

Indo-European Dragon-Slayers and Healers, and the Irish Account of Dian Cécht and Méiche¹

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Variants of the dragon-slayer myth in Indo-European traditions have been studied extensively by comparatists, among them Dumézil (1939), who pointed out in passing an Irish parallel in the *Dindsenchus* (lore of place-names), examined here in detail. Among the points of comparison identified and dealt with below are the various divine personages in Celtic and Indo-Iranian, and shared cultural themes surrounding the myth, which are examined in their larger context of a common mythological system partially retained at either end of the Indo-European world. The close parallels between Celtic and Indo-Iranian are noted, along with the dragon-slayer's clear affinities with the role of healer inherited from a common tradition.

The Indo-Iranian Myth

The slaying of a monster, often in the form of a serpent, by a hero was a widespread story throughout the ancient world, and has been shown to be an important component in the mythologies of the peoples belonging to the Indo-European² cultural and linguistic domain. Within the bounds of this inherited tradition we find variants of the myth under a variety of names: Indra and Vṛtra, Illuyankas, Zeus and Typhon, Hercules and the Hydra, Apollo and Python, Thor and the serpent, etc. (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 185). From its important and dramatic role in a larger cosmogonic story, together with its distinct variants and wide distribution in recorded sources, we may regard it as one of the central myths to survive from some stage (or stages) of common IE.

Indo-Iranian traditions, particularly that of the Rig Veda

¹ My thanks to Calvert Watkins for his helpful suggestions in an earlier version of this paper.

² Abbreviations: AV Atharva Veda; Av. Avestan; CMT 1 (Fraser); CMT2 (Gray); DIL Dictionary of the Irish Language; IE Indo-European; I-Ir Indo-Iranian; LG Lebor Gabála (Macalister); OIr Old Irish; RV Rig Veda; ŚB Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; Y Yasna; Yt Yast.

(RV), contain the most extensive and coherent body of evidence for the myth; they have also been the most extensively investigated. The Vedic legend of Indra and Vṛtra along with its parallels in Iranian were examined in 1934 by Renou and Benveniste in their detailed study. Briefly, the RV account consists of variations on the formula identified by Renou (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 108) as ‘Indra slew Vṛtra,’ where the ophidian Vṛtra confined the waters and the god Indra, sent by the other gods, slew him and freed the waters with their life-giving properties. As for the name Vṛtra (Ved. *vṛtrá-* : Av. *vṛthra-*), Benveniste (27) derives it from IE **wṛtrom* ‘résistance, hostilité’, which is still the essential meaning of the words in Vedic and Avestan. The word in Indo-Iranian (I-Ir) must have been a neuter abstract; it is attested in Avestan only in the neuter, and in its extended sense ‘barrier’ (95) it is certainly associated in the RV (1.52.2; 8.12.26) with Vṛtra’s function of retaining the waters. Because of the obvious transparency of the name and its derivation from the verbal root *vṛ-* ‘to, cover, bind’, Renou (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 101) has suggested that ‘cette association en soulignerait plutôt la fiction ... et le jeu verbal suit de près chez eux l’invention mythographique.’ Though this may be true with regard to the name Vṛtra, another name, *Ahi* ‘serpent’—this time animate—is applied to a monster that is none other than Vṛtra (cf. RV 1.32; Bergaigne 1878, 2: 203-204, Coomaraswamy 1935: 390). Renou has shown that the references to *Ahi* are those attached to the most concrete elements in the legend, and that the gradual imposition of the name Vṛtra on the role of the serpent *Ahi* is a Vedic innovation (105-7).

The mother of Vṛtra is Dānu (RV 1.32.9) and *Ahi* is described as her offspring as well (RV 2.12.1). In this connection Vṛtra is called *dānu-* (RV 2.12.11) as well as *dāsā-* (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 164, 166). The name of Vṛtra’s mother, Dānu, is not entirely transparent in its form or meaning; it probably has some relation to Ved. *dānu-* ‘fluid, moisture, mist’ (Bergaigne 1878, 2: 220; Coomaraswamy 1935: 390; *pace* Renou in Benveniste-Renou 1934: 165) and the reference to *Ahi* as ‘being born of the waters’ (*abjā* RV 7.34.16) may be regarded as lending support to this relation.

The slayer of Vṛtra-*Ahi* in the Rig Veda is Indra (e.g. RV 4.42.7), the member of the Vedic pantheon who corresponds

most closely to the second (warrior) function in Dumézil's system. Indra's chief epithet is *Vṛtrahan-* 'the slayer of *Vṛtra*', an epithet which is transparent and has its phonological equivalent in the god *Vrθragna* in the Avestas (Benveniste and Renou 1934:28-40). On the basis of this evidence, together with the analysis of the formulas in the RV involving Indra as *Vṛtrahan-*, Renou (116, 192) has concluded that the Vedic evidence provides no reason to doubt that *Vṛtrahan* was originally distinct from Indra, as the Iranian evidence also suggests. In the process of evolving from hero to divinity, Indra as dragon-slayer acquired the characteristics of the warrior divinity. Among these was the epithet *Vṛtrahan*, which in Vedic provided the basis for a new name for the monster, formerly designated simply as *Ahi* 'serpent'.

Indra is not the only dragon-slayer in the RV; the slaying of the three-headed, six-eyed monster *Viśvarūpa* 'Omniform' by *Trita Āptya* as described in RV 2.11.19; 10.8.7-9 parallels this story closely. *Trita*, a protégé of Indra, also releases the confined cows, elsewhere associated with the waters, from the body of *Ahi* (RV 10.48.2) and in RV 1.187.1 it is he who dismembers *Vṛtra*. *Viśvarūpa* is described in post-RV texts as the son of the god *Tvaṣṭṛ* by a 'sister of the Asuras' who is left unnamed (RV 2,11,19;³ Bergaigne 1878: 329; Coomaraswamy 1935: 385, 387).

Benveniste (178) regards the Iranian traditions involving *Vrθragna* as representing a more conservative version of the myth. The Avestan name *Vrθragna*, like Ved. *Vṛtrahan*, is an abstract personification of 'a force that shatters resistance' (28). Direct comparisons with the earliest Indic sources are complicated, however, by the fact that there is no monster **vrθra-* in the Avestas, and no account of a confrontation between *Vrθragna* and a dragon-like adversary. The two traditions in the Avestas that do feature a conflict between a god and a serpent-monster (*Θraitauna-Aži Dahāka* and *Krsāsapa-Aži Srnvara* 'horned') do not show any direct connection with *Vrθragna* (181). Nor is *Vrθragna* associated with the release of waters; according to Benveniste the theme of confinement of the waters does not occur outside I-Ir and must have been independent of any dragon-slaying story, owing its emergence

³In the *Pañcavimā Brāhmaṇa* 6,7-13 *Viśvarūpa* is *Vṛtra*'s brother (Coomaraswamy 1935: 387).

to 'l'importance particulière de l'eau dans les régions aryennes' (188), presumably during the period of Indo-Aryan migration toward the subcontinent. Benveniste and Renou conclude accordingly that there were three separate motifs in I-Ir: 1) the religious motif of a warrior god *Vṛtrahan-, 2) the epic struggle with a dragon and 3) the mythological motif of the release of the confined waters. The motifs were fused in Vedic but remained separate in Avestan (182, 188-198).

Subsequent studies, particularly by Iranian specialists, have led to a reassessment of the views advanced by Benveniste and Renou. In his review of the question nearly three decades later Duchesne-Guillemin (1962: 175-178) declared his belief in the co-existence of the three motifs in I-Ir in a cosmogonic myth where a god overcomes an obstacle or being, ophidian or otherwise, that confines the waters. An examination of the two dragon-slayers in Iranian tradition, Θraitauna and Krsās̄pa, and their counterparts elsewhere in Iranian, has proved helpful in reconstructing earlier stages of the story. Θraitauna vanquishes the three-headed dragon Aži Dahāka (Y. IX, 8; Yt. XIV, 40)⁴ and is supported in the struggle by the force *vrθragna* just as Trita is encouraged by Indra 'Vṛtrahan' (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 196); their structural equivalence indicates a likely common I-Ir source for both stories (cf. Wikander 1941: 162, 164). Thus according to the more recent findings I-Ir *Vṛtrahan can be reconstructed as the god representing various mythical figures who overcame an obstacle to creation and to the natural order, and whose name survived in the reformed Zoroastrian system only in the sense of 'victory' over evil.

The occurrence of such transformations before the time of recorded traditions in the Indic and Iranian mythological systems encourage us to seek a wider – and more recent – range of sources outside the RV and the Avestas in order to construct a more complete picture of the myth in this region of the IE world. Such sources abound in both traditions. Θraitauna's dragon-slaying exploit is attested outside of the Avestas in Pehlevi literature: in what may be descended from a dragon-slaying ritual mentioned in the Šāhnāmah, the king Farīdūn (< Θraitauna) is described as having disguised himself as a dragon in order to give his sons the opportunity to test

⁴ Note that the Indic Vṛtra is called a *dasyu* RV 6. 23.2.

their prowess as warriors. The youngest son proves to be the bravest and is chosen as his father's successor. The theme of the rule of the dragon was later historicised in Iran; in the tradition of Firdausī the dragon Aždahā, a foreign usurper, is overcome by the righteous king Farīdūn (Widengren: 43, 45). A further parallel to the theme exists in a ritual struggle against a dragon in the cult of the mysteries of Miθra (*op. cit.*: 44-45). In the ceremony the leader kills a dragon with a club called *gurz* (<**vazra*) whose name corresponds precisely to the Vedic 'lightning-bolt' (*vajra*) created by Tvaṣṭṛ and used against Vr̥tra/Ahi. The fact that this particular ceremony occurs in a Mithraic cult raises no problems for comparison, since it is clearly the result of the transformation in Iranian religion that occurred as a result of the Zoroastrian reform. The warlike characteristics were acquired by Miθra as a secondary development, who along with Vr̥θagna filled the warrior role left vacant by Indra when the latter was demoted to the rank of demon in the Iranian pantheon (Duchesne-Guillemin: 174).

The close association of the group Miθra (Vr̥θagna) – Θraitauna - Krsāsapa, pointing to their former identity, is reinforced from other sources in Iranian mythology. Dumézil (1971 cited in Littleton 1982: 147) in support of his tripartite scheme has pointed out that the *xvarnah* ('glowing nimbus?') associated with sovereignty was taken first by Miθra as representative of the first function, then by Θraitauna representing the third function, and lastly by Krsāsapa embodying the second function. Wikander (1941:161-176) likewise advances effective arguments that the two directly attested dragon-slayers in Iranian, Θraitauna and Krsāsapa, derive from a common mythological prototype. The name Θraitauna is etymologically related to the name Θrita who is described as the father of Krsāsapa (Y. 9,10).⁵ Both Θraitauna and Krsāsapa have the Ganderwa as an adversary, and both are connected with the function of kingship in their capacity as dragon-killers. Furthermore, the mothers of the two dragons Aži Dahāka and Aži Srnvara 'the horned serpent' appear to

⁵ Cf. Dumézil 1939: 5. In the same work he draws attention to aspects of the I-Ir myth that correspond in their particulars, but whose original structures are no longer apparent through comparison, due to subsequent developments in each mythology. These he terms 'problèmes du second ordre'.

have been identical. In Pehlevi, Ōtak is mentioned three times as the mother of Azdahāk (<Aži Dahāka; e.g. Dēnkart LX, 21, 4); she is further mentioned in a list of seven sinful beings next to Azdahāk and Aži-i-sruvar, indicating that she may well have been regarded as the mother of both dragons. She appears in the accompanying prayer:

‘And Ōtak who ... has brought forth want and privation, distress and lustfulness, hunger and thirst, fury with her bloody club, poverty to destroy pastures, terror and secret peril.’ (Wikander 1941: 173-174).

In Iranian Vayu-mythology, *dānu tačintiš* ‘the running (flowing) Dānu’ is to be understood as the mother of the dragon that is mentioned in the same text (*op.cit.*: 98, 176). Wikander points out that the name Ōtak < Av. *Awi.tačina* ‘rushing forward’ is attested in Yt. 14,1 in association with a river-name. It is semantically close enough to *dānu.tačintiš* to suggest that it is simply a Middle Persian translation, indicating that the mothers of the serpents were originally identical. The apparent connection suggested by Av. *dānu-* : Ved. *Dānu-* between the mother of Aži Dahāka/Aži Sruvara and Dānu, mother of Vṛtra-Ahi, is supported by another shared characteristic (1941: 176). In RV 1.103.2; 2.12.12 the adjective *rauhina-* is attached to Vṛtra, and in its meaning of ‘son of Rohinī’ clearly implies that his mother Dānu is associated with the colour red; Av. (Aži) *raoiđita* ‘red’ (V.1,2) is an epithet for the dragon.

If Ōraitana/Krsāspa, Aži Dahāka/Aži Sruvara, and *dānu tačintiš*/Ōtak derive from common prototypes, as is highly probable, can the same be shown for Vṛtra/Viśvarūpa in Vedic tradition? Vṛtra’s father is not mentioned in the RV, but according to the Brāhmanas (v. ŚB 1.6.3.1 ff.) Tvaṣṭṛ is the father of Vṛtra and Viśvarūpa (Brown 1942: 90n.). We have seen above that Viśvarūpa is Tvaṣṭṛ’s son ‘by a sister of the Asuras’, and Dānu fulfils these conditions.

Our review of the conclusions of Duchesne-Guillemin, Wikander and Widengren has added some detail to the outline of a prehistoric dragon-slaying myth in I-Ir times. However, the motif of the confinement of the waters, as Benveniste observed above, does not appear to be attached to any of the dragon-slayers in Iranian, nor to any of the dragons. Whether or not the absence of a direct attestation of the motif, like

that of the relation between Vr̥θagna and the dragon-slaying motif, is due to a secondary suppression in Iranian religion is open to question. It appears probable, however, when we observe that precisely this motif of withholding the waters is attributed to the evil spirit Angra Mainyu, the creator of Aži Dahāka, who appears sometimes in the form of a lizard (Duchesne-Guillemain 1962: 32; Güntert 1923: 23):

‘They destroyed (overcame) the malice of the fiend Angra Mainyu, so that the waters did not stop flowing nor did the plants stop growing; but at once the most beneficent waters of the creator and ruler, Ahura Mazda, flowed forward and his plants went on growing’ (Yt. 13,78; transl. Darmesteter 1883, 2: 198-199; cf. Watkins 1995: 355)

On the strength of evidence from the more extensive range of sources examined, it is likely that the three motifs thought by Benveniste to have been separate were closely associated in a cosmogonic myth from common I-Ir times. Having been able to identify certain characteristics of the personages *Dānu- and her monstrous offspring, let us examine more closely those of the dragon-slayer *Vr̥trahan.

Θraitaua’s capacities in Iranian tradition are not limited to overcoming dragons; he is also invoked as a healer in Yt. 13,131:

‘We worship the Fravashi of the holy Θraētaona, of the Āthwya house; to stand against itch, hot fever, humours, cold fever, and incontinency, to stand against the evil done by the Serpent’ (transl. Darmesteter 1883, 2:221).

Significantly, Θrita, father of Krsāsapa and brother to Āthwya, father of Θraitaua, appears as ‘the first of the healers’ (Vidēvdāt 22,2). Parallel evidence in Indic from post-RV sources indicates that the attribution of healing powers to the dragon-slayer, or to those closely associated with him, stems from a common I-Ir source. In Atharvaveda VI.113, the gods wish to cause Grāhi, the demon of sickness, to disappear in connection with the sin that the gods have transferred from themselves onto Trita Āptya. In Tattirīya Samhita I.8.10.2 Trita is described as associated with long life.

Related traditions from the peripheries of the Iranian cultural territory also provide important evidence. In a wide-

ranging and instructive article Dumézil (1938) has demonstrated that the parallel between Ved. Vṛtrahan and the Armenian dragon-slayer Vahagn does not rest on a 'motif banal' as Benveniste had supposed. A judicious use of comparisons, once more from Indic post-RV sources ('la littérature postérieure') reveals that the story concerning Vahagn (= Ir. Vrθagna) is derived from an Iranian prototype and corresponds in its details to the account of the consequences of the sin incurred by Indra's slaying of the Brahman Vṛtra, preserved in Mahābhārata 5.9.2 et seq. In this connection, Dumézil re-examines the incarnations of the Iranian Vrθagna in Yt. 14 earlier observed by Benveniste (1934:33) as expressing 'vigueur offensive avec son corollaire, ardeur sexuelle'. Bringing to bear the additional Armenian evidence (e.g. the Arm. use of *vazēr* 'he ran' in the description of Vahagn's emergence from the stem of a reed) Dumézil proposes that Vrθagna's characteristics as seen in his ten incarnations are in need of a minor revision: they are best described as concentrating around the qualities of 'strength, and to the same extent swiftness'. He notes that the 'refined' traits in turn correspond to those in Vedic tradition distributed between Indra Vṛtrahan and the god Visnu, characterised as *urukramah* 'of the long strides', together with other features latterly shared by 'osmosis' between Vrθagna and Cištā, goddess of roads and travel (166-67).

II Ireland

Since the 1930s Dumézil's comparative model has frequently been applied to Celtic mythological traditions, most notably to those of Ireland (Littleton 1982: 167-74; Dumézil 1954, 1963). Evan (1948) discusses the close parallels between the healing activities of the children of Dian Cécht and those of the Iranian third function deities Haurvatāt 'Health' and Amrtāt 'Immortality', later to be related to the IE medical doctrine by Puhvel (1970) and Watkins (1995: 537-539). In his study of the 'fire in the water' theme attested in a ritual context in Indic (Ved. Apām Napāt) and as a mythological fragment associated with sovereignty in Iranian (Av. *xvarna*), Dumézil (1963) examines the Irish account of the mysterious properties of the waters in Nechtan's Well, bringing out points of comparison between the mythologies of the eastern and western extremes of the IE world.

More recently Watkins in his study of the dragon-slaying myth in various IE cultures has proposed a basic inherited verbal formula recounting that a hero slays a serpent (301; cf. Benveniste and Renou 1934: 108). To this he adds a tentative late IE expansion where a hero (variable) slays (*g^hen-) a monster (*og^whi-) who is three (*tri-)-headed (variable) with the aid of a god (variable), as a result of which the hero drives off the monster's cows (468). Watkins further (441-447) draws attention to the Irish saga of Fergus mac Léti, a tale, 'drawn from mythology and pressed into service by jurists', which he compares with the two variants of the more famous Hittite yearly ritual myth of the slaying of the serpent Illuyankas with reference to the simpler (and presumably older) formula. By applying the use of formulae as a primary means of comparison (cf.: 451), he demonstrates how the specific themes such as 'abnormal or inverse social or sexual relations', 'abuse or violation of hospitality', 'violation of injunction' and the 'death of the hero' present in both traditions affirm that 'the chaos symbolized by the IE dragon was fundamentally social in character'. On a cosmic scale the conflict symbolises a threat to the ideal of social order expressed through Ved. *ṛta*, Av. *aša*, OIr *fírinne* 'truth' (303, 445-446).

Earlier in his career, Dumézil (1939: 112-113), on the basis of comparisons between Iranian cultic material and a similar theme in the Norse saga of Hrólfr Kraki, proposed the existence of an IE initiation ceremony involving the ritual 'killing' of a simulated adversary that he describes as a 'monstre tricéphale'. Together with accounts already well known from I-Ir, Greek and Latin sources, he provides a passing reference to the medieval Irish account of the slaying of Méiche 'au coeur triple', which contains striking similarities to the I-Ir traditions and, unlike the more famous battles of Mag Tuired, has not been studied. The story is one of a large number gathered together in the extensive legendary/mythological place-lore collections that form the contents of the prose and metrical *Dindsenchas*. The metrical version, under the river-name *Berba* has been collated from ten MSS by Gwynn (62-68). The prose version of the story exists in closely similar MSS variants.⁶ Of these the oldest and most complete is in LL (159 b 40; transl. Stokes 1892: 483).

⁶ LL 159b 40, Book of Ballymote 358a,II. 17b, Rennes 95a.2 and Bodleian = Rawl. B 506

Berba unde nominatur. Berba is inti ró láttea na trí nathracha ro batar i cridi Mechi meic na Mórrigna iarna marbad do Dian Cécht i Maig Méchi. Mag Fertaige ainm in maige sin ar tús. Delba trí cend nathrach bátar forsna trí cridib batar i Mechi. 7 meni thairsed a marbad forbétais na nathrachasain ina broind conna farcbaidís anmanna beo i nHerind. Coron loisc Dian Cécht iarna marbad. 7 co ron là a lúiaith lasin sruth út. Coromberb 7 coro dílég cech n-anmanna boí inti. Unde Mag Luadat 7 Mag Méchi 7 Berba.

*Cridi Méchi cruaid in chned.
Isin Berba ro baded.
A lúiaith iarna loscud lib
Ro chuir Mac Cécht cetchuinig*

Whence Berba 'Barrow'. Into this river were flung the three snakes that were (found) in the heart of the Morrigan's son Méiche after he was slain by Diancécht on Magh Méichi: which plain's name at the first was Magh Fertaige. The three hearts that were in Méiche bore the shape of three serpents' heads and, had not the killing of him come to pass, those snakes would have grown in his belly and eventually left no animals alive in Ireland. When he had slain Méiche Dian Cécht burned the snakes and their ashes he committed to that current, with the effect that it seethed and digested (i.e. boiled to rags) all living things that therein were.

Méiche's hearts, hard the wound
Have been drowned in the Barrow;
Their ashes, after being burnt by you,
Mac Cécht, slayer of a hundred, cast in.

The account from the metrical *Dindshenchus* provides further details (text and transl. Gwynn 2, 67):

*Ní fuailfed focheird innti
Lúiaithred Mechi mor-millti;
Rosbalb rosberb cen athbach⁷
Salchur serb na sen-nathrach*

⁷ 'Without delay' DIL 'A'2 449-50.

*Nathair fo thrí focheird cor
Tathig in mberg dia bronnud:
Cnáifed dia álaig óg n-éll
Slog sádail na sen-Érend.*

*Aire-sin romarb Diancecht:
Ba fotha garb din glan-echt,
Dia cosc co búan din bronnud
Ós cach cúan, din chomlongud.*

*Eól dam a lecht leth rolá
Fert cen tech is cen tuga:
A lúath olc cen aib n-enga
Fofúair socht i saér-Berba.*

'No motion it made
The ashes of Meichi the strongly smitten:
The stream made sodden and silent past recovery
The fell filth of the old serpent.

Three turns the serpent made;
It sought the soldier to consume him;
It would have wasted by its doings all the kind
Of the indolent hosts of ancient Erin.

Therefore Diancecht slew it:
There rude reason for clean destroying it,
For preventing it ever from wasting
Worse than any wolf-pack, from consuming utterly.

Known to me is the grave where he cast it,
A tomb without walls or roof-tree;
Its ashes, evil without loveliness or innocence
Found silent burial in noble Barrow.

The serpent of the metrical version is not contained in Méiche's heart, but is Méiche himself, and is large enough to attempt to consume his adversary. Nor does it have three heads; instead, it makes three turns (*nathair fo thrí focheird cor*), possibly three coils of itself, maintaining its threefold aspect, before it is slain and its ashes cast into the river. Here the river not only boiled or seethed, but the ashes of Méiche made no motion in it (*ni fuailfed inti luaithred meichi mór-millti*) and they rendered the stream silent (*rosbalb*).

There is one difference between the MSS versions that causes an initial difficulty in our interpretation of the place-name legend: the identity of the slayer of Méiche. In the LL prose account he is named Dian Cécht and later in the verses Mac Cécht. The Bodleian and Rennes accounts (both dating from the end of the 14th. century) are consistent in assigning the deed to Mac Cécht. The metrical version however, in associating Dian Cécht alone with the slaying, indicates that the tradition involving Dian Cécht is probably the more archaic of the two, for in its other details this version, as we have seen, varies from the prose version accounts. Thus on the strength of relatively greater age and wider distribution Dian Cécht was most likely the original name of Méiche's slayer, with Mac Cécht co-existing or being introduced as a by-form.⁸ There are no references to the story in Irish tradition known to me outside of those transmitted in the *Dindshenchas*, nor is Méiche mentioned in any other sources. Likewise, the river Barrow is referred to elsewhere in the metrical *Dindshenchus* only in passing, e.g. as 'seething' or 'rising' (Gwynn 3: 20, 238).

Dian Cécht and Morrígu, the mother of Méiche, however, do appear elsewhere in important roles at various points in the tradition. Morrígu is enigmatic in her relation to the rest of the Irish pantheon. As the goddess of battle and one of the three Machas or *morrígnæ*, she is associated with carnage, and is closely paralleled by the Germanic Valkyries in this function (Hennessy 1870: *passim*). Her name Morrígain (more recently Mor(r)ígu, Mōrrigu) is a compound, the second element of which is 'queen'. Thurneysen (1921: 63-64) has suggested that the first element is mor- (with the variant mór- as secondary lengthening due to the influence of *mór* 'large') meaning 'ghost' and cognate with German *Mahr*, English *nightmare*. The root also appears in OIr *morand* < *morfhind* 'ghost-white', *mor-draige* < **mor-drech* 'a deranged person' and the mythological name *Fo-moire* 'Fomorian'. The etymology 'queen of spectres, queen of ghosts' is supported from several other sources. Cormac's Glossary (Y697, §58) provides the definition '*Gūdemain .i. uatha 7 mórígnæ*' where *gūdemain* means 'spectres'. In *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* (ed.

⁸ For the possible earlier equivalence of Dian Cécht and Mac Cécht see O'Rahilly: 125n.

Stokes: 1,2) Morrígu is glossed as *lamia* ‘a witch’.

Morrígu’s most interesting appearance is in the two mythological battles of Mag Tuired. During the retreat of the Tuatha Dé Danann before the Fir Bolg in the first battle, Morrígu and her two fellow sorceresses Badb and Macha protect their allies the Tuatha by calling forth magic showers and mists upon their adversaries (CMT1 §29). In the second battle, which involves the Tuatha Dé Danann against the Fomoiré, Morrígu urges on the gods in battle without actually engaging in combat herself. In her use of magic and her failure to join in the conflict directly she appears to be a very remarkable war goddess indeed, and it is interesting to note the parallel between her behaviour in both battles with that of the god Lug in the second battle.

Morrígu has a further role in the second battle of Mag Tuired: in the aftermath of the conflict she prophesies the end of the world (CMT2 §167):

I shall not see a world
Which will be dear to me:
Summer without blossoms,
Cattle will be without milk,
Women without modesty,
Men without valor.
Conquests without a king...
Woods without mast,
Sea without produce...

Here we should note the parallels between the theme of cosmic devastation (combined here with the collapse of the social order) and the consequences that would have ensued had the serpent(s) confined in the body of her son not been slain. Morrígu is associated with dissolution elsewhere in Irish tradition. In the metrical *Dindshenchas* (4: 196-201) she steals the bull of Buchat, Cormac’s cattle-keeper. When Buchat’s wife Odras pursues her to Cruachan, Morrígu emerges and chants spells over her pursuer, causing her to dissolve and be transformed into a pool of water.

Morrígu’s association with the Underworld emerges from the account of her union (the only one known from surviving Irish sources) with the Dagda ‘The Good God’ on the eve of *samain* a year before the second battle of Mag Tuired:

‘The Dagda ... had arranged to meet a woman a year from that day, near the All Hallows of the battle ... The Dagda spoke with her and they united ... The woman mentioned here is the Morrigan’ (CMT2 §84).

Her association with *samain* is particularly important in terms of the concepts and realms (cf. Ved. *sat* and *asat*) of order and chaos underlying our cosmogonic myth examined above, for *samain* ‘union’ refers specifically to a yearly union with or opening to the Underworld, where ‘the elimination of the boundaries between the dead and the living... between the present and the future...all symbolize the return to chaos. What Samain inaugurates is winter, and much of the uncanniness of the night, when man seems powerless in the hands of fate’ (Rees and Rees: 91).

The sum of Morrígu’s characteristic functions is not easily understood, especially when applied to Dumézil’s tripartite system for the IE pantheon. Her conflict with Cú Chulainn (Thurneysen 1921: 309-11) and particularly her use of magic and prophecy shows her affiliations with the group of gods corresponding to the first function (sovereignty) which are brought out clearly by her alliance with the Tuatha Dé Danann – the élite among the gods of Irish mythology – in the two battles of Mag Tuired. Morrígu’s use of magic in the battle and her lack of actual participation recall the sacral and religious functions within that of sovereignty; her prophecies, and her acts at *samain* representing contacts between the world of order and light and the Underworld correspond to the Varunian aspect of that function, much like Lug whom Dumézil (1940: 96) compares to Varuna. Without pursuing this parallel further, it should be noted that one of Morrígu’s striking characteristics is her ambivalent interposition between the interests of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the forces of destruction. Nevertheless, her role as a war-goddess corresponding to Dumézil’s second (warrior) function has long been appreciated (Hennessy 1870: *passim*), and her varied roles may situate her as a trivalent goddess associated with all three of the functions in Dumézil’s tripartite scheme (Dumézil 1954: 5-6; Lyle: 2).

The remaining facts we have concerning Morrígu seem anomalous within Irish tradition. In the *Ban-shenchas* (Dobbs: 168) under the name Ana(nd) we are told:

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*Anand .i. in Mor-rígan diata Dá Chich Anand for Luachair
Deadad, bean eile do'n Dagda.*

'Anand, that is Morrígu, from whom the two Paps of Ana
on Luachair Deadad. Another wife of the Dagda'.

The curious equivalence Morrígu = Ana also occurs in the *Lebor Gabála* (LG 1: 158) where the three daughters of Ernmas are listed as Badb, Macha and Ana. In the accompanying versification, however, the name Morrigan is substituted for Ana:

*Badb is Macha met indbais
Morrigan fotla felbais*

'Badb and Macha rich in store
and Morrígu who dispenses confusion'

Finally, in the *Táin Bó Regamna* Morrígu (Bodb) appears as a woman wearing a red cloak as she chants spells against that model of warrior conduct, Cú Chulainn (Thurneysen 1921: 173, 309-11; Windisch 2: 241ff.).

Dian Cécht's appearances in Irish literature are considerably less frequent than those of Morrígu. The first word in his name seems to mean 'swift'. The only certain meaning of *Cécht* is ploughshare' (DIL 'C' 1: 95) which makes little sense in the light of his activities. Elsewhere in Irish tradition Dian Cécht is not a warrior, but a healer. In the *Coir Anmann* 'The Fitness of Names' (Windisch 3: 356-58) under Dian Cécht we find:

*Dian Cécht .i. ainm suithe leigís Éirenn, dian na cumachta,
nam Cécht cumachta dicitur ... ut est deus salutis*

'Dian Cécht .i. the name of Erin's sage of leechcraft, the
god of powers, for Cécht means power ...that he is the
god of health and well-being'.

In the St. Gall incantations various spells for the cure of ailments incorporating Dian Cécht's name are preserved (Stokes 1901, 2: 249).

Dian Cécht plays an important role as a healer to the Tuatha Dé Danann in the battles of Mag Tuired where he replaces Nuadu's lost right arm with one of his own making. In

the second battle, Dian Cécht is the father of two sons, Octríuil and Miach, and a daughter Airmed, all of whom help to heal the Tuatha Dé Danann wounded in the battle .

In his function as healer Dian Cécht is compared by De Vries (77-78) to the continental Apollo, the Gaulish god of healing. Among the various epithets attached to the Gaulish god is the name BORVO (BORMO), derived from Common Celtic *berw-. The root also appears as OIr *berbaim*, Lat. *fervere* 'seethe, cook, boil'; it was associated in Gaul with hot healing springs (*op. cit.*: 73-74) as well as the OIr river-name Berba, the scene of the slaying of Méiche.

In terms of Dumézil's tripartite scheme, as physician to the Tuatha Dé Danann royalty Dian Cécht's first function associations are made explicit. His warlike slaying of Méiche and the protection of Ireland associated with it belong to the second function. De Vries (77-78) places him in the third function through his associations with other Irish third-function deities; his activities as a healer with his three children are chiefly linked with the artisans of the third function, counterparts of the Iranian *hūitiš* identified by Benveniste (cf. Binchy: 6-7; Littleton 1982: 163). It is significant in this regard how closely Dian Cécht's offspring Miach, Ochtríuil and Airmed in the battles of Mag Tuired correspond in their activities to well known I-Ir third-function healers: the Iranian trio of the brothers Haurvatāt, Amrtāt, their sister Ārmaiti, along with their Vedic equivalent the Aśvins (Evan: *passim*; Watkins: 539; Duchesne-Guillemin: 197-198).

Irish tradition also preserves one reference to Dian Cécht that appears, when viewed synchronically, to be unrelated to the rest. In a poem by Eochaid Ua Flainn (obit. 1004) in LG concerning the genealogies of the Tuatha Dé Danann Dian Cécht is mentioned in the following context (MacAlister 4: 217; Lehman: 177):⁹

*Goibenn nírbo báeth bruithne ,
Luichne sáer in c(h)erd Creidne,
DianCécht fri dul rót roichthe,
Mac in Oc Lug mac Eithne*

⁹ Binchy (2) notes that Dian Cécht is mentioned elsewhere together with the other three 'craft-gods' in the context of 'professional' or 'craft' judgements in legal texts.

Goibniu was no novice at smelting,
 Luichne the wright, Creidne the metal-worker,
 Dian Cécht who travelled the extended ways
 Mac ind Óc, Lug son of Eithne.

III The Mythological Personages in their Wider Contexts

Dumézil's studies of later Iranian-derived sources enable us to conclude with some confidence that the I-Ir God *Vr̥trahan possessed the attribute of swiftness. In the light of this it is probable that the Iranian Vr̥tragna's epithet *hvāyaona-* 'aux bons chemins' (Benveniste and Renou 1934: 53), one of the points of 'osmosis' between Vr̥tragna and the goddess Cištā, belongs to Vr̥tragna at least to the same degree that it belongs to Cištā. The attribute of wayfarer ascribed to a god with healing attributes indicated by *hvāyaona-* recalls Eochaid ua Flainn's *Dian Cécht fri dul rôt roichthe* 'who travelled the extended ways'. The explanation of the passage in LG (MacAlister 4: 315), *Dian Cecht do bhíodh ag imthecht tria conairibh an roi-leighis no na ccorp n-eiscert n-easlan* 'Dian Cécht who used to be journeying over the roads of great healing or of weak, unsound bodies' merely invokes his role as physician, and seems to rationalise a juxtaposition of attributes rather than explain their associations. The attribution is also curious for its apparent lack of relation to his function as a healer in any other sources, and to my knowledge the association of healing with roads is nowhere else supported in the form of an Irish tradition of an itinerant divine healer. His wayfaring aspect is most easily understood in a comparative context, reflecting an earlier IE mythological tradition of which traces have survived in Ireland.

Returning to the qualities of 'power and swiftness' associated with the prototype of Vr̥trahan in I-Ir, we may examine the surviving traditions concerning Dian Cécht for parallels. None are evident in his list of exploits, and the parallel between Av. *hvāyaona-* and the LG passage, though of interest in its own right, does not yield the precise attribute of 'swiftness' to suggest a plausible correspondence. Within the framework of the mythological comparisons examined, however, Dian Cécht's name may be seen to take on a new significance. The first element, *dian* 'swift', does correspond exactly to the second of Dumézil's divine attributes. Although

Dian Cécht, outside of his second-function exploit of the slaying of Méiche, is nowhere directly connected with the notion of ‘power’ in Irish mythology, the formerly anomalous explanation of his name given in *Coir Anmann* where *Cécht* is glossed as ‘power’ indicates that the fundamental association of the first attribute with his role had persisted in Irish mythology.

Bretha Déin Chécht ‘The Judgements of Dian Cécht’, a legal text found in a fifteenth century medical manuscript and datable on linguistic grounds to the eighth century (Binchy: 1,3), provides a strong indication that the attributes of swiftness and power were closely bound up with the name, either through the then current lexicon or by associated tradition. In the opening section of the text (22-23) the name is explained thus:

.i. do tuathaib de donann don liaid-so, bri luath cumachtach, no is ainm proprium .i. dilus.

‘This leech belonged to the Tuatha Dé Danann: a **swift** and **powerful** judge (?); or is it a *proprium*, that is, a proper noun’.

Although the name was evidently a puzzle for the compilers, *luath* and *cumachtach* are precise OIr glosses of its components, occurring in the same order and leaving little doubt that the inherited attributes associated with the god of healing had persisted in tradition. There are, to be sure, questions to be raised on linguistic grounds. The first has to do with whether a name like Dian Cécht with its proposed components falls within the rules of word order for Old Irish, to which we should additionally note the frequency with which *dian-* occurs as the initial element in a compound which may have formed a basis for the name (e.g. *dian-leges* ‘swift healing’), later to be reinterpreted in its common intensive function (DIL ‘degradodealbtha: 62-63). Secondly, there is no satisfactory etymology for *cécht* in either of its meanings. Ideally, we would hope that each name of a god featured in a pantheon would be etymologically transparent in all of its components; however numerous examples from comparative mythology demonstrate that names of deities can change through time while their attributes persist (cf. Benveniste and Renou 1934: 185).

The combined evidence from the Irish materials and the

more extensive I-Ir traditions of the slaying of an ophidian monster by a personage with healing powers points to an inherited tradition revealed by specific correspondences based on their reconstructable essentials:

Dian Cécht	*Vṛtrahan
1. Healer	Healer (Θraitaua/Θrita, Trita)
2. Power (<i>Cécht</i>)	Power (Vrθragna, Indra)
3. Swiftmess (<i>dian</i>)	Swiftmess (Vrθragna, Vahagn, Indra)
4. Wayfarer: <i>fri dul rôt roichthe</i>	Av. <i>hvāyaona-</i>
5. Tri-functional	Miθra, Krsāspa, Θraitaua

Figure 1

In Common I-Ir tradition, as noted above, the mother of the dragon is associated with the name *Dānu- (Ved. Dānu- : Iran. *dānu tačintiš*). *Dānu-, ‘moisture’ (Indic) or ‘flowing water’ (Iranian) occurs in numerous river-names over the breadth of IE territory, including that of the river Danube < *Dānawyoš. *Dānawyoš, -yā is probably a Celtic name, for the river Danube was within the territory occupied by the prehistoric Celts, and derives from an adjectival form based on Common Celtic *dānu- ‘strongly flowing water’ (: Av. *dānuš* ‘river’; Thurneysen 1931: 14; Förster: 10), with both forms appearing in British Isles river-names (Jackson: 292, 382). Celtic, as well as I-Ir, possesses names of goddesses that correspond to river-names in *Dānu-. Thus, in Wales the name of the goddess Dōn can be compared to the name of the river Donwy, and in turn to OIr Danann and Vedic Dānu of the RV (Rees and Rees: 52-53).¹⁰ Information concerning the goddess Danann is scarce in Irish tradition, but it is clear that her position in Irish mythology as the mother of the Tuatha Dē Danann (especially Brian, Iucharba and Goibniu) is equivalent to that of W. Dōn as the mother of Gwydion, Gofannon and Arienrhod (de Vries: 120). The etymological correspondence OIr Danann : W. Dōn : Ved. Dānu leads us to suspect that there may also exist a mythological correspondence. A difficulty in our reconstruction, however, is

¹⁰ In OIr we would expect *Dānann instead of the attested form Dānann, which from the Brythonic evidence may be a secondary formation. For Indic Coomaraswamy (393n.) observes that an original Dānu and Dānu are both possible for the name of the mother of Vṛtra. The former does not occur in RV but is attested in ŚB 1.6.3.9.

the fact that the mother of Méiche is not Danann, but Morrígu.

Danann is known in Irish mythology only as the mother of the gods, i.e. the Tuatha Dē Danann, but this position is not hers alone. A passage from *Sanas Cormaic* (ed. Meyer s.v. Ana) shows that the goddess Ana held an identical position:

Ana .i. mater deorum Hibernensium
Robo maith didiu robiathais si deos
 ‘Ana .i. the mother of the Irish gods.
 Well did she feed the gods’.

There is further evidence for the earlier equivalence of Danann and Ana. The two hills *Dá Chích Anand* ‘Paps of Ana’ in Munster from the *Ban-shenchus* (p. 15 supra) are called *dá chích Danann* ‘Paps of Danann’ by the historian Keating in his *History of Ireland* (1. 10. 93). In addition to equivalence in functions and associations, the names Ana (genitive Anann) and Danann (genitive with no attested nominative) both exhibit genitive forms that are rare in OIr, suggesting that Ana (or Anu) may well be a simple variant of *Danu, Danann arising from a metrical cutting of the initial consonant (*díchned* ‘beheading’) that occasionally occurs as a conscious formation in OIr (DIL *op.cit.* 78-79).

The identity of Ana and Morrígu in Irish tradition noted above (p. 15) provides ample reason to suppose that all three goddesses were originally identical following a well established pattern (Dumézil: 1954). Thus we may regard the Irish goddesses Morrígu, Danann, Ana as derived from a single earlier common prototype, which we can place beside the etymological correspondence OIr Danann (< Common Celtic *Dānu, with its river-name associations): I-Ir *Dānu:

OIr Morrígu (= Ana =Danann) : I-Ir *Dānu

Although the mythological associations of Ved. Dānu and OIr Morrígu suggest that they share common antecedents, the absence of functional correspondences between the two in other contexts requires further explanation. Morrígu has been described as far as the limited sources of Irish mythology will allow; from a comparative perspective an examination of the basic thematic oppositions in the extensively retained mythology of the RV and its relationship

to remnants of a system of belief surviving in medieval Ireland is useful in bringing to light the larger narrative contexts underlying the I-Ir and Irish versions of the story (cf. Rees and Rees: 40-41).

'The universe, as Rig Vedic man saw it, was in two parts. One, being that in which gods and men live, consisted of the earth's broad surface, the vault of the sky over it, and the atmosphere between the two. This he called Sat 'the Existent.' Below the earth, reached by a great chasm, was a place of horror inhabited only by demons and this he called Asat 'the NonExistent.' The creatures of the two regions were in a natural state of enmity with one another, and the two regions themselves were antithetical... In Sat were light, warmth, moisture... In the Asat, the NonExistent, were, cold, darkness, drouth... Decay and death marked it, and the creatures there looked for every opportunity to injure the rta-observing beings of the earth and sky.'

Reflecting the antithesis in the structure of the universe, the gods were divided into Deva, including Indra and the Ásvins, and the Asura, who were cosmic demons and the adversaries of the Deva in celestial conflicts. The Asura, among whom were numbered Mitra-Varuna, were distinguished from the Deva by their possession of *māyā* ('craft in all senses of the term') and in Vedic *Asura* thus meant approximately 'possessor of occult power'. The Asura consisted of two groups, the largest being the children of the goddess Aditī (Ādityas) in which were included Indra, Varuna and Agni; they were associated with *sat*, *ṛta* 'cosmic order' and all of its lightsome and unconfined benefits. The second group, the children of Dānu (Dānavas), belonged to *asat* and consisted of Vṛtra-Ahi and occasionally some minor (later) demons.

Within this structure, the legend of the slaying of Vṛtra-Ahi occurs as part of an epic quarrel between the Ādityas and the Dānavas (RV. 8. 96.9): Vṛtra held the cosmic waters which Varuna wished to have released, for they contained the Sun, the source of heat and light. After the death of Vṛtra and the release of the waters, some other properties contained within them are described (RV 10.49.10):

‘In them (the Waters) I have placed what not even the god Tvaṣṭṛ could place in them, the white (milk), the desirable, in the udders, the breasts of the cows (Waters) the honey of honey, the mighty, the soma, the blend.’

The nature of the goods liberated is more specifically stated in RV 10.8.7-8 where Trita, by slaying Viśvarūpa, releases cows that had been confined.

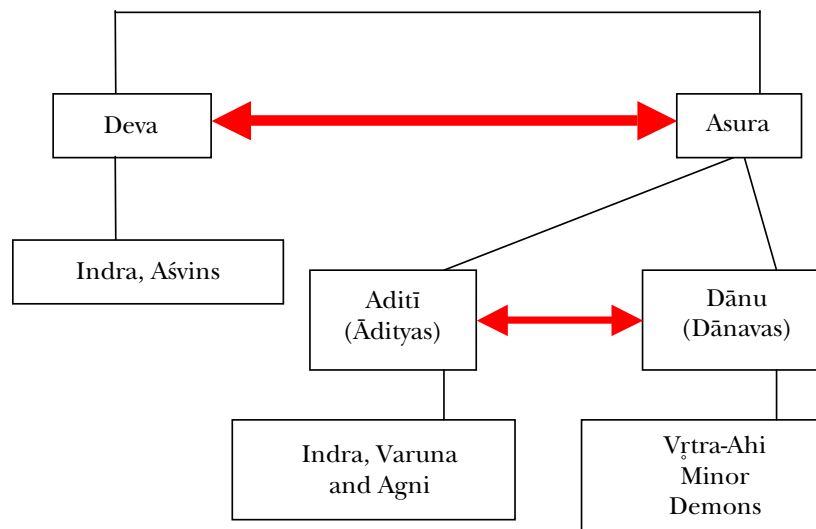


Figure 2

The properties of the waters described in these hymns are among those that Dumézil has included in his third function, and their absence describes precisely the realm *asat* ‘the Non—Existent’ that contains death and decay. The equivalent threat to Ireland is the death of all the beasts (*anmanna* ‘animals’, *ell* ‘flocks[?]’) in the land if the snakes in Méiche’s heart are allowed to live. The Irish story has not retained a wider mythological context to provide a causal connection between the slaying of the serpent(s), the still/seething waters and the threat to wealth and sustenance, presumably in the form of cattle, but Morrígu’s prophecy at the end of CMT2 provides clear evidence that some version of the *sat-asat* opposition played an active role in Irish mythology and was at one time the most likely context for this episode.

If we attempt to relate the characteristics of

Morrígu to the structure of the Vedic oppositions in Fig. 2, it is at once evident that her traits, especially her use of magic, resemble most closely those of the Asura. Her association with *samain* reminds us of the dark, menacing aspect of Varuna that is reflected in *asat* and its extension Vṛtra. Indeed, in terms of the dualism that appears so often in Vedic mythology, Morrígu is often on the side of darkness, and the conflict in the dual natures of the Asura is paralleled closely in the conflict in the Irish mythological second battle of Mag Tuired of the Tuatha Dē Danann (the positive side of the Asura) against Balor and the Fomorians (the negative side). This raises an important question: if a dualism of this kind is significant in Irish mythology, as the parallels between the battles of Mag Tuired and the description above of the Vedic universe suggest, it is surprising that the Irish children of Danann should be placed on the opposite side of the divide from the Vedic offspring of Dānu. Comparisons within insular Celtic traditions provide a plausible explanation: De Vries (120) has noticed a number of parallels between Danann's Welsh equivalent Dōn and the Vedic mother goddess Aditī, and on this basis it is possible to regard the apparent divergence between the Indic and the Celtic structures as arising from an innovation within the Celtic group. Postulating a situation for Late IE much like the Indic where *Aditī is the mother of the *Ādityas and *Dānu is the mother of the *Dānavas, it is quite possible that during Common Celtic times the name of the earlier goddess *Dānu may have become dissociated from her own original function to replace *Aditī as *mater deorum*. The name *Dānu in its new function would correspond to the Irish goddess Danann (Ana). The goddess left in *Dānu's original function as mother of the *Dānavas (Vṛtra : Ahi : Méiche) would continue under a new name, perhaps an epithet, and indeed Mor-rígu 'queen of spectres, queen of ghosts' is an appropriate and serviceable translation into OIr of the role of Dānu in Vedic mythology.

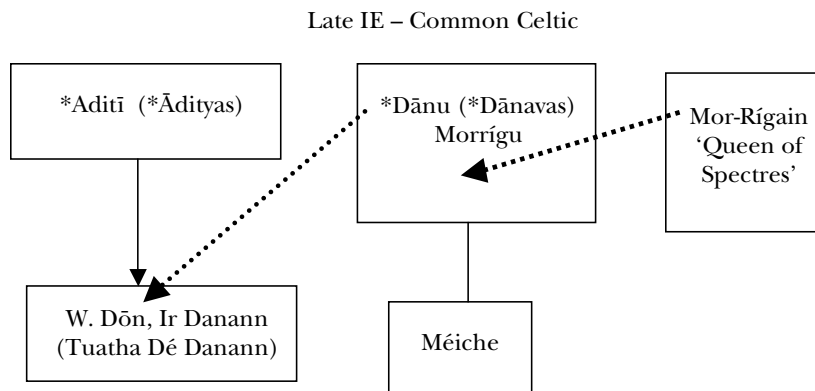


Figure 3

The comparative evidence to support Dumézil's suggestion regarding the slaying of Méiche and recognised variants within other IE traditions is at first sight striking in its dramatic detail, and a closer examination of the comparanda, when placed in their mythological and verbal contexts, provides additional substantial support. Among these we have noted the mythological characteristics of Méiche's mother Morrígu and how they correspond to those of I-Ir *Dānu; the Irish-I-Ir parallels in their overall cosmological structure and coherence to Dumézil's tripartite system; and the name and attributes of the physician/dragon-slayer Dian Cécht. When studied in isolation, nearly all of the parallel attributes might be regarded as logical and separate developments around a dragon-slaying myth; taken together, the clusters of corresponding motifs and characteristics appearing in traditions separated by a vast geographical distance constitute a strong case for common origins. A key element in the comparison, and one that does not, like the attributes of strength and swiftness, seem to be an obvious attribute of a dragon-killer, is the clear association, in our peripheral variants of the myth, with healing and medicine. Significantly, Irish and I-Ir are not unique in this respect; the healing associations in the geographically intermediate Greek traditions of Apollo are well known (cf. Puhvel 1970: 373). Thus Apollo slays the serpent-dragon Python, whose name, along with that of the slain dragon Typhon, has been equated on linguistic and formulaic grounds with Ahi Budhnyà 'Serpent of the Deep' in the Rig Veda (RV 7.34.16-17; Watkins 1995: 452-53, 460-63).

The creature's proximity to water in I-Ir, noted by Wikander (1941: 160) is also featured in the Homeric Hymn to the Pythian Apollo (Watkins 1995: 452-53); it is paralleled in the Irish accounts by the prominence of the river Barrow (Berba), and Fergus Mac Léti's struggle with the water-monster under Loch Rudraige (supra: 9). The importance of water – or 'the waters' – does not end with the location of the conflict: it contains significant medicinal properties, often shared with plants, that are linked with the dragon-slayer. We have already noted the continuing association of the Continental Apollo with healing springs. The belief that waters and plants are conducive to physical health and long life is a common I-Ir theme (Duchesne-Guillemin: 196, Puhvel 1970: 374), expressed through the healing gods Haurvatāt 'health,' Amrtāt 'immortality' and Ārmaiti 'pious thought' and their functional equivalents, the Vedic twin healers the Aśvins. Dian Cécht's sons Miach and Octrúil, and their sister Airmed, as we have seen, are the Irish mythological counterparts of the Iranian trio. During medical procedures in the first battle of Mag Tuired Dian Cécht kills and buries Miach, and herbs corresponding to the number of joints and sinews in his body grow up from the grave (§34-§35). In the second battle (§123) the four healers cast those mortally wounded in the battle into a well and heal them with incantations. Sláine 'health', the name of the well, is a fem. abstract derived from the IE root *sol-/salw- 'whole, health', which is also present as an abstract in the name of the Iranian healer Haurvatāt, raising the possibility that the word may have been present in formulae or narratives from IE times associated with the third function gods of healing.¹¹

The parallels examined above between the I-Ir myth of the dragon-killer and the slaying of Méiche in the *Dindshenchus*, when compared to variants preserved closer to the centre of the IE geographical area,¹² are remarkable for

¹¹ Airmed (<*are-medā), the name the daughter of Dian Cécht, may contain the root *med- 'to take the appropriate measures' closely associated with the IE medical doctrine by Benveniste (1945; Watkins 1995: 539). The DIL (M: 125) gives *miach* (genitive *méich*) as 'a dry measure, bushel' which, coincidentally or not, falls within the wider semantic range of *med- as 'measure' e.g. Lat. *modus* 'a measure of grain'. By the regular rules of sound change in Goidelic it is at least theoretically possible to associate Miach as an o-stem with Méiche (yo-stem).

¹² E.g. the Latin history of Horatio (Dumézil 1956). It is worthwhile drawing

the explicitness of the themes and detail that have survived. Such survivals in themselves do not necessarily provide added insight into the nature and meaning of the original myth; the Greek and Anatolian evidence would seem to suggest distinct variants –or perhaps successive chronological stages – of a common IE story. They do, however, provide evidence that identifiable components of a story very like the I-Ir cosmogonic myth survived at the extreme western edge of the IE world as an isolated account, supported by mythological associations, to be written down in medieval Ireland and included in the *Dindshenchus* by its compilers.

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attention to some additional parallels in motifs that are noteworthy but at present too isolated to be conclusive. The variation in I-Ir between a one-headed and a three-headed monster (Vṛtra and Viśvarūpa) also occurs between the descriptions of Méiche in the metrical (a single serpent large enough to consume Dian Cécht) and the prose (heart containing three serpents) versions of the *Dindshenchus*. In the prose version once Méiche was slain the three serpents were cast into waters of the Barrow (*Berba is inti ró láttea na trí nathracha*). In RV 5.32.5-8, 8.6.17 Vṛtra's corpse is cast into the abyss and sinks into the darker regions. The motif also appears in AV 20.128.13 (Wikander 1941: 176). The corpse is buried in the still waters (RV 1.32.10) just as the waters of the Barrow were made silent (*rosbalb*) upon receiving Méiche's remains (met. version). Ahi- Vṛtra's epithet *rauhiṇa* (RV 2.12.12) 'offspring of the red one (Rohiṇī fem.)' recalls the red garments of Morrígu: in Av. (V 1.2) the serpent is described as (*aži*) *raoiḍta* 'red' (Wikander 1941: 176).

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