

Indian “hero-stones” and the Earliest Anthropomorphic Stelae of the Bronze Age

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Having taken as starting point the suggestion made by Alexander Zaitsev and K. Jones-Bley that the earliest North Pontic anthropomorphic stone stelae of the late 4th and 3rd millennium BC may be perceived as visual representations of the IE formula “undying/unfading fame”, the author then demonstrates that both the tradition of memorial stelae for fallen heroes and the use of Indo-European poetic formulae expressing a worldview of “pastoral heroism” were inherited by the archaic culture of the Indo-Aryans. Contrary to widespread opinion, the use of the “undying fame” formula is not limited to one or two contexts in the Rigveda. This formula, in a slightly modified form, was used in Sanskrit epic poetry. Indian “hero-stones” which have been erected since very old times in regions inhabited by warlike nomadic cattle-herders, are considered by the author to be a branch of the Bronze-age Eurasian tradition of anthropomorphic stelae. Indian memorial stones are the object not only of archaeological, but also of ethnological studies; at some places hero-stones continue to function in their original cultural context, the symbolic meaning of their design is transparent and we may use them as an explanatory model in order to elucidate the semantics and function of Bronze-age Eurasian memorial monuments. Basic Indian terms designating hero-stones reveal their IE antiquity, being in particular connected with the well-known IE formula “keep safe (our) men/heroes and livestock” (**uih₂ro-pek₂* + **pah₂*). Variants of this formula have been found in the Śatarudriya hymn of the Yajurveda and even in the Mahābhārata. All this makes the author believe that the specific worldview of “pastoral heroism”, which had originated in the Eurasian steppe-belt in the Early Bronze age, survived in India over several millennia, existing side by side with the mainstream Vedic-Hindu complex of ideas.

About 150 years ago the discovery of the Indo-European (IE) formula the “undying fame” (cf. Vedic

śrávas ákṣitam and Hom. κλέος ἄφθιτον; see: Kuhn 1853) started a search for other elements of the IE poetic language. Soon IE formulas were identified for the “great fame” (Ved. *māhi śrávas* and Hom. μέγα κλέος) and the “wide fame” (Ved. *urú śrāvas* and Hom. κλέος εὐρύ), combinations of the word for “fame” with particular verbs (IE **dheh_r* [**dhē-*], **bher-*), etc. Scholars have reconstructed a set of heroic notions and a complex of verbal expressions that may remind us of the oral-poetic “theme” as it was understood by M. Parry and A. Lord (Lord 1960).

Both linguistic and archaeological data lead us to the conclusion that the specific set of notions and verbal expressions came into existence most probably during the Copper and Early Bronze periods in the western part of the Eurasian steppe where the linguistic ancestors of both Greeks and Indo-Aryans had lived together, in a kind of cultural unity, and where, at the same time, mighty chiefdoms were emerging and metal weapons, fortifications and other signs of frequent wars were discernible; in other words, it was the beginning of the epoch that could well be viewed by the subsequent generations as the “heroic age”. The exceptional role played in the economy of the period by cattle-breeding leads us to the suggestion that the main object of wars between the steppe tribes might have been good pastures and herds of livestock. The main cultures of this period - the Pit-Grave (Yamnaya), the Kemi-Oba and the Novosvobodnaya (“Majkop-2”) for the first time in history introduced the practice of a chieftain’s or hero’s burial under a high earthen mound (*kurgan*), sometimes with a memorial stone monument at the top.

It is well-known that the ancestors of the Greeks came to Greece from the North-Pontic steppes and brought with them the practice of building large burial mounds with memorial stelae on top of them. The poems by Homer make it quite clear that the mound built in the memory of a hero, was thought to be the embodiment of his fame, κλέος (see e.g. *Odyss.* IV.584). This gave the Russian Classical scholar Alexander Zaitsev (1986) and, later, K. Jones-Bley (1990) grounds to suggest that the

earliest anthropomorphic stone stelae of the late 4th and 3rd mill. BC found in large numbers in the North Pontic region (see Figure 1, 1) could equally be perceived as visual representations of the IE formula “undying fame”. Of course, due to the scarcity of the data, suggestions of this kind are deemed to remain purely speculative until they can be supported by more weighty arguments.



Figure 1. Animals and/or women in the lowest panel.

1. Hero-stone from Karnataka (South India). In the lowest panel the hero defends the cows from raiders. The middle panel shows the hero ascending heaven in the company of two Apsarās. The highest panel contains the picture of the hero’s apotheosis. The Government Museum, Bangalore (after Thapar 1981).

2. Cattle-raid stones from Naygavpeth, Maharashtra (after Memorial Stones 1982). In the lowest panel: the cows are mourning over their fallen defender.

3. Hero-stone from Bavde, Maharashtra. In the lowest panel, the hero’s wife, mourning over his body, and the Apsarās with

flower garlands. The composition reminds one of that of the "cows' lament" (after Settar and Sontheimer 1982).

4. The "Idol from Kernosovka" (Ukraine), front side. In the lower panel, below the belt, there are two horses and a square enclosure or pen for livestock. Bronze Age (after Mallory 1989, plate 27).

5. Anthropomorphic stela from the Apsheron Peninsula, Azerbaijan. Some animals can be seen in the lowest panel (below the belt). Bronze age (after Leus 2007).

6. Anthropomorphic stela from Hakkari (South-eastern Turkey). Noteworthy are the shepherd's crook, the animal (deer) in the lowest panel, a woman's figure "stuck" under the belt and a goblet or cup in the right hand of the figure. The horned animal to the left of the figure's head may be a symbol of a god (animal symbols representing heavenly gods were well-known in the region in the Bronze Age) or, if the animal is a mountain goat, it may merely symbolize the ascent of the person represented to the highest sphere of the Universe. All these details reappear on some other stelae from the same site. Late Bronze Age (after Leus 2007).

For an indologist it was tempting to check the hypothesis with the use of the Indian data. First of all, it seemed reasonable to ask two questions: 1. Does the formula *śrávas ákṣitam* have any continuation in the Sanskrit texts after the Rigveda? And: 2. are there any visual correspondences to this formula in Indian art and culture?

The "undying fame" formula stands isolated in the RV, it looks like a survival of or a borrowing from some other tradition. After the RV it never reappears in the Vedic texts. But a related formula is used in the Great Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, which originally belonged to the warriors' (kṣatriya) tradition. The difference is that the Vedic word *śrávas* is replaced everywhere by its epic synonym *kīrti*, which had taken its position in combinations with the standard epithets derived from the same verb *kṣīṇāti*, with the negative prefix *a-*. Instead of the Vedic *śrávas ... ákṣitam* (RV I. 9.7) the Epic has *kīrtiḥ... akṣayā* (Mbh III. 221.76; V. 121.7; 02*179.9), instead of *ákṣiti śrávaḥ* (RV I.40.4; VIII. 103.5; IX. 66.7) – *akṣayā kīrtiḥ* (Mbh XII. 54.28; 320.36). The epic formula is used in the context of the specific poetic "theme" connected with the

mythic notion of the fallen hero's bliss in heaven – the notion which in the time of the epic's composition was, as it seems, still popular in some circles of the society in spite of the fact that from the point of view of both Vedic and Hindu values the concept looked like an archaic survival; such kind of bliss was no longer regarded as an aim to be pursued.

As far as the material expressions of the same concept are concerned, a search in the Sanskrit sources, including even the Great Epic, gives no results. But a further search leads to the conclusion that we can recognize such expressions in the artistic form that has existed for centuries and has partly survived even to our days on the periphery of the Hindu (Sanskritic) culture. I mean the so called memorial stones, or “hero-stones” that have been erected in the Western Punjab, Saurashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal for centuries, beginning at least in the 3rd century BC (the date of some recent finds in Tamilnadu).¹ The territories with the hero-stones form a kind of belt around the subcontinent. They have something in common: we often find in them cattle-breeding societies with strong vestiges of an archaic social organization and traditions of cattle-raiding. Interestingly, there are no “hero-stones” in Madhyadeśa. i.e. the northern part of Uttar Pradesh, the cradle of the Vedic (Brahminic) civilization.

It should be noted that in about half of these territories people speak non-Aryan, mostly Dravidian languages. But as a rule in these languages the basic terms referring to the hero-stones are of Indo-Aryan origin (as, e.g., the term which Europeans translate as “hero-stone” – Tamil *virā(k)kal* where the Dravidian *kal* “stone” is

¹Announcement of the discovery made by scholars of the Tamil University, Thanjavur, appeared in “The Hindu” on 5th April, 2006. Later in the same month the highest authority on the Tamil epigraphy, Iravatham Mahadevan assigned the Tamil Brahmi inscriptions on the hero-stones to the end of the 3rd - early 2nd century B.C., on paleographic evidence (Mahadevan 2006; see also: <http://thehindu.com/2006/04/29>). The earliest Tamil works of the Śāngam age (3rd cent. BC - 3rd cent. AD) refer to the erection of the hero stones as an established custom (Memorial Stones 1982: 52).

combined with the Indo-Aryan, and even the IE term for a man=hero: Skt. *vīra*, IE **uih₂ro*).

Some scholars have suggested earlier that the tradition of the hero-stones might be connected in their origin with the Megalithic culture (Srinivasan 1946; Sontheimer 1976; Thapar 1981: 294-295; Memorial Stones 1982: 186) whose early monuments are dated now to the 13th-12th centuries BC (Allchin and Allchin 1982: 243-245). This culture of Western and South India, in its turn, was linked to some cultures of Iran, the Caucasus and ultimately to the "Kurgan" cultures of the North Pontic steppes in the early Bronze age (Deo 1973; Leshnik 1974; Allchin and Allchin 1982: 242): so it could possibly represent one of the non-Vedic waves of Aryan migration to India. One may suggest that some of these tribes lost their Indo-Aryan speech and were assimilated by the Dravidians but left them a legacy of some specific elements of culture (cf. Parpola 1973; 1984: 320).

The whole symbolism of the hero-stones reproduces the archaic Indo-Aryan mythic concept of a fallen hero ascending to heaven to enjoy posthumous bliss in the company of the gods (Figure 1). As it is often mentioned in the Sanskrit epic, the bliss continues as long as the glory of the hero is still alive. In this connection the pictorial motif of the Sun and the Moon which is very often present on the hero-stones is worthy of mention. Local informants in different parts of India agree in their explanation of this motif: as long as the Sun and the Moon appear in the sky, the glory of the hero will not die (see, e.g.: Thapar 1981: 296-97, 305; Memorial Stones 1982: 252-253).

This gives us sufficient grounds to connect the hero-stones with the ancient "undying fame" formula. But there is also direct linguistic evidence for it. Along with many local terms for a hero-stone there is a general one which was in use in different parts of India – *kīrtistambha* "the post of fame". The terms *stambha*, *khambha*, *khambhi* in some local languages may be regarded as its shortened forms. As it has been said, *kīrti* "fame, glory" is a substitute for the ancient *śrāvas* in the post-Vedic language. There is also another important term connected with the hero-

stones: the horrible mask of anger that often appears in the upper part of Indian memorial stones bears the name *kīrtimukha* “the face of Glory”, the term that until now could not have been explained semantically on the basis of Indian sources; now it can be understood as the face of the *kīrtistambha* i.e. of a memorial stela, or rather the face of *kīrti* – of the hero’s “undying fame” which is embodied in it.

These Indian terms related to the hero-stones significantly add probability to the suggestion made by A. Zaitsev and K. Jones-Bley that the remote ancestors of both Greeks and Indians who lived in the North Pontic region about 5000 years ago too might have regarded the stone stelae erected in memory of the heroes, as embodiments of their “undying fame”.

But the importance of the Indian hero-stones is not limited to this linguistic evidence. The tradition of the earliest Eurasian anthropomorphic stelae² has been dead for millennia, and nobody can explain to us the meaning of its symbolism. Even early Greek art existed in a non-literate society, and we can only make guesses at its symbolic meaning. The tradition of Indian memorial stelae, with its millennia-long history, is still alive, some of the hero-stones continue to function in their original cultural context, and we may use them as an explanatory model, in order to elucidate the semantics and function of both Greek and the Bronze-age Eurasian memorial monuments.

Let us first have a look at the structure, semantics and function of the Indian hero-stones. Their composition can be very simple, reduced sometimes to a figure of a hero with his weapons, or a scene of his fight with an enemy. But more common are complex, multi-panelled compositions. Such a composition is often crowned with the *kīrtimukha*. In a standard composition (Figure 1), the

²By “Eurasian anthropomorphic stelae” we refer here not only to North Pontic memorial monuments, but also to the the stelae of North Mediterranean (Southern France, Switzerland, Northern Italy), South-Eastern Turkey (see Sevin 2000; Sevin and Özfirat 2001; Sevin 2005), South Arabia (Rodionov 1997; Vogt 2006) and Central Asia (Chemurchek culture of Altai: Kovalev 2007) genetically related to them.

lower panel usually contains the picture of the hero’s last fight; in the middle panel two heavenly maidens, the Apsarās, attend the fallen warrior in his ascendance to heaven; the upper panel, under the *kirtimukha*, depicts the hero enjoying bliss in a heavenly paradise. If he is a devotee of Shiva, he is usually shown sitting beside the lingam. If he belongs to another religious cult, the hero is shown worshipping his chosen god or enjoying bliss in the closest proximity to him. But sometimes the hero is himself shown practically as a god: sitting on a throne and accepting worship. He may be attended, in heaven, by the Apsarās, or by his wife (if she became a *satī*, i.e. joined him in the cremation on the funeral pyre).

One thing should be particularly stressed: many hero-stones in Western and South India were erected in memory of the local warriors who died defending the herds of their community from cattle-raiding (or taking part in such a raid on the herds of their neighbors). The earliest hero-stones, recently found in the extreme South of India, contain inscriptions in the Tamil Brahmi script, and one of them explicitly says that this stone was erected in order to glorify the local hero who had been killed in a cattle-raid³. In the other regions of India several early inscriptions on the hero-stones in the same way connect the death of the heroes with cattle-raids (Skt *go-grahana*, Kannada *туру-гоļ* etc.)⁴. In later periods some hero-stones show, on the lower panel, the hero defending the herd against the attacking enemies. But more often there is one more panel, the lowest one. It represents the object of the fight: the cows. They are shown standing over the prostrate body of the hero with their heads bowed down as if mourning for their fallen defender.

There is also another variant of the fourth, lowest panel that provides us with a perfect compositional parallel of the “cows’ lament” scene, but here we see, instead of the cows, the hero’s wife sitting near her slain husband and the Apsarās who have come down from heaven with

³“The Hindu”, 24 September 2006 (<http://www.thehindu.com/2006/09/24/stories/2006092406750300.htm>).

⁴See, for example, an inscription in the Brāhmī script of the 3-4th cent. AD from Gangaperuru, Andhra Pradesh (Memorial Stones 1982: 210).

garlands of flowers to glorify him (Figure 1.3). The crescent-like garlands in their raised hands look very similar to the horns in the scene of the “cows' lament”. The compositional parallelism between the cows and the female personages is based on the functional parallelism between cows and women in the world-view of the heroic age. Sometimes not the cows, but another object of combat is shown on the hero-stones: the women whom the hero defends from violence. Some hero-stones were specially dedicated, as the inscriptions witness, to the memory of the heroes who fell defending women from rape or molestation by enemies; other inscriptions define the objects of fight as “cows and women” or “women, cows, horses and camels” (see, e.g.: [Memorial Stones 1982: 144, 154,195]).

Some of the stelae, instead of the figure of the hero enjoying the bliss in the heaven of his chosen god, introduce, in the upper panel, the image of the god himself, usually a form of Viṣṇu. Sometimes it is the image of Kṛṣṇa raising Govardhana mountain over his head in order to protect his herds and his people from the heavy rains sent by Indra – which provides an obvious parallel to the defense of his herds by the hero. Another popular image is Viṣṇu in the form of the Man-Lion (Narasimha), tearing with his claws the evil demon-king Hiranyakaśipu. The meaning of this symbolism is clear: the deceased is not only glorified as a true hero: he is likened to a god and, to a certain extent, identified with him.

This is, in the shortest formulation, the symbolic meaning and function of the Indian hero-stones. This concept is practically identical to the general concept of the hero-cult in early Greece (see especially: E. A. Savostina 1988). Moreover, this concept is expressed in the early Greek memorial and funerary monuments (the funerary multi-panelled Geometric style vases, Archaic memorial stelae, kuroi etc.) with the help of the set of specific pictorial motives which display striking parallelism with the corresponding set of motives on the Indian hero-stones.

The motif of *battle*, or a military expedition, or its symbolic equivalents (such as the chariot race, or the

animal fight: the killing of a small animal by a predator) is a common scene represented on the Greek funeral vases and other monuments. The motif of the *cattle-raid* is very popular in India: the Greeks preferred a related topic – *the raping of women* (we know that both in archaic India and early Greece the herds of cattle and women were regarded as related and interchangeable values in myth and in everyday life). As we have seen, in India the cows as the cause of the battle are often shown in the separate, lowest panel. On many Greek Geometric funerary vases, the subject of horses and sometimes bulls or goats grazing on the grass represented on separate panels could be regarded a survival from the same motif.

Another motif was very popular among the Greeks, the motif of *prothesis* – i.e. the mourning of the hero by his wife and other women over his body on his death-bed⁵. We can regard as an Indian equivalent to it the above-mentioned Indian pictorial topic of the hero's wife and the Apsarās mourning over the dead body; the wife is represented in this case with her hand raised up to indicate that she is a *sati*, i.e. is ready to join her slain husband on his funeral pyre. The parallel topic of the "cow's lament" may be viewed as another variant of the Indian "*prothesis*" theme. The same is probably true with reference to the extremely popular, beginning from the post-Gupta period, separate motif of *sati* where both the deceased's body and his wife sitting beside are represented amidst the flames of fire.

Widespread in early Greece (but not in the Geometric period) is the theme of *apotheosis* ("becoming a god") that can be expressed in the picture of a hero feasting (drinking) in the otherworld (see, e.g., Vermeule 1979: 450, Figure 13), or sitting on a throne being worshipped or honored, or wearing a special band around his head which is usually a mark of divinity; or the hero can be merely presented as the young Apollo, which is probably implied by the *kuroi* – the statues of the deceased as a beautiful youth (Savostina 1988: 106-109). All this can be considered as parallel to the motifs that we find on the

⁵See, e.g., Ahlberg 1971.

upper panels of the Indian hero-stones. The difference is that in India the hero in heaven is never shown drinking: this is against classical Hindu cultural norms, but in the pre-classical times the motif was undoubtedly well known.

Regarding the monstrous apotropaic mask of *kīrtimukha*, it has its Greek parallel in the related image of Gorgo (Medusa) which is sometimes substituted, and sometimes accompanied by the image of the sinister Sphinx (Richter 1961: 14, 26, Figure 1-14, 34-65, 83, 84, 96-103, 110-122).

As expected, some of these common Indo-Greek pictorial motifs are present also on the most ancient anthropomorphic stelae of the North Pontic region, as well as on the stelae of similar types from the other regions of Eurasia. Now it is time to mention that the North Pontic stelae⁶ represent only one branch of the tradition which was very widespread, it seems, across Eurasia. In the West we find similar stelae in Southern France, Switzerland and North Italy (see Arnal 1976; Landau 1977; Anati 1977; Guilaine 1990), in the East the Chemurcek culture has been recently discovered in the foothills of the Chinese Altai, where the borders of China, Mongolia and Russia meet (Kovalev 2007). In my brief review I shall sometimes refer to the materials of these traditions.

Among the North Pontic stelae, two contain in their lower parts the scene of the hero's *fight* with the enemy (see Mallory and Adams 1998: 545). On the so called "Idol from Kernosovka" (Figure 1.4) we can see, in the lower part, below the belt, some *animals*: two horses standing in front of an enclosure or a pen for livestock on the face side of the "idol", the bull on its left side (Krylova 1976: 36; Mallory 1989: fig 27; Mallory and Adams 1998: 545). The figures of the two horses are engraved on the back side of the stela from Ak-Chokrak (Crimea). It should be noted that in the North Pontic region the flesh of horses, according to the archaeological evidence, constituted the main kind of meat eaten at that period, so the figures of horses on the stelae might well symbolize the horse-herds. The situation was different, as it seems, in the steppes of

⁶See on them: Häusler 1966; Telegin 1971; Krylova 1976; Mallory 1989: 203-206, 210-221; Figure 27, 119-121; Telegin and Mallory 1994.

Central Asia, where we can see, in the lower parts of the Chemurchek stelae, the figures of bulls (Kovalev 2007: 53, Figure 8 [a stela from Aktubai]).

The attribute of the hero, common to all branches of the ancient Eurasian tradition, is the *shepherd's staff*, or crook (Figure 2).⁷ It is clearly seen in the hands of the heroic figure on the stelae from France (e.g. from Rosseronne and Mas-de-l'Avegle [Smirnov 2004: 80, Figure 10]), from the North Pontic region (e.g. the stelae from Novosyolovka and Novocherkassk [Telegin and Mallory 1995: Figure 5, n. 3; Figure 11, n. 1]) and finally from the Chemurchek culture of Central Asia (e.g. the stela from Utsbulak [Kovalev 2007: 51, Figure 6, n. 3]). Of special interest is the Chemurchek stela from the site of Kainarl where we can see the hero who holds, in his right hand, a shepherd's crook and, at the same time, something looking like a noose or a kind of lasso thrown upon the figure of a running bull (Kovalev 2007: 50, Figure 5, nn. 1, 3). In early Greek art, a shepherd's crook is reinterpreted as a walking staff which should help the deceased in his journey to the underworld, or the spear of a soldier. On Indian hero-stones this attribute, as far as I know, is never present, and this is most probably caused by the specific role played by the staff in classical India – that of an attribute of wandering ascetics.⁸

⁷The motif of the staff, or the shepherd's crook, on the North Pontic and North Mediterranean anthropomorphic stelae is dealt with in a special article (Smirnov 2004) very rich in comparative material. However, the interpretation ultimately suggested by the author, seems to me unacceptable. Having taken for granted the views of some French archaeologists (e.g. Bailloud G., Boujot C., Cassen S., Le Roux C.-T. 1995) A. M. Smirnov regards the staffs to be divine insignia, symbols of magical power and treats the stelae themselves as the statues of female characters (goddesses).

⁸However it is worth noticing that the staff of an Indian religious mendicant may be traced in its origin to the crooked staff as an attribute of the "heroic shepherd". According to some Vedic texts, *danḍa* "staff" is used both for driving cattle (RV VII. 33.6) and for fighting (defense or attack – ŚatBr I.5.4.6; XII.7.3.1). The Vedic student's staff (*danḍa*), according to the "Aparārka" (the oldest commentary on the "Yajñavalkya-smṛti"), is required, among other purposes, for the defense or control of the guru's cattle (*gavādinivāraṇam*), which the student was to tend. Another text ("Gautama-smṛti" I.25) adds that the tip of the student's staff should be curved (Gonda 1965: 263, 265).

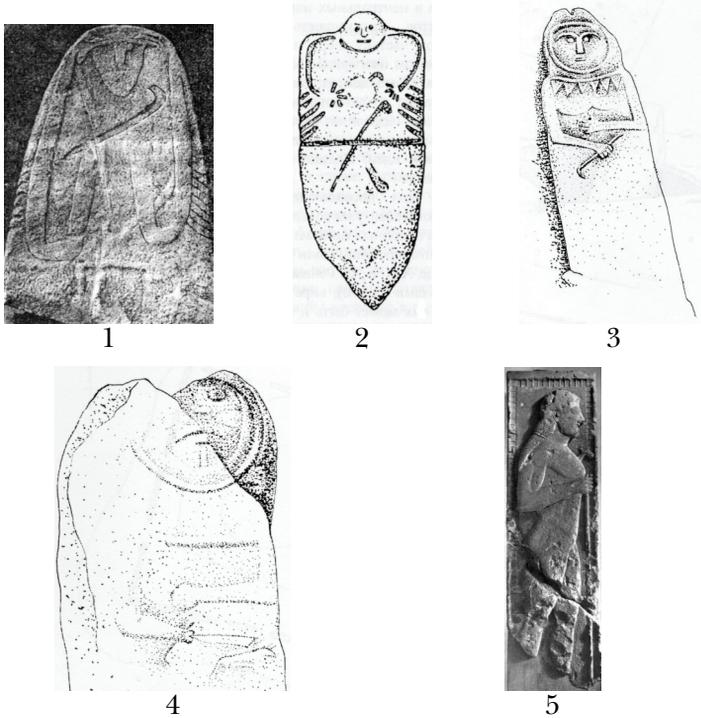
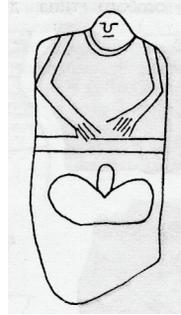


Figure 2. The shepherd's crook.

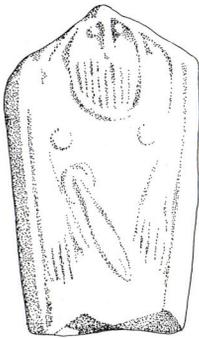
1. Stela from Ronseronne, Southern France (after Smirnov 2004). 2. Stela from Novoselovka (Ukraine), Bronze Age (after Smirnov 2004). 3. Stela from Utsubulak (North China). Chemurchek culture. Bronze Age (after Kovalev 2007). 4. Stela from Kainarl. The Chemurchek culture. The hero is depicted in the process of "controlling" the animal (bull) with the shepherd's crook and something looking like a kind of lasso. Bronze Age (after Kovalev 2007). 5. Archaic Greek stela from Attica (after Richter 1961).



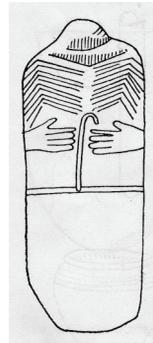
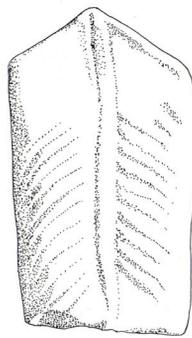
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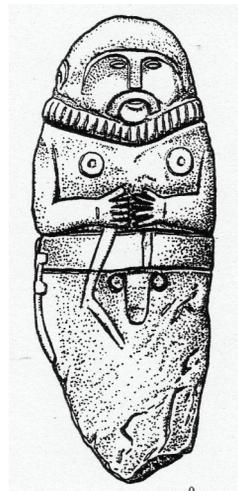
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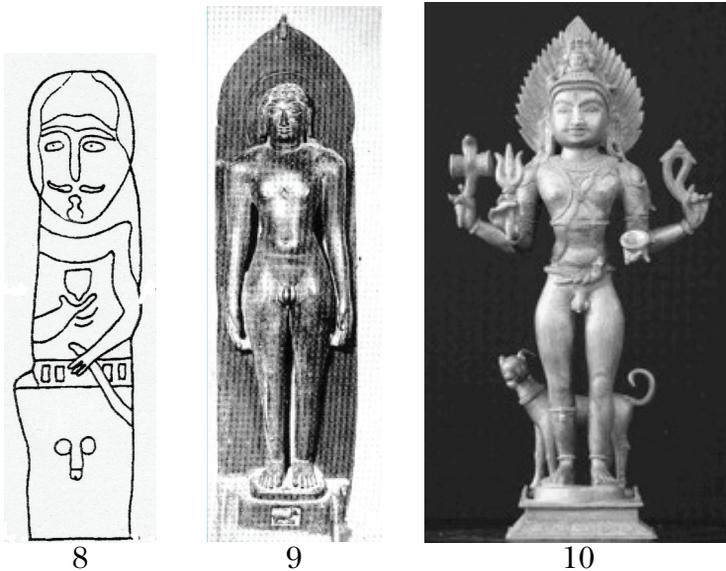


Figure 3. "Heroic nudity".

1. Stela from Mas de l'Avegle (France). The nipples on the breast of this and many other stelae are often misinterpreted as evidence that the stelae represented "goddesses" (after Smirnov 2004). 2. Stela from Dobrudja (Romania), Bronze age (after Danilenko 1974). 3. Front and back views of the stela from Hadramaut (Yemen). Noteworthy are the nipples and the sword of the "phallic" form on the front side, the spine and ribs on the back. Bronze age (after Rodionov 1997). 4. Stela from the Novoчеркассk region (South Russia), showing the ribs and the shepherd's crook between the hands. Bronze age (after Danilenko 1974). 5. Stela of the Chemurchek culture from Sentas, North China. Note the breast muscles and the navel. Bronze Age (after Kovalev 2007). 6. Lower part of the Archaic Greek stela from Attica (after Richter 1961). 7. Nipples and male genitalia on the Scythian statue from the North Pontic region. 6th century BC (after Ermolenko 2008). 8. Turkic statue of a hero from Mongolia. 7th-9th cent. (after Ermolenko 2008). 9. Statue of a Jaina saint. India, 10th cent. BC (after Bhattacharya 1974). 10. Śiva Bhairava. Bronze. South India, 20th century.

One more feature common to all early Eurasian traditions of memorial stelae is the nakedness of the hero, shown either by the demonstration of the genitals, or ribs,

breast muscles and nipples (Figure 3). The last detail has been misunderstood by specialists in the Aeneolithic and Bronze age stelae of France, who recognized in the figures on the stelae female images (goddesses; see e.g. Arnal 1976: 213; Smirnov 2004: 68). The tradition to emphasize the hero's nudity was continued in the later Scythian and even some Mediaeval Turkic memorial statues in the steppes; it also survived in early Greece⁹. And again, India is different: the classical norms did not permit one to show a hero in his nakedness. But there is a significant exception: the statues of Jaina teachers and ascetics – the *tirthankaras* – are always nude. We can explain this by the suggestion that the ancient Jaina ideal of a *tirthankara* was formed under the influence of the archaic Indo-Aryan concept of heroism that originally might have included the notion of "heroic nudity". The definition of the *tirthankaras* as *jina* "conqueror", the terms for the religious community (*saṃgha*) and its divisions (*gaṇa*), borrowed from the warriors' tradition of non-Vedic Aryans – all these features betray the strong influence of the heroic world-view. As we know, even the constant epithet of the greatest teacher of Jainism – *Mahāvīra*, "the Great Hero", contains the term *vīra* which is a normal designation, in

⁹The figures of the chariot-riding heroes on the earliest Greek memorial stelae from Mycenae dated 1600 – 1500 BC, are nude (Mylonas 1951), the tradition is then continued by the warriors' figures on the Geometric vases (Ahlberg 1971), by the figures of young heroes on the Archaic stelae of Attica (though in this period warriors are represented sometimes as dressed and armored [Richter 1961]) and by *kouroi* – the memorial statues of the youths (standing in a strictly frontal pose) of the Archaic period (late VIII-V centuries BC; see, e.g., Richter 1959: 47-84). The hero *par excellence* – Heracles and the heroes in general were depicted mostly nude in early Greek art (the so called "heroic nudity"). The participants in competitive games (such as the famous Olympics), connected both with the hero cults and the concept of "undying fame", originally wore no clothes, and as it seems, it was closer to the Classical period that they began to wear loincloths. As the author of a special paper on the subject formulates, "nudity survived in Greek athletics because it was supported by heroic tradition and religion" (Mouratidis 1985: 232). The early Greeks, according to him, "believed that there was in nudity something heroic and sacred". He traces the origin of this belief to the prehistoric practices of "warrior-athletes", where nudity was used for aggression and apotropaic purposes, and even to the pre-human, animal behavior (Ibid., pp. 221ff.).

the Indian culture, of the character shown on hero-stones.

Inside the Hindu tradition, nudity is a specific characteristic of Bhairava – a form of Śiva, which is supposed to be a continuation of Śiva’s archaic forerunner – the wild god Rudra (see Figure 3, no. 10). The image of Bhairava may also be viewed as a result of the generalization which made it possible to include into the system of Hinduism the gods of a specific type worshipped by some pastoral ethnic groups in many regions of Western, Central and South India. Every god of this class was originally a deified local hero (often with a hero-stone of his own); he was usually perceived as the leader of a “wild hunt”, head of a host of violent demoniac spirits (e.g. Marathi *bahan vīr* - “fifty-two vīrs”). The bhaktas of such gods as Khaṇḍobā in Maharashtra or Mailār in Karnataka form militant brotherhoods and behave in ritual contexts like the “dogs of god”. G. D. Sontheimer has convincingly demonstrated some striking similarities between the mythologies of Khaṇḍobā/ Mailār/Mallaṇṇa and ancient Rudra, as well as between the practices of the pastoral gods’ bhaktas and the ancient vrātya brotherhoods (Sontheimer 1987). These similarities can be explained only by the suggestion of direct continuity between modern pastoral cults and the Rudra religion of the ancient vrātyas. The spread of the archaic tradition of non-Vedic Aryans over the Deccan and South India is probably evidenced by the archaeological Megalithic culture representing in its early forms nomadic militant communities of horsemen followed by their dogs (Sontheimer 1984: 162, fn. 18). Warrior brotherhoods similar to ancient vrātas left obvious traces in the great epic of India – the Mahābhārata (see Vassilkov 2009).

Another example of male nudity in the Indian culture is connected with the same set of notions. The so-called gaṇas – the retinue of Śiva, members of his host – gaṇa (without doubt inherited by him from older Rudra) are usually depicted in classical art as nude (or almost nude), very young (in fact, childish) and having a halo of curly hair, or a hairstyle resembling the Rastafarian dreadlocks (see, e.g.: L’Âge d’or 2007: 269, pl. 78; 273, pl. 81). This feature links the gaṇas with the young warriors’

brotherhoods (and the modern teenager gangs) all over the world, but, at the same time, with ancient Indian *vṛātyas* who are repeatedly described in the Vedic sources as *keśin-s* – “long-haired ones”. It is worth noticing that in the *Mahābhārata* Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who are of the same age-group and probably share some common initiatory experience, call each other with meaningful nicknames: Guḍakeśa “with the ball of hair” (for Arjuna) and Hṛṣikeśa “with the halo of sticking out hair” (for Kṛṣṇa).

Marco Polo mentions in his book (chapter clxxiv) that in the land of Ma’abar (an old Muslim name for Coromandel coast – the eastern coastline of the Deccan, south of Madras-Chennai) men used to go to battle stark naked with only a lance and a shield. The Venetian saw the reason for this in the hot climate; we too could be satisfied with this simple explanation, but we already know that the traditions of “pastoral heroism” were still very much alive in mediaeval South India, and this gives us grounds to suggest that the strange custom of the Ma’abar warriors could have been a survival of the ancient “heroic nudity” concept on Indian soil (cf. Mouratidis 1985: 223, 225).

* * *

All this gradually draws us to the conclusion that the earliest anthropomorphic stelae of Eurasia can be considered a common source not only of the Greek and Indian memorials, but also of the other Eurasian traditions of heroic stelae and statues. A closer look at the earliest stelae enables us to see that their composition contains germs of development in two main directions. On the one hand, an early stela is an anthropomorphic figure, but on the other, the horizontal lines of the necklace and the belt divide it into hierarchical panels (tiers), and these panels tend to become “thematic”: the weapons and prestige symbols are usually placed between the necklace and the belt; the fight scene is always in the lower part of the stela; the animals are also in the lower part or at the very bottom. This tendency to the “panelization” of the whole composition will later find its full expression in the

Greek Geometric vases and the Indian hero-stones with their hierarchy of thematic panels, but also in the so-called “deer-stones” of the Eurasian steppe dating to the 2nd–beginning of the 1st millennium BC. The difference is that whereas the Greek vases and the Indian hero-stones have lost their anthropomorphic features completely¹⁰, the deer-stones retain a certain measure of a reduced, conventional anthropomorphism: three diagonal lines on the thin side mark the “face”¹¹, in the upper part of the left and right sides, two circles signify “ear-rings”, the horizontal lines around the monument still remind us of the necklace and the belt; but all these features look like *survivals* of anthropomorphism, and the whole composition is perceived rather as a cosmological pattern (see, e.g., Podol’skij 1987; 131; Kilunovskaya, Semenov 1998-99) . The origin of the deer-stones has remained a mystery until now; some scholars (e.g., Chlenova 1984: 56-60; Savinov 1994: 152-154) have compared them to the Bronze age stelae of the North Pontic region and North Italy, but the enormous distance separating their Central Asian homeland from Europe made impossible any thought of a genetic connection. Now, the discovery of the ancient Chemurchek stelae precisely in the same region of Central Asia where the tradition of the deer-stones originated in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC will make the suggestion of the genetic link look much more probable in the eyes of scholars. The movement of the biologically closely related groups of people from the North Pontic region to Central Asia in the 3rd millennium. BC, and then backwards, from the East to the West in the second half of the 2nd mill. BC has been now convincingly traced by

¹⁰There are some rare exceptions such as a *pālia* stone of the Gamit tribe from South Gujarat: it has the form of a human figure with broad shoulders and the semi-circular head; but instead of the face there is, as it seems, the solar (or the composite solar-lunar) symbol. On the neck there is a massive necklace and below – the figure of the hero on horseback, with his sword and spear, ready for the battle (see: Memorial stones 1982: Figure 10 for the paper by H. Shah “Tribal Memorials in Gujarat”).

¹¹According to one of many explanations, this specific treatment of the face may be explained by reference to the battle paint of the Steppe warriors (Yu. S. Khudyakov quoted in: Savinov 1994: 21).

means of physical anthropology (Kozintsev 2007). This movement practically coincides with the spread of the Bronze Age stelae from Europe to Central Asia and the subsequent spread of the “deer-stones” in the opposite direction.

Another artistic tradition of Eurasia that can be traced in its origin, but through another line of development, to the same earliest memorial stelae, is represented by *Scythian* memorial statues (dating from the 8th century BC). In general, they follow, as their face sides are concerned, the iconography of the ancient stelae¹² but introduce one novelty: a cup or a goblet appears in the right hand of the hero, which is, no doubt, a variant of the apotheosis motif, the motif of the hero's feast in heaven¹³. Some scholars (e.g. Shultz 1976: 220-221; Chlenova 1984: 60) had earlier suggested the possibility of a genetic connection between the Scythian statues and the Bronze age stelae, but the differences in their general form and in the details such as the above-mentioned goblet made the suggestion open to doubt. At the end of the 20th century the series of eight anthropomorphic stelae was discovered in the south-easternmost corner of Turkey, in the city of Hakkari. Their date is approximately the second half of the 2nd millennium BC (see Sevin 2000; Sevin, Özfirat 2001: 22-23; Schachner 2001: 131; Sevin 2005; Leus 2007: 59). They look very much like the Bronze Age stelae, being nude (or almost nude), having similar faces, necklace, sets of weapons, belts, the figures of fighters or animals below the belt, etc. But there are also significant differences, e.g. the cup or goblet appears in the right hand of a hero, and the “shepherd's crook” has been replaced by a spear or a bow. The Hakkari stelae demonstrate how the Bronze Age stelae with their design incised or done in low relief, under the obvious influence of Near Eastern art, turn into deeply cut reliefs, as if being half way towards the Scythian memorial statues.

¹²In the early phase, they have a face with the “grimace of fury”, necklace, weapons, and in some later traditions – elements of “heroic nudity”, pastoral attributes, such as whips or lashes, etc.

¹³And, at the same time, the symbol of the hero's “large share” or “great lot” in his earthly life.

It is remarkable that the iconography and symbolism of the Scythian statues is partly continued throughout the Middle Ages by the tradition of the Turkic tribes of the steppes. This and the persistence of the Indian memorial stones' tradition up to the present day give us some grounds to say that the ancient concept of heroism which had been expressed, for the first time, in the earliest anthropomorphic stelae, continued to exist in Eurasia in some form for about five millennia among the peoples speaking many different languages.

Our reconstruction reveals, as it seems, the ancient concept of heroism centered on the image of the hero as defender (and capturer) of the cattle. In the process of this reconstruction we have analysed the data of Indian hero-stones (what can be called historical or even modern anthropological material) and have projected this on the artistic objects of the remotest antiquity. This way of reasoning could be considered rather arbitrary and unsound, but we can refer, in support of this approach, to the data of IE comparative linguistics.

The IE formula “protect men and livestock”

The basic Indian terms for the hero-stones are not merely Indo-Aryan, but IE words: the term *vīra* “hero” in Sanskrit *virastambha* “post/stela of a hero”, Tam. *virakkal*, Kannada *viragal*, Telugu *virakallu* “hero-stone” may be traced to a word in the Indo-European poetic language: **uih₂ro-* “full of vitality, young; marriageable adult (about the age of 20); man, husband” (Mallory and Adams 1997: 366, 531, 548). The basic term for “post/stela” - Sanskrit *stambha/skambha* and its continuations in the Modern Indian languages (*thambha*, *khambha*, *khambhi*, *khambi*) go back to the IE pair of interrelated verbs: **stembh-* and **skambh-* (Pokorny 1959: 916, 1011-1013). The term widespread in Gujarat and Maharashtra: *pāliya* (with variants: *pāliya*, *pavaliya khambi*) “[stela] for the defender” is connected with Sanskrit *pāla* “defender” which has also a specialized meaning of “herdsman” (as in *gopāla* “cowherd”); this trail leads us eventually to the IE verbal root **pah₂-* “to defend, protect”. The same IE root is present in the Russian verbs *pasti* “to graze, keep watch

of”, *spasat* ‘to save’ and the nouns: OldSlav *pastyr*’, Russ. *pastukh*, Latin *pāstor* all meaning “shepherd”.

It is highly remarkable that some of the roots used in India with reference to hero-stones, appear on the level of the common proto-IE poetic language in the context of the formulae which express the concept of defending cattle. For example. *vīra* in the Rigveda constitutes the first element in the compound *virapśá*- m. “abundance” (<* *vīra-ṛśv-á* - “rich in men and livestock”). The parallels found in Avestan (*pasu vīra*), Umbrian (*uiro pequo*) and Latin (*pecudesque virosque*) reveal the IE formula **uih_xro-peku-* / **peku- uih_xro* “men (and) livestock”, first discovered by J. Wackernagel in 1910 (see Wackernagel 1953: 280; Schmitt 1968: 30-33; cf. Watkins 1979; Watkins 1995: 15, 42-43; Mallory, Adams 1997: 23; Watkins 2000: 63, 101; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: 470-471). Subsequently C. Watkins reconstructed a larger formula in which this pair of words is governed by a verb:

**uih_xro-peku-* / **peku- uih_xro* + **pah₂-*

PROTECT (**pah₂-*) MEN (**uih_xro*) (and) LIVESTOCK
(**peku-*)

This formula is represented in four IE languages belonging to two branches of the family: Indo-Iranian (Avestan, Vedic) and Roman (Latin, Umbrian). As Watkins demonstrates, this formula underwent, in different traditions, certain historical changes: Latin and Vedic have independently substituted other words for MEN: *pastores pecuaque* (Early Latin prayer to Mars), *púruṣam paśúm* AV VIII.7.11, *púruṣān paśūn* AV III. 28.5,6; in the Iranian tradition one of the gāthās ascribed to Zarathushtra (Y. 46.2) introduces instead of *vīra-* another term for “man” – *nar-* (Watkins 1995: 15). The original verb **pah₂-* was substituted in Vedic and Avestan by the Indo-Iranian verb **trā-*:

trāyantām ...púruṣam paśúm
...protect...man, beast... (AV 7.7.11)

θrāθrāi pasuuá vīraiiá
...for the protection of cattle and men... (Yt. 13.10)

However, in spite of all these substitutions, the formula “preserved the essential unity intact” (Watkins 1995: 42).

Of special interest to us are the Italic variants of the formula which use, instead of **pah₂*, the verb **ser-* “to preserve, protect” (or, as Watkins sees it, a two-part phrase “keep safe”):

pāstōrēs pecuaque salva servāssīs
 (I pray that) you keep (*servāssīs*) shepherds
 (*pāstōrēs*) and livestock (*pecuaque*) safe
 (Early Latin prayer to Mars)

uīro pequo salua seritu
 may he keep (*seritu*) men (*uīro*) (and) livestock
 (*pecuaque*) safe (*salua*)
 (Umbrian prayer from the Tables of Iguvium)

Watkins considers this substitution to be an Italic innovation, but the use of the same verb by the Avestan texts in the meaning of protection with reference to cattle (see e.g. the expression *pasuš.haurvō spā* “the dog guarding cattle/sheep; shepherd dog”) allows us to suggest that the variant of the formula with the verb **ser-* already existed already in Indo-European. This verb is particularly relevant to our reconstruction of the most ancient heroic values, because it probably was the basis on which the ancient Greek and later common European term for the “hero” was coined: Gr. *hērōs* from IE **sēr-ōs* “protector” (Pokorny 1959: 910; Watkins 2000: 76).

The IE formula **uih_xro-pekū- + *pah₂* in the Śatarudriya

The brilliant and fruitful reconstruction of the IE verb phrase **uih_xro-pekū- + *pah₂*, done by C. Watkins, has one weak point. In his own words, “none of the four languages shows a direct reflex of the verb **pah₂* ‘protect’ in the formula”. He restores **pah₂* “as a likely candidate for the Indo-European lexical expression” only because it is often used in Indic and Iranian in the meaning of “protecting”, “defending”, “keeping safe”, especially with reference to the herds of cattle. Another line of his

reasoning is the appeal to what he calls “the associative semantics (contiguity relations)”: e.g. *pās-tōrēs* in the Latin variant of the formula “may be a formulaic echo of **pah₂*”. As the scholar himself saw it, “to expose such formulaic links, which constitute a potentially vast network, is one of the important tasks of the future for the Indo-European comparatist-littérateur” (Watkins 1995: 213).

Following this path, it has become possible to find in the Indic texts, both Vedic and Post-Vedic, reflections of the same formula **uih_xro-pekū-* + **pah₂*, which, as it seems, have escaped the attention of C. Watkins.

There is a poetic theme in the Vedic texts, which provides a striking parallel to the Italic prayers to Mars (Early Latin) and Jupiter (Umbrian of the Iguvian Tables). This theme may be defined as a prayer to Rudra – the ambivalent (both deadly and benevolent to humans) god of the Vrātyas and the heroic shepherds (*vīra*). The formulaic sequence which is of special interest to us appears once in the hymn to Rudra RV 114. 8-10, and then in the variants of the well-known hymn “Śatarudriya” from the Saṃhitās of the Yajurveda. Even before discovering the formulaic affinity between the Indian and the Italic texts, the reader is surprised at the common mood of these litanies – the mixed feeling of horror and the hope for the god’s mercy. Then comes the realization that the text contains the familiar IE formula:

mā no gōṣu mā no āśveṣu ririṣaḥ |
vīrān mā no rud(a)ra bhāmitō vadhīr |

Harm not our cattle, (harm) not our horses;
slay not in anger our men (heroes), o Rudra...
(RV I. 114. 8bc = Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.5.10.3)

The text of Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā (XVI. 16) differs in one detail:

vīrān mā no rudra bhāminó vadhīḥ...

Slay not our angry men (or: our heroes in their fury), o Rudra...¹⁴

¹⁴The possibility of such a reading puts to doubt the widespread opinion

At first sight it may seem that these verses have nothing in common, except the word *vīra*, with the formula **uīh₂ro-pekū-* + **pah₂*; in particular, any direct reflex of **pekū-* is absent. Instead of the expected pair *paśu* - *vīra* we see here the sequence: cattle (*go-*), horses (*áśva-*) and men/heroes (*vīra-*). But this does not obviate the identity of the phrase with the IE formula. We have to take into account the historical changes of its lexical garb on Indian soil: in the language of the Rig- and Atharvaveda *paśu* as the term for ‘livestock’ tends to be substituted by the “bipartite asyndetic” expression *gávo áśvāḥ* which stands for the most important ‘large cattle’ (German *Grossvieh*) and, as *pars pro toto*, for the cattle in general (see Watkins 1975: 278-279; Watkins 1994: 653-654). There are in the Rigveda direct indications to this meaning, e.g. in RV I. 83.4: *áśvāvantaṃ gómantaṃ á paśúm náraḥ* “the men (drove) in the cattle: horses (and) cows”, or RV X.48.4: *etám gavyáyam áśviyam paśúm* “this cattle consisting of cows and horses”. This means that the noun phrase “cows(and) horses” is a substitute for *paśu*.¹⁵

The verb too presents a problem. Firstly, “protect” is here expressed negatively: “do not harm/slay”. A Vedic example of the transformation of our formula in the same

that Vedic *vīra* or *puruṣa* in pairs *paśu* - *vīra*, *paśu paśu* - *puruṣa* (cf. *dviṣad* - *catuṣpad*) referred to slaves (“two-footed cattle”). The sacrificer for whom mantras and magic charms were composed - the king or the leader of the Vrātya brotherhood, *sthapati* - was perceived as the “good shepherd” for the community, that is why all its members could be viewed as his “two-footed cattle” whom he “grazed” and defended. But nothing in the texts indicates that the men called *vīra* or *puruṣa* were really slaves. On the contrary, in one of the hymns from the “Vrātya” book of the Atharvaveda (XV. 5.1) it is promised to the sacrificer, “who knoweth thus”, that not Śarva, not Bhava, not Íśāna (the names of Rudra’s *gaṇapatis*) injure him or his cattle (*paśūn*) or his “equals” or “fellows” (*samānan*) - members of the king’s host or of the Vrātya brotherhood.

¹⁵However see RV V.61.5ab ... *áśviyam paśúm / utá gávyam śatāvayam* “the cattle (consisting) of horses and cows, (and) a hundred of sheep”. But as a rule the pair “horses (and) cows” is equivalent to *paśu*. It often supersedes *paśu* in the word combination *paśu* + *vīra*, e.g., *ní vīrám gávyam áśviyam ca rádhah* “[give us] a hero son (*vīrá*) and a gift of kine and horses” (RV VII. 92.3d); *gám áśvam rāsi vīrávat* “give cow (and) horse, (and) abundance of men” (RV IX. 9.9).

way was adduced by C. Watkins:

sá no má hiṃsīt púruṣān paśúmś ca

Let her not injure our men and cattle.

(AV 3. 28.5, 6; Watkins 1995: 212).

Secondly, we do not know what particular verb would be used here in the case of a positive formulation. Certainly, there are some instances in Vedic texts where the meaning of protection with reference to cattle and humans is expressed with the root *pā-*: *paśúñ ca sthāṛñ caráthaṃ ca pāhi* “protect cattle and (all beings) immovable and moving” - RV I. 72.6d; *priyā padāni paśvó ní pāhi* “protect the footprints of cattle, (which are) dear (to us)” RV I. 67.6; *tā no vasū sugopā siyātam / pātāṃ no vṛkād aghāyóh* “Be our good shepherds (lit.: cowherds), ye two gods, protect us from the wicked wolf” – RV I. 120.7. However, all this would not be enough to convince us that *pā-*, and not any other verb, was basic for the variants of the formula **uih_xro-pekū-* + **pah_z* in Vedic. Still there is a way to prove that this really was the case.

In two of the three variants of the Vedic prayer to Rudra (RV I. 114 and Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā XVI. 16) there are direct hints to it. The next stanza immediately following the stanza RV I.114.8 with the formula *má no góṣu má no áśveṣu rīriṣaḥ / vīrān má no rudara bhāmitó vadhīr*, contains the term *paśupá* “shepherd (=protector of cattle)”:

úpa te stómān paśupá ivākara

I drove in (my) laudatory hymns to you like a shepherd
(drives cattle).

(RV I.114.09a)

It is, in fact, a double echo: first, of the original *paśu* (**pekū-*), substituted by the pair *go-* + *áśva-*, and second, of the original verb *pā-* (**pah_z*). The word *paśupá* appears here not as a result of coincidence, but as an example of evocative poetics in action. We see how it works again in the variant of the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā XVI. 16: immediately

after the formula *mā no gōṣu mā no áśveṣu rīriṣaḥ / vīrān mā no rudra bhāmitó vadhīr* in stanza 16.16 there follows, in the next stanza, a chain of “homage!” exclamations which also contains the double echo of the IE formula:

... *dīṣāṃ ca pátaye námo ... paśúnām pátaye námo ...
pathinām pátaye námo ... puṣṭānām pátaye námaḥ //*

And to the Lord of the regions be homage, ... to the
Lord of the cattle homage, ... to the Lord of the paths
homage, ... to the Lord of the well-fed homage!

(Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā XVI.17).

The central element *paśúnām pátaye* “to the Lord of the cattle” reminds the audience (or the addressee of the prayer) the word *paśu* (**pek̑u-*), a basic constituent of the old formula ousted from its present variant. At the same time the echo of another superseded component - *pā-* (**pah₂-*) is evoked on the phonetic level by the repeated combinations of the syllable *pa-* (in *paśúnā* and several times in *pátaye*) with the long vowel *ā* in the genitive plural endings (*paśúnā*, *pathinā*, *puṣṭānām*). This excludes any possibility of coincidence: we see that the millennia-old basic components of the formula, though ousted from its present poetic variation, are still alive in the consciousness of the Vedic poets. The use of associative poetics and phonetic devices is directly connected with the communicational aspect of Vedic poetry and its basic function. A prayer or a laudatory hymn was to be heard and perceived by its addressee (see Elizarenkova 1993: 12, 124-154, 312-313; cf. Elizarenkova 1995). In our case, the poets obviously took precautions, consciously or not, in order to be sure that the addressee would recognize and perceive the old sacred formula in spite of its new lexical and phonetic appearance.

These verses from the Vedic hymn to Rudra, as it seems, give additional weight to the reconstruction of the IE formula **uih₂ro-pek̑u-* + **pah₂-* done by C. Watkins.

The IE formula **uih_xro-pekū* + **pah_ɣ* in Sanskrit epic

In conclusion, a few words must be said about the traces of the IE formula **uih_xro-pekū* + **pah_ɣ* in the epic (Mahābhārata). Of course, in the context of the pan-Indian "battle of nations" at the Field of Kuru, the archaic values seem to be mostly forgotten, and the term *vīra*, for example, means nothing but a heroic warrior¹⁶. But in the background, e.g. in the stories of the Pāṇḍavas' young years, one can find numerous vestiges of the "pastoral-heroic" world view. There are, in particular, several stories of cattle-raids (e.g. Mbh I. 205. 5-23; III. 225-243; IV. 24-62); the heroes, Pāṇḍavas appear in them usually as the protectors of the herds, overcoming the cattle-thieves and bringing the cows back to their owners. In this earlier stratum of the epic content the word *vīra* still retains some archaic shades of meaning. It is often said about the unhappy lot of a *vīra*'s wife who has lost her *vīra*, is *hata-vīrā* or *vīrahīnā*, is often described as now *anāthā* ("without a protector"), helpless against sexual harassment and rape (see, e.g., I. 146.12; III. 225.6; XI. 16.20). One may think that if these epithets (*vīrahīnā* etc.) usually refer to a wife, the basic meaning of *vīra* is "man", "husband". But sometimes such epithets as *vīrahīnā* may be applied to relatives in other categories. Thus it is said that after the massacre of the Yādava heroes in Prabhāsa Arjuna took care about their relatives and, "having gathered old men, children, women and all others who had lost their *vīras* (*vīrair vīhīnān*), ... settled them in Śakraprasthā" (Mbh XVI. 8.68). Here *vīra* obviously means "protector", "defender". The protection as the main function of the *vīra* is revealed by the constant use of this noun with the verbs meaning 'to protect', 'defend', such as *pāl-* (*pālayati*,

¹⁶But, even in this context some basic elements of the "pastoral-heroic" world view are still preserved: the best lot for a warrior is "to lie down on the bed of heroes (*vīraśayanam*)", i.e. to be killed in battle (Mbh V. 125.17; 126.2; VI. 115.34; 116.2; VII. 3.7), to meet the "death of a hero" (*vīravadhā*, III. 238.8), to obtain "the great (earthly) glory" (*mahad yaśaḥ* V. 132.26; VII. 88.59 "to go to the world of heroes" (*vīralokam*, V. 157.12; VII. 166.22; IX. 18.41; 30.40). The verse VIII. 33.56 tells us about the Apsarās taking the fallen heroes one by one on their flying chariots (*vīmāna*) and leaving with them from the battlefield for the heavenly world – the scene presented on many multi-tiered mediaeval hero-stones.

understood as a causative from *pā-* or as a denominative verb from *pāla* ‘protector, ‘herdsman’; but in both cases eventually from **pah₂*’),¹⁷ *gup-* (*gopāyati*, originally formed as a denominative verb from *go-pa* or *go-pā* ‘cowherd’ [Mayrhofer 1956-1976: I, 339-340])¹⁸ or *rakṣ-* (*rakṣati*, sometimes with prefixes *abhi-* or *pari-*).¹⁹

Several contexts connected with cattle-raids demonstrate that a specific and probably most ancient duty of a *vīra* was the protection of cattle and the recovery of stolen cows. In Book IV, the Pāṇḍavas, living in disguise at the court of Virāṭa, king of the Matsya country, help the Matsyas to resist the cattle-raid of the Kauravas and their allies. When Virāṭa’s son, prince Uttara, gets frightened at the sight of the Kaurava army, Pāṇḍava Arjuna, who at the moment acts as his charioteer, reminds the prince of his status of a *vīra* and warns that if he returns home without the cows (*gāḥ*), all men and women will laugh at him (Mbh 4. 36.21). King Virāṭa, having recovered his “treasure of the herd” (*[go]dhanam*) and taking back all the cows (*gāḥ*), enters his capital and at this moment of his triumph is called *vīra* (4. 63.1-3). Prince Uttara, when his father begins to praise him as the victor, says: “It was not I who won back the cattle...everything was done by...that son of a god... He recovered the cows, he vanquished the Kurus: the feat was this hero’s, father, not mine (*tasya tat karma vīrasya*)” (4. 64.20-21). Virāṭa then asks: “Where is he, that hero (*vīra*) of great fame, son of a God, who in battle won back my treasure (of a herd – *[go]dhanam*)?” (4. 64.30).

There are also several instances in the Mbh, where

¹⁷See, e.g.: *vīra tvam prajā dharmeṇa pālaya* “protect your subjects, o hero, according to dharma” (Mbh 5. 145.27); *senām ... vīreṇa pālyamānām* “the army...guarded by the hero” (5.169.10); *raṇe karṇam kuruvīro 'bhyapālayat* “the hero of the Kurus protected Karṇa in the battle” (8. 32.20); *adya rājāsmi .. tvayā nāthena vīreṇa viduṣā pariḥālitāḥ* “I am now the king ... protected by you as (my) wise hero-protector” (8. 69.31).

¹⁸See *guptam vīraiḥ* (4. 36.43; cf. 8. 7.23; 32.19 etc.), *vīraiḥ goḥyamānāḥ* (6. 15.34).

¹⁹E.g., *naḥ parirakṣai 'kavīra* “protect us, o the sole hero!” (1. 223.9); *mām vīraiḥ abhirakṣitām* “me guarded by the heroes” (4. 13.17; words of Draupadī); *na hi paśyāmi taṁ vīraṁ yo me rakṣet sutān raṇe* “I do not see a hero who could protect my sons in battle” (6. 61.10); *tasya kāryaṁ tvayā vīra rakṣaṇam sumahātmanaḥ* “your duty, o hero, is to guard this (man) of great soul” (6. 101.3); cf. 7. 53.27; 87.44; 156.4, etc.

the term *vīra* seems to be very close semantically to *gopāla* “cowherd (= protector of cows)” or *nātha* “protector”. In the Droṇaparvan, Subhadṛā laments over her dead son, Abhimanyu: “While you had Vṛṣṇi heroes (*vīra*), Pañcāla heroes and Pāṇḍavas as [your] protectors (*nātha*), who could kill you as if you were the one who has no protector (*anāthavat*)?” (7. 55.9). When Arjuna in the first book (1. 213.17-18) introduces his new wife Subhadṛā to his first wife Draupadī, the former is characterized as *vīrapatnī* “wife of a hero” and at the same time wears the dress of a cowherd’s wife (*gopālikā*); this detail is motivated by the necessity to demonstrate the humility and obedience to the elder wife (“I am Bhadrā, your servant!”), but the choice of this particular dress is possibly predetermined by the ancient associative link between *vīra* and *gopāla*.

There is also a śloka in which all the three components of the IE formula **uih_xro-pekū-* + **pah_z* seem to meet again (if we see in *go-* a substitute for *paśu*). After the victory over the cattle-raiding Kurus, Arjuna suggests to Uttara that they would go with the good news back to the capital but asks him first to “wait till all the herds of cows (*gokulāni*) and their heroes-herdsmen (*vīragopālakaiḥ saha*) have been collected” (4. 62.8). If *vīragopālakaiḥ* is really, as we see it, a compound²⁰, then all the three roots are present in one word, which, at the same time, demonstrates the unmistakable semantic proximity between *vīra* and *gopāla*.

All this makes us recall the interchangeability of the words *u(e)iro* “men” and *pāstōrēs* “shepherds” in the Italic versions of the formula **uih_xro-pekū-* + **pah_z* (see above). Indian epic evidence gives us some ground to believe that the semantics of **uih_xro-* might include the meaning of “protector”, “defender” even in IE antiquity. There is one more consequence of the same facts related not to the distant past, but to the future. The two popular terms for a hero-stone: *vīrastambha* “stela of a hero” and Western Indian *pāliya* “[stela] of the protector” in this light may be considered almost synonymous.

²⁰The translators usually understand *vīra* here as one more address (in the vocative), in addition to *rājaputra* and *mahābāho*, but in my opinion, the grounds for such a reading are insufficient.

One more epic stanza is worthy of notice here. In the beginning of the Bhīṣmaparvan (Mbh 6.15.49), Dhṛtarāṣṭra, bewailing the loss of Bhīṣma, compares the army of the Kurus, left without its commander, with two parallel objects: a woman who has lost her *vīra* and a herd of cows (*gokula*) that has lost its herdsman (*gopa*). The images in the two upamānas (objects of comparison) imply a parallelism not only between a hero and a cowherd, but also between women and cows – the values which were interchangeable, axiologically equal in the pastoral-heroic worldview of various historical periods (for the pastoralists of South India see, e.g., Dubianski 2007: 275).

To sum up: the IE formula “protect men and livestock” (**uih₂ro-peku-* + **pal₂-*), which is present in the Vrātya hymn “Śatarudriya” from the tradition of the Yajurveda, had left also some distinct traces in the heroic stratum of the great Indian epic – the Mahābhārata.

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