre, mentioned by Bede) and OHG (Östara); the month of April was called originally Èostur-monath, cf. Eng. easter. The attested forms are derivable from PIE *h₂ewswōs ‘dawn’ (see above). The other goddesses include Fjörgynn (a mother of gods, whose name is often compared to Slav. Perun, etc., but more likely derived from *pork’o- ‘furrow’, Lat. porca) and Freyja, originally probably the same goddess as Frigg mentioned above. The goddess lērð, who is not very prominent in the Norse mythology, was the personified Earth (cf. Germ. Erde, Goth. airpa). PGerm. *erþō ‘earth’ has been etymologically connected to W erw ‘field’, Arm. erkur ‘earth’ and Gr. (gloss) éra ‘earth’, but none of these connections are certain.

The world is seen as encompassed by the ocean and the snake Miðgarðsormr - probably originally the personification of the world ocean, just as the Greek ὲκεανός, which is also sometimes depicted as a snake on Greek vases. In the middle of the world is the sacred tree, the Yggdrasill (from Ygg ‘ash-tree’, related to Croat. ľva ‘osier’, Lith. ĭva and Eng. yew). It is probably the same tree (although this is not explicitly stated anywhere) on which Öðinn sacrificed himself to himself (Hávamál, 138). Near its roots are two wells, the well of wisdom (the well of Mimir, the giant whose name means ‘Rememberer’) and the well of Fate (Urðr). Mimir was beheaded in the Aesir-Vanir war and his head was carried off by Öðinn, who gained secret knowledge from it. Somewhere near the edge of the world was Hel (also called Niflhel), the kingdom of the eponymous goddess of the dead, who was the daughter of Loki.
and the sister of the monstrous wolf Fenrir and the snake Miðgarðsormr. According to one
tradition, Hel was in Iceland, so one had to travel a water expanse (as in most Indo-European
tradition finds in them) to reach it. Etymologically, Hel is derivable from the root *k’el- ‘to cover, hide’, 
like Lat. célo, Skr. śarman- ‘shelter’. Hel was not the only otherworld in the Germanic 
tradition: Valhalla (ON Valhöll) was a magnificent hall in the city of the Aesir (Ásgarðr) 
where half of the slain heroes feasted with Óðinn, while the other half were sent to the field 
Fölkvangr (‘field fo the host’), ruled by the goddess Freyja (Gylfaginning 24).

1. Tacitus, Germania 9-10, on the gods of the Germanic peoples

Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostis litare fas 
sacrificat: unde causa et origo peregrino sacro parum comperi nisi quod signum ipsum in modum liburnae figuratum [3] docet advektam religionem. ceterum nec cohibere partitibus 
deos neque in ulla humani oris speciem adsimulare ex magnitudine caelestis arbitrantur: 
lucos ac nemora consecrant deorumque nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola 
reverentia vident.

Auspicia sortesque ut qui maxime observant. sortium consuetudo simplex. virgam frugiferæ 
arbori decisam in surculos amputant eosque notis quibusdam discretos super [2] candidam 
vestem temere ac fortuito spargunt. max, si publice consultetur, sacerdos civitatis, sin 
privatim, ipse pater familiae, precatus deos caelumque suspiciens ter singulos tolit, sublatos 
secundum impressam ante notam [3] interpretatur. si prohibuerunt, nulla de eadem re in 
eundem diem consultatio; sin permissum, auspiciarum adhuc fides exigitur. et illud quidem 
etiam hic notum, avium voces volatuseque interrogare: proprium gentis equorum [4] quoque 
praesagia ac monitus experiri. publice aluntur isdem nemoribus ac lucis, candidi et nullo 
mortali opere contacti; quos pressos sacro curru sacerdos ac rex vel princeps civitatis 
comitantur hinnitusque ac fremitus observant. [5] nec uli auspicio maior fides, non solum 
apud plebem, sed apud proceres, apud sacerdotes; se enim ministros deorum, illos conscios 
putant. est et alia observatio auspiciarum, qua gravium bellorum eventus explorant. [6] eius 
gentis cum qua bellum est captivum quoquo modo intercipient cum electo popularium 
 suorum, patris quemque armis, committunt: victoria huius vel illius pro praetidico 
accipitur.

Mercury is the deity whom they chiefly worship, and on certain days they deem it right to 
sacrifice to him even with human victims. Hercules and Mars they appease with more lawful 
offerings. Some of the Suevi also sacrifice to Isis. Of the occasion and origin of this foreign 
rite I have discovered nothing, but that the image, which is fashioned like a light galley, 
indicates an imported worship. The Germans, however, do not consider it consistent with the 
grandeur of celestial beings to confine the gods within walls, or to liken them to the form of 
any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves, and they apply the names of 
deities to the abstraction which they see only in spiritual worship.

Augury and divination by lot no people practise more diligently. The use of the lots is simple. 
A little bough is lopped off a fruit-bearing tree, and cut into small pieces; these are 
distinguished by certain marks, and thrown carelessly and at random over a white garment. In 
public questions the priest of the particular state, in private the father of the family, invokes 
the gods, and, with his eyes toward heaven, takes up each piece three times, and finds in them 
a meaning according to the mark previously impressed on them. If they prove unfavourable, 
there is no further consultation that day about the matter; if they sanction it, the confirmation
of augury is still required. For they are also familiar with the practice of consulting the notes and flight of birds. It is peculiar to this people to seek omens and monitions from horses. Kept at the public expense, in these same woods and groves, are white horses, pure from the taint of earthly labour; these are yoked to a sacred car, and accompanied by the priest and the king, or chief of the tribe, who note their neighings and snortings. No species of augury is more trusted, not only by the people and by the nobility, but also by the priests, who regard themselves as the ministers of the gods, and the horses as acquainted with their will. They have also another method of observing auspices, by which they seek to learn the result of an important war. Having taken, by whatever means, a prisoner from the tribe with whom they are at war, they pit him against a picked man of their own tribe, each combatant using the weapons of their country. The victory of the one or the other is accepted as an indication of the issue.

2. Tacitus on the Festivity of Nerthus (Germania, 40):

Contra Langobardos paucitas nobilitat: plurimis ac valentissimis notionibus cincti non per obsequium sed proelii et perculiendo tuti sunt. Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suardones et Nuithones fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur. 2. Nec quicquam notable in singulis, nisi quod in commune Nerthum, id est Terram matrem, colunt eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehi populis arbitrantur. Est in insula Oceani castum nemus, dicatumque in eo vehiculum, veste contectum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum. 3. Is adesse penetrati deam intellegit vectamque bubus feminis multa cum veneratione prosequitur. Laeti tunc dies, festa loca, quaecumque adventu hospitioque dignatur. 4. Non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies nunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata, donec idem sacerdos satiataam conversatione mortalium deam templo reddat. 5. Mox vehiculum et vestes et, si credere velis, numen ipsum secreto lacu abluitur. Servi ministrant, quos statim idem lacus haurit. Arcanus hinc terror sanctaque ignorantia, quid sit illud quod tantum perituri vident.

What on the contrary ennobles the Langobards is the smallness of their number, for that they, who are surrounded with very many and very powerful nations, derive their security from no obsequiousness or plying; but from the dint of battle and adventurous deeds. There follow in order the Reudignians, and Aviones, and Angles, and Varinians, and Eudoses, and Suardones and Nuithones; all defended by rivers or forests. Nor in one of these nations does aught remarkable occur, only that they universally join in the worship of Herthum; that is to say, the Mother Earth. Her they believe to interpose in the affairs of man, and to visit countries. In an island of the ocean stands the wood Castum: in it is a chariot dedicated to the Goddess, covered over with a curtain, and permitted to be touched by none but the Priest. Whenever the Goddess enters this her holy vehicle, he perceives her; and with profound veneration attends the motion of the chariot, which is always drawn by yoked cows. Then it is that days of rejoicing always ensue, and in all places whatsoever which she descends to honour with a visit and her company, feasts and recreation abound. They go not to war; they touch no arms; fast laid up is every hostile weapon; peace and repose are then only known, then only beloved, till to the temple the same priest reconducts the Goddess when well tired with the conversation of mortal beings. Anon the chariot is washed and purified in a secret lake, as also the curtains; nay, the Deity herself too, if you choose to believe it. In this office it is slaves who minister, and they are forthwith doomed to be swallowed up in the same lake. Hence all men are possessed with mysterious terror; as well as with a holy ignorance what that must be, which none see but such as are immediately to perish.

1. Hljóðs bið ek allar helgar kindir,
meiri ok minni mögu Heimdallar;
viltu, at ek, Valföðr!
vel framtelja forn spjöll fíra,
þau er fremst um man.

2. Ek man jötta
ár um borna,
þá er forðum
mik fædda höfðu;
nið man ek heima,
nið íviði,
mjötvöð mæran
fyr mold neðan.

3. Ár var alda
þar er Ýmir bygði,
vara sandr né sær
né svalar unnir,
jörð fannsk æva
né upphiminn,
gap var ginnunga,
en gras hvergi.

4. Áðr Burs synir
bjöðum um ypðu,
þeir er Miðgarð
mærán sköpu;
sól skein sunnan
á salar steina,
þá var grund gróin
grænum lauki.

5. Sól varp sunnan,
sinni mána,
hendi inni hægri
um himinjódyr;
sól þat ne vissi
hvår hon sali átti,
máni þat ne vissi
hvæ hann megins átti,
stjörnur þat ne vissu
hvær þær staði áttu.

6. Pá gengu regin öll
á röktóla,
ginnheilug god, ok
þat gættusk;
nát ok niðjum
nöfn um gáfu,
morgin hétu
ok niðjan dag,
undorn ok aptan,
árum at telja.

7. Hittusk æsir
á Iðavelli,
þeir er hörg ok hof
hátimbruðu,
afla lóðu,
að smiðuðu,
tangir skópu
ok tól gördu.

1. Hearing I ask | from the holy races,
   From Heimdall's sons, | both high and low;
   Thou wilt, Valfather, | that well I relate
   Old tales I remember | of men long ago.

2. I remember yet | the giants of yore,
   Who gave me bread | in the days gone by;
   Nine worlds I knew, | the nine in the tree
   With mighty roots | beneath the mold.

3. Of old was the age | when Ymir lived;
   Sea nor cool waves | nor sand there were;
   Earth had not been, | nor heaven above,
   But a yawning gap, | and grass nowhere.

4. Then Bur's sons lifted | the level land,
   Mithgarth the mighty | there they made;
   The sun from the south | warmed the stones of earth,
   And green was the ground | with growing leeks.

5. The sun, the sister | of the moon, from
   Her right hand cast | over heaven's rim;
   No knowledge she had | where her home should be,
   The moon knew not | what might was his,
   The stars knew not | where their stations were.
4. Snorra Edda, Gylfagynning 11: The Celestial family

Þá maelti Gangleri: ‘Hversu stýrir hann gang sólar ok tungls?’ Hár segir: ‘Sá maðr er nefndr Mundilfoeri er átti tvau börn; Þau vóro svá foigr ok fríð at hann kallaði annat Mána en döttur sina Sól ok gipti hana Þeim manne er Glenr hét. En guðin reidduz Þessu ofdrambi ok tóku Þau syskin ok settu up á himin, létu Sól keyra Þá hesta er drógu kerru sólarinnar Þeirar er guðin hófðu skapat til at lýsa heimana af Þeiri sio er flaug ór Muspellzheimi. Þeir hestar heita svá: Arvakr ok Alsviðr.

Gangleri asked again: ‘How does one govern the path of the sun and the stars?’ The High One said: ‘The man who was called Mundilfari had two children. They were so nice and kind that he called his son Mani or the Moon, and his daughter Sol or the Sun. He married her to the man who was called Glen. But the gods were angry at this impertinence and took the brother and the sister and placed them in the sky. Sol had to drive the horses who drew the chariot with the suns. And the gods created them from sparks flying out of Muspellsheim to light up the worlds. The horses were called thus: Arvak and Alsvið.

5. 2nd Merseburg Charm

Phol ende Uuôdan uuorun zi holza.
Dû uuurt demo Balderes uolon sin uuoz birenkit.
thû buqul en Sinthgunt, Sunna era suister,
thû buqul en Friia, Uolla era suister;
thû buqul en Uuôdan sô h uuola conda:
sôse bêrenki, sôse bluotrenki,
sôse lidirenki:
bênz bêna, bluot zi bluoda,
lid zi geliden, sôse gelimida sin!

Phol and Wodan rode to the wood.  
There Balder's foal disjointed his foot.  
Then Sinthgunt addressed him, and Sunna, her sister,  
Then Friia addressed him, and Wolla, her sister.  
Then Wodan addressed him, so as he understood:  
As the bone disjointment, so the blood disjointment,  
so the limb disjointment.  
Leg to leg, blood to blood,  
limb to limb, so they should be joined!

6. Adam of Bremen describes the pagan sanctuary at Uppsala (Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum 5, 26-27)

ministrat virtutem contra inimicos. Tertius est Fricco, pacem voluptatemque largiens mortalibus'. Cuius etiam simulacrum fingunt cum ingenti priapo. Wodanem vero sculpunt armatum, sicut nostri Martem solent; Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur. Colunt et deos ex hominibus factos, quos pro ingentibus factis immortalitate donant, sicut in Vita sancti Anscarii leguntur Hericum regem fecisse.


‘xxvi (26). That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far from the city of Sigtuna and Bjorko. In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather crops. The other, Wotan—i.e., the Furious—carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus. But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his scepter apparently resembles Jove. The people also worship heroes made gods, whom they endow with immortality because of their remarkable exploits, as one reads in the Vita of Saint Ansgar they did in the case of King Eric.

xxvii (27). For all their gods there are appointed priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wotan; if marriages are to be celebrated, to Frikko. It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted. Kings and people all and singly send their gifts to Uppsala and, what is more distressing than any kind of punishment, those who have already adopted Christianity redeem themselves through these ceremonies. The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male, they offer nine heads, with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. The bodies they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Mow this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang there with men. A Christian seventy-two years old told me that he had seen their bodies suspended promiscuously. Furthermore, the incantations customarily chanted in the ritual of a sacrifice of this kind are manifold and unseemly; therefore, it is better to keep silence about them.
(Translated by Francis J. Tschan)
ARMENIAN

The pre-Christian Armenian religion is very poorly known; after all, Armenia was the first country in the world to embrace Christianity as the official religion, in the beginning of the 4th century A.D.. Our main sources for the study of Armenian paganism are the ecclesiastical writers such as Moyses of Koren (Mowsēs K’orenac’i) who wrote a ‘History of Armenia’ in which he noted some ancient traditions and even fragments of pre-Christian poetry. It appears that the Armenian religion, just as the Armenian language, was subject to a strong Iranian influence. This is not surprising, since Armenia was ruled by Parthians for nearly half a millennium. The name of the mythical hero Vahagn, celebrated in a famous passage from Moyses’ History, is from Iranian, cf. Av. Vərəθrəyəna-. We also learn that the chief god of the pagan Armenians was Aramazd, which is clearly the avestan name of Ahura Mazdā, borrowed from the Parthians. However, unlike his Iranian model, Aramazd was conceived as a god of thunder (ampropayin). The goddess Anahit, called “lady” (tikin), was clearly modelled on Avestan Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā (see above). Cattle bearing the brand of a star were sacrificed to her, and it has been claimed that she has absorbed some of the elements of the worship of Ishtar, the ancient Near Eastern goddess of love. Finally, the great Armenian fire-festival, still celebrated on the 13th of February, is originally the Mazdaist festival Āθrakāna, celebrated in the fire-temples and associated with Mithra (the Avestan name of the pagan temple, mehean, probably comes from Iranian māithrāna- also derived from the name of this god).

1. The birth of Vahagn (from ‘The History of Armenia’ of Mowsēs Kcoreac’i)

Erknēr erkin, erknēr erkir
erknēr ew covn cirani;
erkn i covown ownēr ew zkarmrikn elegnik;
and elegan p’ol cux elanēr;
and elegan p’ol boc’ elanēr;
ew i boc’ oyn vazēr xarteaš patanekikna hur her unēr, boc’ unēr mōrus,
ew ac’ kunk’n ēin aregakunk’.

‘The Sky was in labour, the Earth was in labour,
The purple sea was also in labour;
Labour caught also a small red reed in the sea.
Through the reed's tube came a smoke,
and from the reed's tube came a flame,
and from the flame a red-haired youth jumped.
He had fire as hair, fire as beard,
and his eyes were Suns’.

ARmenian

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erknēr ew covn cirani;
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SLAVIC

By the time they became literate, all the Slavic peoples were Christianized. We do not have any written texts from the pre-Christian period, and even the archaeological data about the Slavs before their great migrations (6th-7th centuries A.D.) are rather limited. Some scarce information about pagan Slavs’ beliefs and religious practices can be found in the works of the Byzantine authors, such as Procopius. Russian Povest' Vremennyx let (The Primary Chronicle) contains valuable references to the paganism of the Eastern Slavs, including an account of the baptism of Kiev (988), when the Russian prince Vladimir accepted Christianity and threw the large statue of the chief pagan god Perun into the Dnieper. There are also several references to pagan gods in the earliest Russian literary text, ‘The tale of Prince Igor’ (Slovo o Polku Igorevě, 12th century). Although this poem was composed in Christian Russia and it tells about an unsuccessful raid by the (Christian) prince Igor against the pagan Polovtsians, the poetic language preserved several formulas inherited from the pagan period, including the mention of several gods, e.g. Velesь and Svarogъ.

Western medieval chroniclers, such as Thietmar of Merseburg (11th century), also mention pagan practices among the Slavs, e.g. the pagan temple dedicated to Zuarasici (*Svarožičь, a diminutive of *Svarogъ, otherwise known as one of the Slavic deities) in Riedegost. In Russian medieval sources, Svarožičь is explained as the personification of fire. Other authors who gave accounts of Slavic paganism include Saxo Grammaticus (see above) and Helmold (Chronica Slavorum, 12th century), who mentions, e.g., Zerneboh (*Čьrnobogъ ‘the black god’) and the goddess Ziva (*Živa ‘the living one’). Most of these references (in Latin) are about the religion of the Western Slavs, with whom the Germans were in contacts during the Middle Ages.

Other than the mentioned sources, we have rich collections of Slavic folklore, which often mentions pagan gods and other supernatural creatures in euhemerized forms. Traces of Slavic paganism are also visible in the toponymy of the Slavic-speaking countries, cf., e.g., the placenames Perunovo brdo and Mokošica in Croatia, or Veles in Macedonia. Several lexical traces of paganism in Slavic languages are no longer understood, e.g. why the flower Iris is called perunika in Croatian, and also bogiša (a derivative of bog ‘god’) in dialects. Was it the flower dedicated to Perun?

It is generally agreed that the chief deity of the Slavic pantheon was Perunъ, who is usually mentioned first in the lists of pagan deities. His name is probably derivable from *peru-n-‘rock’ (Hitt. peruna-), but it may also be connected to the root *per- ‘beat, strike’ (Lith. peŗti, Russ. prat‘ beat (linen), wash’. Pol. piorun still means ‘thunder’, and in Gr. we have keraunós ‘thunderbolt’ with unexpected k-. Velesь/Volosъ is sometimes glossed as skotii bogъ ‘the god of cattle’; his name is probably related to Lith. vėlė ‘soul of the deceased’ and Vėlnias ‘devil’, less certainly with Hitt. wellu- ‘meadow’, etc.). In Old Norse, the name of the Valkyries (ON Valkyrja ‘chooser of the slain’) may be from the same root, which is also contained in Valhalla, the hall of the slain. While the domain of Perunъ is the high ground (*gora) and sky (*nebo), the domain of Velesь/Volosъ is the low ground, the mud and the swamp (*bolto), where Perunъ slays him with his weapon, the thunder (*gromъ/*trěskъ), mythologically represented as an arrow (*strěla, cf. the Byelorussian expression stralá perunuva). In the Slavic folk-lore representation of the world-tree, the thunderer Perunъ is usually represented as a bird or prey (*oryłъ ‘eagle’ or *sokolъ ‘falcon’), which bears resemblance to similar representations of Old Norse Ōinn (whose sacred bird is the eagle) and Celtic *Lugos (note that his Welsh incarnation, Llew, is represented as an eagle, eryr, in
the Mabinogi). Velesъ/Volosъ, on the other hand, is represented as a snake (*zмьja, or *zмьb ‘dragon’) lying in water by the root of the world-tree. Occasionally, he is also represented as a bear (*мевьh), or some other kind of ‘fierce beast’ (PSl. *лютъ вьh). It has been argued that Velesъ/Volossъ is a cattle-stealer, and Old Russian sources call him skottи bogъ ‘the god of cattle’. When Perunъ killed him, the cattle was apparently released. Perumъ’s killing of *Velesъ/Volossъ is thus parallel to Indra’s killing of Vîtra in the Rig-Veda, which also leads to the freeing of cattle and the flowing of rivers.

Svantеvid, or Svętovitъ, the pagan deity worshipped on the island of Arkona in the Baltic and mentioned by Saxo, may be derived from svętъ ‘holy’ and vitъ, or rather vidъ ‘appearance’. The god Triglavъ at least has a transparent etymology, since his name simply means ‘three headed one’, cf. OCS glava ‘head’; three- and four-headed gods are well known in Early Slavic iconography, and they are attested in the writings of authors such as Saxo Grammaticus (in his account of the sanctuary of Arkona among the Baltic Slavs). Stribogъ is also a compound name, but its first element is unclear; some connect it to PIE *ph2tēr (Lat. pater, Gr. patēr, etc.) and see in him the father of the gods (*ph2trey-bhoho-); however, this etymology is very disputable, as the regular reflex of *ph2t in Slavic is uncertain. The gods *Хъrъ (ORuss. Xorsъ) and Simarglъ, mentioned in ORuss. chronicles, are generally believed to be borrowed from Iranian, and this is also possible for Svarogъ, although this latter deity is often connected with PSl. *svaŭr ‘dispute, strife’ (Russ. svára, Pol. swar); this etymology faces both semantic problems (Svarogъ was probably a fire-god) and formal difficulties (*-огъ is not a suffix in Slavic). The Hypathian Codex (a 15th century Russian translation of the 6th century Greek text by John Malalas) translates Greek Hephaestus as Svarogъ, which implies the connection of this god with smiths; the same text also claims that the Sun was a son of Svarogъ, and that he was called Dažbogъ. His name means ‘the giving god’ (from ORuss. datъ ‘give’ and bogъ ‘god’), but this etymology does not make the connection with the Sun any clearer. Moreover, it is uncertain how reliable the Hypathian Codex is as a source on pre-Christian Russian (and Slavic) mythology.

The goddesses seem to have been scarce among the Slavic deities. Mokošъ, mentioned in the Russian Chronicles and well attested in toponymy (e.g. in Croatian placename Mokošica), is of unknown origin; the connection with OIr. MACHA, a goddess connected with horses in the Old Irish Ulster cycle. The goddess Morana, scarcely attested, and not in early sources, most likely represents a female demon, and her name is usually derived from morytъ ‘to kill’. There may have also been the goddess of the spring, Vesna. Her name means simply ‘spring’, cf. Russ. venнa < PIE *wesr (Skr. vasanta-, Gr. ἐαρ, Lat. vēr, etc.). In Slovene dialects on the Sontia river she is attested only as a sort of a wood fairy, and otherwise the attestations of such a deity are scarce. The general name for female nymphs in Slavic folklore is Vila (Croat. vila, Slov. vila, ORuss. vila, Cz. vila); the etymology of this noun is uncertain, but it may be related to Lith. vėjū, vėtī ‘chase, hunt’, OHG weidōn ‘hunt’.

Little is known with any certainty about the pagan Slavic rites and customs. Christian authors tell us that there were temples to gods (such as the temple of Perunъ above ancient Kiev, or the temple of Velesъ in Yaroslavl‘), and certain rites apparently involved keeping of eternal fires (in the temple of Velesъ in Yaroslavl‘), sacrifices of animals and (if Christian chroniclers are to be believed) humans. Gods were represented by giant statues (Csl. kumirъ, a word of Turkic origin). There were fertility rites, that may have involved orgiastic elements, e.g. the feast of Jarylo celebrated in the early spring (he was later confused with St. George, whose day fell on April 23). As reconstructed chiefly from folk-lore texts (Katičić 2010), the myth of
Jarylo represented this god as a traveller who is coming from afar (*jьz za morja чьrvenaego ‘from beyond the red sea’) and whose arrival made the fields bear crops (*Kąda Jarylo xoditъ, тąda pole roditъ). His voyage takes him over muddy roads (*do kolёna bolto, do ormene voda ‘mud (reaching his) knees, water reaching his elbows’) on which he rides a white or grey horse (*Jarylo jadetъ na бёломь/sivomь koni). He uses his sword to cut off the head of a dragon or snake (*pozoju/zмьji mьčemь golvą sěčetъ) and is met in an enclosed dwelling (*gordъ) by a female personality whose name Katičić reconstructs as Morana or Mara (*Mara dёvojьka po gordу xoditъ, dёvery buditъ ‘The girl Mara walks in a gordъ and awakens (her) brothers-in-law’). She has a golden apple (*zolto jablъko) and uses it to choose Jarylo as her bridegroom (*Jemu ţe jablъko, tomu dёvojьka. Jarylu jablъko, Jarylu dёvojьka). There follows a ritual of holy wedding between Jarylo and Mara, which takes place in a moist, dewy meadow (*padla jestь rosa, dёvojьka xoditъ bosa ‘the dew fell, the girl is walking barefoot). After a ritualized conversation (*dёvice, kaka jego jesi roda ‘Maiden, what is your kin?’), Jarylo and Mara recognize each other as brother and sister (*dёvice, ty jesi moja sestrica ‘maiden, you are my sister’). The holy matrimony celebrated to bring about fertility to the fields is thus incestuous. After the marriage, the bridegroom is driven to the fields and slaughtered as a horse, a gruesome end to the ritual which has been compared to the Old Indian horse-sacrifice (ašvamedha).

1. Vladimir worships pagan gods (*Povest’ vremennyx let, Laurentian Codex (1377), sub anno 980)

И нача кнѧжити Володимеръ въ Києвѣ єдинъ . и постави кумиры на холму . вић двора теремнаго . Перуна древьяна . а главу его сребреную . а оусъ златъ . и Хърса Дажбаъ. и Стрибаъ. и Симарьгла . и Мокошь [и] A жраху имь нарицоще а б[ог]ьь B. [и] A привожаху сиѣ своѣ и дѣцери . и жраху бѢсомь . [и] A въ[ернаху землю теребами своими] . и осквернились кровью земля Руска . и холмо-ть бо прбльби Бъ не хотѧ смрти грѣшникомъ . на тѢмь холмѣ нынѣ црѢць стоитъ . стѢо Васильѧ есЪ /л.25об./ акоѣ послѢднѢ скажемъ . мы же на преднеѢ возвращимсѧ . Володимеръ же посади Добрѣнь B оуѢ свого в НовѢгородѣ . и пришедь Добрына Нооугороду . постави кумиры надѢ рѢкою Волховомъ . и жраху ему людѢ НооугородѢстнѢ . аки БѢ.

Translation into Modern Russian:

И стал Владимир княжить в Киеве один, и поставил кумыри на холме у вища двора теремного. Перун древний, а главу его серебреную, а усы золотыми, и Хорса, Дажбога, и Стрибога, и Симаргла, и Мокошь. И приносили им жертвы, называя их богами, и приводили своих сыновей и дочерей, и приносили жертвы бессам, и осквернили землю жертвоприношениями своими. И осквернилась кровью земля Русская и холм тот. Но преблагой Бог не захотел гибели грешников, и на том холме стоит ныне церковь святого Василия, как расскажем об этом после. Теперь же возвращимся к прежнему.

Владимир посадил Добрыню, своего дядю, в Новгороде. И, придя в Новгород, Добрыня поставил кумира над рекою Волховым, и приносили ему жертвы новгородцы как богу.

‘And Vladimir started to rule alone in Kiev, and he placed the idols on the hill behind the castle: a wooden statue of Perun with a silver head and golden moustache, and Xors, Dažbog and Stribog, Simargl and Mokošь. And they sacrificed to them, calling them gods, and
brought their sons and daughters, and they made sacrifices to demons, and they desecrated the earth with their sacrifices. And the Russian land and that hill were desecrated by blood. But the very merciful God did not want the sinners to perish, and the church of Saint Basil stands on that hill today, as we shall tell later. Now let us return to our story. Vladimir set up Dobrynya, his uncle, in Novgorod. And when he came to Novgorod, Dobrynya placed an idol above the river Volkhov, and the Novgorodians made sacrifices to that idol as if it were God.’


Quorum admirationem conspicuae granditatis ensis augebat, cuius vaginam ac capulum praeter excellentem caelaturae decorem exterior argenti species commendabat.

3. A Byelorussian charm


Дык гэто коли ударыць іде пярун, дык гэто Бор нячысцика бщец. Ён, як находишь хмара, здаeцца ци собаком, ци свиней, ци кошку – абы чим; ды й хузаетца пот кого–нибудь. Тоды там пярун бщец.

(P 4, 155–156, Дополнение № 3)

‘This is how God (var. Ilias) quarrelled with the Devil: I will, kill you, he says!. -And how will you kill me? -I will hide. -Where? -Under a man! -I will kill the man, forgive his sins, and kill you. -Then I will hide under a horse! -I will kill the horse, too. I will recompense the man, and kill you. -Then I will hide under a cow! -I will kill the cow too, recompensate her master at once, and I will kill you. -Then I'll hide under a building. -I will burn down the building, recompense the man, and kill you. -Then I will hide under a tree. There you will not kill me. -I will crush the tree, and kill you! -Then, he says, I will hide in the water, under a trunk, under a plank! -Well, there is your place, there you should be! So, when a thunder comes to strike, it is God who strikes the devil. He changes into a dog, or a pig, or a cat, as the dark cloud comes. He will change into anything and hide under anyone. Then the thunder strikes there.’
4. A Serbian song about the Sun and the Moon (Vuk Karadžić, Srpske narodne pjesme I, 235)

"Aj gjevojko, dušo moja!
Što si tako jednolika
i u pasu tankovita
kan'da s Suncu kose plela,
a Mjesecu dvore mela,
văn stajala, te gledala
gdje se Munja s Gromom igra;
munja groma nadigrala
dvjema, trima jabukama.

‘O girl, my soul!
Why are you so simple-looking
and thin on the waist,
as if you wove the Sun's hair
and swept the court of the Moon,
as if you stood outside and watched
how the Thunder played with the Lightning;
the Lightning outplayed the Thunder
with two or three apples.’
BALTIC

Baltic peoples were among the last in Europe to accept Christianity. Lithuania was definitely baptized only in the 14th century. No wonder, then, that all of our sources for the study of Baltic paganism are rather late. Some pagan customs and rites were recorded by German authors who wrote about the Balts, or mention them in other contexts, e.g. by Adam of Bremen, in his History of the Bishops of Hamburg (11th century), or Simon Grunau, in his Prussian Chronicle (15th century), but such texts are often unreliable. Therefore, we have to rely on folklore texts collected in the Baltic countries long time after Christianization, such as the monumental collection of Latvian folk-songs (dainas) by Christian Bārons (finished in the 1st half of the 20th century).

In Latvian and Lithuanian dainas we find many names of pagan gods. The word for 'god' (Lith. dievas, Latv. dievs) originally referred to only one of the pagan gods, as is still clear from many dainas, where dieva dēli 'god's sons' are mentioned. The thunderer, Perkūnas, Latv. Perkons, is certainly related to Slav. *Perunъ (ORuss. Perunъ, etc.), but the forms are not superimposable on each other. The Baltic theonym was probably contaminated by the reflex of PIE *perkʰw-o ‘oak’ (Lat. quercus, etc.), since the oak-tree is the favorite target of Perkunas's thunder, cf. Latv. Pērkons spēra ozolā ‘Perkons hit the oak’ (LD 33713).

The name of the sun-goddess, Saulė, is the PIE word for ‘sun’, PIE *seh₂wōl ‘sun’ (Lat. sōl, Gr. hēlios, etc.). Another important mythological figure in the dainas is her daughter, Lith. Saulės dukrėtė (= ‘sun’s daughter’), Latv. Saules meīta ‘the Sun-maiden’. Vēlniās, Latv. Vēlns ‘devil’ is the Baltic counterpart to Slavic *Velesъ, ORuss. Velesъ, Volosъ (related to Lith. vėlė, Latv. velis ‘soul of the deceased’, which might be connected to Hitt. wellu- ‘meadow’, see above). The ‘lord of the wind’ in Lithuanian dainas is called Vējopātis (from vējas ‘wind’ and pātis ‘master’, cf. Gr. Poseidāön, which is a similar compound). The goddess of fate, Lith. Laimē, Latv. Laima is also the abstract noun meaning ‘luck’, but this word is without a clear etymology. The earth-goddess, or the personified Earth, is Latv. Zeme, or Zemes māte ‘mother of the earth’, Lith. Žemynė (a diminutive of žemė ‘earth’ < PIE *dʰgʰem-, OCS zemlja, Lat. humus, etc.). Similarly, Latv. Mēness (Lith. Mėnulis) is simply ‘the Moon’. Latv. Meža māte ‘the mother of the wood’ (Lith. Medeinię) rules over the wild animals, and there is also the Žuras māte ‘the mother of the sea’, the Sniega māte ‘the mother of the snow’, and the Lietus māte ‘the mother of the rain’. The Baltic cult of the ‘mothers’ is comparable to the cult of the mothers (matres) in Gaul (e.g. the ‘Mothers of Namausis’ from a Gaulish inscription), or to Latin Mater Matuta (originally the Dawn Goddess).

The chief god of the Prussians, according to Simon Grunau's Chronicle, was Pārūms (also called Pickolos, and Pickollos), portrayed as an old man with a pale, deathly color. He may have been the god of death, and his name is related to Lith. pykstū ‘be angry’.

One of the most important motives in Baltic dainas is a heavenly wedding between the Sun and the Moon, or, alternatively, between the Sun Maiden and one of her suitors (often the Moon, or the son of Dievs), e.g. Latv. Dieva dēla... Saules meītas vedamā ‘Dievs’ son, who is destined to wed the daughter of the Sun, LD 34039-3.

1. A Latvian Daina, (Bārons, LD 34127).

Kupilis auga ozoliņš
Dieva nama galiņē;
Speŗ pērkons, rīb zemiņ',
Ne lapīņa nedrebēja.

‘A branchy oak-tree grows
by the house of Dievs;
Perkons shot it, the earth trembled,
not a leaf shivered’.

2. Bārons, LD 32909

Vāj, Jāniti, Dieva dēls,
tavu platu cepuriti
visa plata pasaulite
apakš tavas cepurites.

‘O Janis, son of Dievs,
your hat is so broad!
The whole broad world
is under your hat!’

3. Bārons, LD 33742

Aiz kalniņa ezeriņš,
Aiz ezera ozoliņš;
Dieva dēls jostu kārā,
Saules meīta vaiņadziņu.

‘Behind the hill there is a lake,
behind the lake there is an oak-tree;
The son of Dievs hangs the belt,
the Sun-mainden hangs the garland’.

4. A Lithuanian daina (Rhesa, 48 1-4)

Po klevelių šaltinaïtis
Čystas vandenaitis.
Kur atei Saulės dukrytės
anskti burną praustis.

Prie klevelio šaltinaicio
ejau burną praustis;
man beprausiant baltą burną,
nuplovjau žiedaitį.

O atėjo Dievo suneliai
su šilkų tinkleišais
Ir žvejavo mano žiedaitį
iš vandens gilumos.

Under the ash-three there is a well
of clear water,
where the daughters of the Sun
come to wash their faces in the morning.

I went to the ash-tree by the well
to wash my face.
And I washed my white face,
and my ring fell off.

And God's sons came
with silk little nets
they caught my ring,
from the depth of the water.
Ir atjojo jauns bernytis
ant bėro žirgaičio;
O tas bėrasis žirgaitis
aukso padkavaitėms.

And a young boy came
on a brown horse;
and that brown horse
had golden hooves.
APPENDIX:
ILLUSTRATIONS

A HITTITE GOD

A VEDIC SACRIFICE

A PROCESSION OF HITTITE GODS IN THE SANCTUARY AT YAZILIKAYA
THE SILVER PLATE FROM LURISTAN

A STATUE OF APOLLO

ORPHEUS
OKEANOS (FROM A GREEK VASE)

THE SUOVETAURILIA

THE GUNDESTRUP CAULDRON
WITH CELTIC DEITIES

CALENDAR FROM COLIGNY
(ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM,
LYON)
TARANIS (JUPITER) FROM CHÂTELET:

THÓRR
A PAGAN SLAVIC IDOL

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