

# **The Deep History of Stories**

## **University of Edinburgh**

### **2007**

#### **Introduction**

The conference with the central theme or title of “The Deep History of Stories” was convened on 28 August 2007 and ran through 30 August 2007; the papers were read in two venues on George Square, part of the University of Edinburgh complex, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Two sponsoring organizations were involved: the Traditional Cosmology Society and the International Association for Comparative Mythology, and in organizing the event Emily Lyle (Emerita, The University of Edinburgh, and well-known in these pages) and Michael Witzel (Harvard) acted as enablers and prime movers. The following papers were mainly, but not exclusively, drawn from the day-long conference session devoted to “The Indo-European Focus” within the main thematic category.

As one can see from the papers published below (several having been expanded and re-cast and re-edited, as compared to their original format when read at the conference) the Indo-European aspect of the “stories” in question has been treated (dissected, analyzed) in quite different ways and displayed according to different modalities by these authors. In terms of what we might call a “central theory” of Indo-European forms and activities, we have N. J. Allen comparing two I-E sources, the Norse mythic and the Vedic, and continuing to suggest a modification (and expansion) of Dumézil’s tripartite schema, in favor of Allen’s theorized pentadic structure. J. Shaw, on the other hand, investigates an “eschatological folktale” and finds significant traces of Dumézil’s tripartition in it; this is also true of H. Neale, who locates the “Threefold Death” drama in a Persian original. K. Bek-Pedersen also builds her paper on the important fragments of archaic myth to be located in folktale, like Shaw drawing on Gaelic-Celtic narratives.

A Petrosyan examines a range of I-E sources bearing on the theme of a mythic combat between river/water deities and

“heroic” antagonists; my own contribution also takes a particular theme (and the so-called “capital complex”) and sees it emergent in several Indo-European contexts, while M. M. Tatár pursues the intricacies of an “abused horse-goddess” drama from a Celtic to an Eastern European recrudescence, here bordering on or embedded in a non-Indo-European culture I should also note the non- Indo-European elements stressed (and symmetrically contrasted) in two other contributions: Petrosyan sees a Semitic influence visible in his Bēlos<Ba’al divinity; Neale sees a Khurasanian (Persian) relic in the shaping of the Koran’s diabolic Iblis. We also have investigations of specific Indo-European themes set in specific Indo-European contexts; citing G. Ducoeur’s examination of the “crossing the flood” theme unfolding in the Vedic and other Indic formations, and V. Kryukova’s decryption, using the skills of the art historian, of certain patterns in ancient Zoroastrian and modern Parsi religious practices, the manipulation of sacred space, and some surviving customs. Finally, D. Buyaner examines another aspect of the Persian-Zoroastrian heritage, and specific mystical trends within it — trends observable in other I-E contexts. I assume that Emily Lyle’s conference contribution, in which she refines her radically shaped “Edinburgh reference set” (with specific reference to an investigation of “the young goddess” theme) will be published in a later issue of this journal.

This was a stimulating, lively, and highly productive meeting, and I hope that this selection of papers will successfully show the range, the variety, and the ingenuity of the approaches to Indo-European themes and contexts that were revealed in Edinburgh.

Dean Miller