

Where do we stand?

Dean Miller

The conference bearing the title “Where Do We Stand? Dumézil’s Trifunctional Theory Considered and Reconsidered” was convened on 22 October 2005 at the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh. As is the invariable custom of the sponsoring organization, the Traditional Cosmology Society founded and directed by Professor Emily Lyle, all papers were read in plenary session in the comfortable and intimate 18th century surroundings of the School, located at 27 George Square. We are most grateful to Professor Lyle for providing this hospitable venue (and for reading an important and provocative paper at the conference), and our thanks are also owed to James Mallory, General Editor of the *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, for agreeing to publish these papers, which will appear twenty years after the death of Georges Dumézil. My own contribution was limited to locating the participants and persuading them to take part in this endeavor, to moderating (not refereeing) the very vigorous discussions that followed the papers, and later to acting as a sub-editor performing a preliminary editing of the written versions of these papers. I also read the paper of C. Scott Littleton, who was unable to appear in Edinburgh in propria persona, and I should note that N. J. Allen, who also took an active part in the conference, opted to publish his paper elsewhere.

It would be superfluous and impolitic for me to detail in this Introduction what I think is going on in each of the papers presented here; readers of this journal will have the opportunity to delve into each contribution and form their own opinions of the thrust and value of each. I believe that I am entitled to admire the very considerable range of the evidence submitted, and to both admit the formative or seminal nature of Dumézil’s original thinking, and the intricate and inventive ways in which these authors have dealt with and expanded on the corpus of Dumézilian theory. If there is an initial lesson here, it is that the trifunctional

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idéologie which Dumézil extracted from (and adduced for) the Indo-European data is, if not dominant, then still important in forming new scholarly approaches – Chris Lynn’s evidence, and his conclusions, taken from architectural remains is emblematic here, while Aldis Putelis testifies to the considerable difficulty any comparative scheme has in penetrating a situation where the data are still sparse or in flux. Another important observation, I think, is that a considerable variation in field and discipline can be focused or channeled through what is at least partially a Dumézilian moyen d’analyser. Anthropology provides Scotty Littleton with a mechanism for explaining aspects of Indo-European expansion and acculturation or hybridization; historical linguistics expands John Colarusso’s re-examination of the Nart evidence that fascinated Dumézil years before, while Colarusso goes on to add intricate suggested patterns for early I-E social organization. Comparative mythology’s still formidable arsenal of tools allows John Shaw to draw together Iranian and Irish evidence, and I find it of great interest that Karen Bek-Pedersen, who is an expert in fabric arts and the ancient skills of weaving, has managed here to weave a design that interprets social intercourse by means of “tripled duality.” John Leavitt has taken “another road,” or more than one, into the human hinterland Dumézil first explored. Emily Lyle’s paper, as presented here, is extraordinarily ambitious, and moves well beyond the perimeters (or parameters) Dumézil suggested. All of us involved in the Indo-European enterprise, and the net of theory that is continually woven to support it, must find her expanded theoretical construction worth regarding and exploring.

My final remark will recapitulate what I myself concluded when this Edinburgh conference was over, and that was that (taking the great Sir Isaiah Berlin’s famous separation of thinkers into Hedgehogs, with their one big idea, and Foxes, with their variety of ideas) that Georges Dumézil, so casually labeled the Great Indo-Europeanist Hedgehog (with his trifunctional notion) was actually a Fox, multiplex, polyvalent, much richer in theoretical perception, suggestion and intimation than some have been prepared to see or admit.

Editor’s note: in addition to the papers from the conference, we have included two other papers closely related to the topic from Kathleen Garbutt and Inés García de la Puente.

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