HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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INDO-EUROPEAN HISTORY

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Political History (Military-Government)
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POLITICAL HISTORY

MILITARY

Overview   Military defense and preparedness, among the PIE's, must not be understood as we might understand the 'armed forces' of a modern nation, or even 'elite warriors' in some far less complex society. And yet the earliest instigators of the IE people's march to the West, which was the vast macro event of, say, the third millennium B.C.E., was led by aggressive and powerful horse-rider forces, which swept muscularly across the plains of eastern Russia and Ukraine, and ultimately, we begin to think, arrived in Western Europe as conquerors, mates, and major gene-pool modifiers. The doers of this invasion were not professional soldiers, but males in search of land conquest, and creative space for their herds--which--sheep, goats, and horses--were the single sustenance for their culture. In so mobilizing themselves as manpower, it seems, they were striking out against what Marija Gimbutas, and others, describe as the Old Europe, almost as old as the tenth millennium B.C.E., in which matriarchy--but this flight of thought is speculative--dominated most of the world's major culture-systems.

The Invasions of IE peoples to the west   Roughly speaking, there appear to have been hunter gatherer incursions westward from the East Asian steppes, as early as 37 000 years ago. 9 000 years ago, to pursue the sequence, farmer types from the Anatolian plains made the same westward incursion. Then in 5000-4800 B.C.E. the Yamnaya people, whose home was in the Pontic Steppes, invaded as far as Western Europe. They were an early Bronze Age people, who brought with them herding skills-- practice with multiple kinds of cattle, the strategies for large scale cattle management, and above all horses, whom they had been training for over a millennium--and whom they ate, sacrificed and sacrificed to, while using them as much dreaded attack animals, to which they became proficient at attaching light and fast moving chariots. So powerful was this Yamnayan incursion from the steppes that, though it cannot precisely be called 'military,' its effect was like that of a full-scale military invasion. It is estimated that within a few hundred years, the Yamnaya contributed one half of the European genetic ancestry we know today.

Yamnayans' warlike posture   The keyword to open the power of Yamnaya culture is the horse. It is well known that the PIE's, to whom the Yamnayas belonged, were masters of ridership and horse training--a Yamnaya horse could carry a rider 20-30 miles a day--and that in battle they could maneuver their horse drawn chariots with dexterity. (The Europeans of that time were not at their best in pitcheed warfare.) The Yamnayans were famed as 'berserk,' wild men on horse--of a fearsome Hunnish type known for devastating and quick tactics, and they fought, as Bronze Age Knights, for the immortality their epic poets would guarantee them in song.

Reading

Dolukhanov, Pavel, *The Early Slavs: Eastern Europe from the Initial Settlement to the Kievan Rus*, New York, l996.

Wells, Spencer, *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*, Princeton, 2002

Discussion questions

Is our genome-transforming study one concerning erotically sensitiveEuropean farm girls, who are swept up into the power of a new culture, and by men who were, as we surmise from the evidence, light in hair color and five or six inches taller than the locals?

Are herders typically 'military' as well as trained in the ways of flocks? What kind of work do you see involved in what the IE's did as herding? What did the women do while the men herded?

Do you see the Yamnayas carrying with them, on their incursions, a language completely formed, *tout fait,* or a kind of bricolage language to which they were adding as they traveled through different language regions?

GOVERNMENT

SOCIAL HISTORY

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Overview   Linguistics and archeology are the key to what we can deduce about IE class structure. To judge from the verbal evidence there was a more or less stable class structure in place, among the principal players in IE culture. Passing over the question of time, and stages of IE development--several millennia--we can identify four classes of the 'typical' IE language group; the kingly/priestly level, in control of 'spiritual powers,' including magic; the warrior class, assigned the job of protecting the community; the class of herders and pastoralists, who provide for food and nurture; the class of 'the praisers,' and especially the 'poets,' who were responsible for sustaining 'imperishable fame.'

The kingly class All linguistic evidence points, here, to a class structure which is patriarchal (based on male authority,) patriineal (provides for succession for descendants from the male line, whether they are male or female), and patrilocal (centered around the location of the male's family). Among the elements of power, in the king's repertoire, is his special closeness to the animate power of fire, and his (or his queen's) availability to copulate with a virility assuring stallion, whose stewed remains will be distributed to the people. The Indo-European term, 'to lead away,' that is to take the bride to one's home, in marriage, is a trademark indicator of the 'kingly male.'

The warrior class   The warrior class probably consisted of single young men. Evidence--archeological as well as linguistic--suggests that these men pursued warrior cult practices not acceptable to their society outside of their peer group. Traces of lupine ritualism are prominent in warrior class burial sites, and there are grounds to see this cult associating itself with wolves and dogs. The horse and the attached chariot are the essential accoutrements for this class.

Herders and pastoralists   From the fifth millennium B.C.E., and probably much earlier, we have convincing evidence of a large wave of nomadic pastoralists into the steppe regions of Central Asia, as well as diffusely into Siberia and North East Asia. During the following millennia, these 'herdsmen' would supply the food, nutrition, and 'caring' stratum of the IE social group.

The 'poets'   Poets were the highest paid professionals in the IE classs structure, valued for their ability to confer lasting fame--in a world insecure at best, when it came to recording the prowess of the past. (That fame was called by different names in the IE lexicon--*kleos aphthiton* in proto-Greek, *sravas aksiti* in Sanskrit--and was what a warrior culture was all about acquiring.) Hence, of course, the great prominence

of celebratory epic poetry in archaic societies, and the widespread presence of metrical models, which accumulate inside them the passion of nomadic people for whom fame was the only security.

Reading

Gimbutas, Marija; Dexter, Miriam *Robbins, The Living Goddesses,* Berkeley, l999.

Bojstar, Endre*, Foreword to the Past: A Cultural History of the Baltic People,* Budapest, l999.

Discussion questions

There are dissenters, within the culture of archeologists and linguists, who dispute the whole idea of cultural reconstructions, such as that of the Indo-Europeans. Where are you finding yourself on this issue?

It is a commonplace of world literature to maintain that 'poetry' is the one path to immortality. What do you think of that claim? Has great poetry been found to confer immortality?

What kind of spiritual or 'magic' powers did the 'kingly class' possess? Where would we go to find evidence on that point?

GENDER RELATIONS

Overview   Language, once again, provides the leading clue to our understanding of women's roles in IE culture. The clue-providing role of language can assume many forms: language can help us to identify terms for social prominence, for administrative authority, for all those relationships that grow up within the family, then within larger social units, like the tribe. Archeology is also a resource for the recovery of PIE women's roles, yet because the archeological evidence provides us only with the sexuality and not the gendered role, of archaic bodies, it cannot penetrate as deeply as language, into the IE implications of 'being a woman.'

The marriage rite   The locution for the marriage rite always attributes to the male the role of 'leader of the woman to his house,' an action after which the woman remains with the family of her new husband. The rite, as described, always confines the woman to the passive role.

Male and female in PIE linguistics   Despite claims that there is a powerful strain of 'goddess-power' in PIE culture areas, and despite works like those of Marija Gimbutas, which celebrate the anti-patriarchal drives which she sees among the earliest Indo-Europeans , the dominant read on IE culture is that it was severely patriarchal--descent through the male line--and patrilocal, meaning that the married couple always settles in the home of the male. The father serves as a firm disciplinarian--as we see by juxtaposing IE usage in a number of languages--though the strength of the female is shown in a 'negative fashion.' It is shown by the close bonding of children to uncles (mother's brothers), nephews (sisters' children), or maternal grandfathers . While one's fathers' brothers are father enforcers, for IE males, and are all about control, mothers' brothers, uncles, and nephews are outside the 'patriarchal control system,' and can be thought of as loveable and fostering. The other familiar support system for females appears to be one's sisters' sons, who like mother's brothers are outside the patriarchal system. There is no common word for 'marriage' in IE, and no common term for 'husband' or 'wife,' though there was a common term for 'widow,' 'widhewa.'

Some literary fall out that reflects the mother's indirectly fostering role   The benignity of the female, in PIE culture, is most clearly shown by the close relation of the mother's brother, sons, or even grandfather, to the mother's children. We can see this relationship in some of the greatest archaic epic. Cu Culainn, the hero of the Ulster cycle (around lst century C.E.) of poems is trained and nurtured by his

maternal uncle; Roland (*Song of Roland*: 1040-1115 C.E.) rises to the height of his strength and power, at the behest of his maternal uncle Charlemagne; and Beowulf (8[th]century C.E.) takes his power from his maternal grandfather, Hygelac, whose daughter is Beowulf's mother. These literary texts probably reflect perspectives embedded in IE gender attitudes.

Reading

Gimbutas, Marija, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe,* San Francisco, l991.

Mallory, James, P.; Adams, Douglas Q., *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, London, l997.

West, Martin Litchfield*, Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford, 2007.

Discussion questions

Is the influence of women in your own culture often hidden behind the culture's ways of describing itself-- say as virile and aggressive? Do you see any parallel here with the IE cultural situation?

What special importance does the maternal uncle have in IE cultures?

We are amply aware of the existence of a female goddess of the dawn, in IE religion. But have we further evidence of women as deities in that religion?

ECONOMIC HISTORY

ECONOMIC INNOVATIONS

Overview   By the early second millennium B.C.E**.** the nomadic Central Asian steppe people we call the Indo-Europeans-- Proto-Indo-Europeans, when we want to emphasize the original stock of the group--had taken over much of Europe and Central Asia. Our evidence for the existence and historical importance of these people, whose sway eventually covered an area reaching from the British Isles to China, is of several sorts: linguistic, archeological, aesthetic, by references made by other cultures. The difficulties involved, in pinning down the details of this loose and scattered civilization, can be suggested by the fact that their origins melt into both a much earlier timeframe than the second millennium B.C.E.--possibly even back to the seventh millennium-- and, at the latter end of their existence, that they melt into Vedic, proto Greek, and Celtic cultures. In other words the PIE's were a loose, often hard to define, but influential stage in the formation of a broad cultural band reaching from China to Western Europe.

Economy: linguistic evidence   Much of the original evidence, for the existence of the Indo-Europeans, derives from the history of language. Starting in the l8th century C.E.. in Europe, several observant antiquarians of language began reflecting on similarities among words and word clusters in a wide variety of older languages--ranging through Celtic, Vedic, Proto Greek, and including, say, languages like Lithuanian, Albanian, or the languages of the Anatolian plateau. Among the similarities noted, a large number lead to clear indications about the economic base of the Indo-Europeans. While their origins identify them as nomadic horse riding pastoralists, who gathered their food as they wandered, these people were, by the second millennium B.C.E., basically agriculturalists given to stockbreeding, as well as horsemen relying on that speedy source as their mobile attack force. From various kinds of linguistic evidence we can conclude that the Indo-Europeans had in their prime proficient skills in bronze casting, wheeled vehicle construction, to establish traction, oxen to pull wheeled vehicles with, and lynch pins and hubs for promoting vehicle efficiency. This short list of linguistic deductions could be prolonged, and would lead to an astonishingly rich set of prompts for understanding the basics of PIE economy.

Economy: non verbal evidence. Archeological, funerary, artistic--relief freezes; all these forms of evidence, over a vast time frame (as said above) and almost world wide geographical spread, underpin the basic economic picture sketched above. The physical/aesthetic evidence left by the IE's depicts or points to the kind of nomadic pastoralist, frequently warlike horseriders the linguistic evidence supports. Scenes of sacrifice, of traditional 'proto Russian style' burial sites, and of wheeled vehicles all add into the larger picture of this diffuse but coherent group.

Reading

Renfrew, Colin, *Archeology and language: the Puzzle of Indo-European Origins,* London, l987.

Cavali-Sforza, Luigi; Selestad, Mark*; Genes, People, and Languag*e, Harmondsworth, 2000.

Discussion questions

What do you think about the linguistic evidence used for discovering clues of the IE economy? Does that kind of evidence, which is our primary fine-tuner for understanding the IE's, seem to you potentially convincing and sufficient?

How much have we learned about the IE economy from our linguistic hints? Can such hints help us to understand issues like wealth-distribution or marketing practices?

Was there IE coinage? If not, what kind of barter system lay at the center of IE economy?

TRADE

CULTURAL HISTORY

SCIENCE

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

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

The wheel   Archeological carbon dating has enabled us to surmise a date as early as the fifth millennium B.C.E. for the effective PIE use of the potter's wheel, and from that point on, in stages, of wheeled vehicles--which of course involves the accoutrements that go with an effective transportation wheel--a yoke, an axle, a hub; as well, say, as for the making of spinning wheels, so indispensable for making clothes in Northern Europe. The lexicon of wheel-related words, in PIE, is lengthy, although we believe that the PIE's were not the original inventors of the wheel. Here's a small sequence. Wheel--

k'ek'los in one of its two original forms--opens out into Vedic Sanskrit *cakra*, Greek *kuklos*, Old English *hweol*, Serbo-Croatian *kolo*; while *wheel*, in its other original form*, roth eh*--becomes fashioned into Vedic Sanskrit *ratha*, German *Rad*, Latin *rota*.

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

Reading

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

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

Discussion questions

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

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

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

ART

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

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

Search of the Indo Europeans, by J.P.Mallory, London, l989. That work is a cogent starting point for unfolding examples of IU visual art.

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

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

Reading

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

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

Discussion questions

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

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

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

RELIGION

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

The linguistic evidence   The linguistic evidence was the first to generate the PIE theory. Philologists became aware, as early as the l8th century, that over a wide range of languages, the PIE languages, the word for 'god,' 'sky-father,' was similar: Sanskrit *dyaus-pita*; Greek *zeu-pater*; Latin *Ju-piter;* Umbrian *luve-patre*; Illyrian, *Dei-patyros*. The list is extensive, and the conclusion, to this and much

more verbal evidence, makes it likely that multiple cultural moves might be in common among the language families assembled here.

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

What we learn from the mythological approach   We learn, thanks especially to the theories of Georges Dumezil, to look for (and find) tripartite and binary divisions which would appear to be plausible characteristics of IE socieites, and to make out the profiles of an IE religion. (What religion is is itself one of the questions raised here.) The tripartite structure of IE myth is typically characterized by a belief system like the Vedic, in which the dominant myth characters are of three different types or levels: the *brahmanas* (priests), *ksatriyas* (warriors), and *vaisyas* (herdsmen or cultivators). This kind of tripartite division, among the dominant figures of a culture's myth--and thus a reflection of the culture's society--is amply illustrated by the myths reflected in other IE languages. In Greek and Roman societies, to illustrate, the same kind of tripartism is broadly reflecte*d on the mythological level:* the Greeks celebrating *priests and magistrates, warriors*, then *laborers/artisans*; the Romans *flamines (priests)*, *milites (soldiers)*, and *quirites (ordinary citizens)*, in that order, as their preeminent myth figures.

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

Readings

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

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

Discussion questions

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

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

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