

# Indra: A Case Study in Comparative Mythology

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In an earlier monograph devoted to Heracles we outlined a comprehensive theory of the mythology of the hero.<sup>1</sup> The Greek strongman was chosen for analysis because he reflected the most familiar example of the figure we have designated as the warrior-hero, and because his career offers a classic model against which the careers of other heroes might be compared.<sup>2</sup> For example, we documented numerous parallels between Heracles and Gilgamesh, the latter being the most conspicuous hero in Near Eastern literature. In itself this was nothing new; the same point had been made by numerous scholars before.<sup>3</sup> It was the attempt to trace the traditions of Heracles and Gilgamesh to ancient conceptions associated with the planet Mars that represented a radical departure from the norm in mythological analysis. In short, the thesis was put forward that the mythology of the world's great heroes commemorated—at least in part—the ancient appearance and activities of the red planet in relation to its celestial neighbors.

If the ancients' identification of Heracles with the planet Mars has a rational basis it will provide us with an invaluable foundation upon which to launch a new analysis of ancient mythology. A case in point is the cult of the war-god. Nearly every ancient culture of which we have sufficient record has preserved traditions of a great war-god whose functions included—among other things—leading the battle-charge and defending the kingdom against invasion. The names of several of these gods, such as the Greek Ares and Latin Mars, are well-known to us. Other war-gods, if less familiar, were equally prominent in olden times. In the present essay we will focus our attention on the Vedic war-god Indra. Indra bears all the earmarks of great heroes elsewhere: dragon-slayer, champion of the gods, invincible warrior, enormous appetite, great sinner,

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<sup>1</sup>E. Cochrane, "Heracles and the Planet Mars," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 89-105.

<sup>2</sup>To be distinguished from other heroes, such as the flood-hero or first king, for example. For a discussion of the latter figures see E. Cochrane, "Kronos, Minos, and the Celestial Labyrinth," in *KRONOS* 9:2 (1984), pp. 11-20.

<sup>3</sup>G. R. Levy, "The Oriental Origin of Herakles," *JHS* 54 (1934), pp. 40-53. B.C. Brundage, "Herakles the Levantine: A Comprehensive View," *JNES* 17 (1958), pp. 225-236.

etc.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it is perhaps safe to say that, with the possible exception of Heracles, Indra's career offers the most complete model we have for reconstructing the archetype of the warrior hero.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

It is well-known that the cult of Indra, prominent at the time of the composition of the *Rig Veda*, suffered a significant demotion under the influence of post-Vedic religious reform. The waning of Indra's celebrity coincided with the rise of cults associated with Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, each of whom usurped some of the Vedic functions of Indra.<sup>2</sup> A similar demotion is apparent in Iran, where Indra became relegated to the status of a low-grade demon.<sup>3</sup> Given the degeneration in Indra's status in post-Vedic times, it is our opinion that the *Rig Veda* offers the best guide in reconstructing the god's original cult. This is not to say that the traditions found in the *Atharva Veda*, *Mahabharata*, and numerous other texts are irrelevant to a discussion of Indra's mythus—far from it; only that one must beware of revisionist tendencies in these later texts. Puhvel's commentary on this state of affairs is most relevant:

Late Vedic and post-Vedic tradition, where Indra's godhead progressively declines with the onset and elaboration of Brahmanism, is still replete with increasingly submythological, epic, and folkloric Indra lore, some of it direct succession and elaboration of the Vedas, other parts purveying potentially important ancient para-Vedic tradition, still others probably reflecting the fictional impulses of a later age.<sup>4</sup>

If the vast majority of Indra's deeds can be found in the *Veda*, it is not always a simple matter to interpret their original significance. Not unlike the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts*, the Vedic hymns generally present only the barest outlines of a particular myth, the details of the myth, presumably, being thoroughly familiar to the audience. Moreover, although it forms the oldest body of Indian texts, the *Veda* itself is the product of many authors and bears numerous signs of having undergone a considerable evolution.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is hardly surprising to find that the Vedic traditions—including those involving Indra—display the contradictions and secondary accretions that would be expected given such a history. Dumezil offered the following assessment of the Vedic traditions:

"The authors of the poems who give praise to Indra sometimes make multiple references to the most diverse parts of this tradition, sometimes exalt one particular point, but they do not trouble themselves to present an episode in full, or to establish, between their allusions to several episodes, a logical or chronological nexus; they do not even confine themselves to one variant...or balk at contradictions in the same hymn: what does it matter, when all the versions of these grand events work together for the glory, the 'increasing,' of the god?"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It is significant to note that the epithet *sura*, "hero," is almost exclusively Indra's in the *Rig Veda*. See J. Gonda, *Some Observations on the Relations Between 'Gods' and 'Powers' in the Veda...* ('s-Gravenhage, 1957), pp. 50-51.

<sup>2</sup>A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (New York, 1974), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>A. Carnoy, "Iranian Mythology," in *Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup>J. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1989), p. 53.

<sup>5</sup>According to the *Cambridge Ancient History* the Vedic literature "is not demonstrably older than c. 1000 BCE." See Vol. 1:2, p. 851. According to Jaan Puhvel, it stems from c. 500 BCE. See J. Puhvel, *op cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>G. Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago, 1970), p. 38.

It is with these bare "bones" of ancient cult that we must work if we are to discover the origins of Indra.<sup>1</sup> Comparative mythology here presents an indispensable tool. Like comparative anatomy in biology, comparative mythology allows for the recognition of parallels in seemingly diverse forms from different times and places; and once such parallels are established, the reconstruction of a god's cult can begin, not unlike the reconstruction of a fossil hominid from a few teeth and an occasional bone. If a crucial link in the sacred dossier of Indra has been lost, perhaps it can be recovered from the dossier of some other hero. In this way, and in this way only, in our opinion, is it possible to arrive at a true understanding of the origins of Indra's cult, much of which has been lost or otherwise obscured with the passage of untold millennia.

A summary of Indra's career would include the following mythological motives: (1) his unusual birth and rapid rise to power; (2) the defeat of the dragon Vritra; (3) the winning of the sun and initiation of the dawn; (4) the deliverance of the waters/cows from the mountain-like prison of the dragon; (5) the ordering of the cosmos and the support of heaven; (6) the discovery of Soma, the beverage of the gods. We will summarize each of these events in short order.

### INDRA'S BIRTH

Indra's birth, according to the various accounts of the event, was an occasion of great commotion, the discomfit extending to the domain of the gods themselves: "When he, yea, he, comes forth the firmset mountains and the whole heaven and earth, tremble for terror."<sup>2</sup> The tumultuous nature of Indra's epiphany is also apparent in the following passage:

"Thou art the Mighty One; when born, O Indra, with power thou terrifiedst earth and heaven; When, in their fear of thee, all firm-set mountains and monstrous creatures shook like dust before thee."<sup>3</sup>

The unusual circumstances attending the war-god's birth has frequently drawn the attention of scholars. Ions, for example, observed that: "At the time of Indra's birth from Prithivi's side the heavens, earth and mountains began to shake and all the gods were afraid." The gods feared that Indra "was the herald of great changes in the divine order and possibly of their own doom."<sup>4</sup>

As we will see, the gods had good reason to be alarmed.

Numerous passages relate that soon after his birth Indra assumed the form of a giant warrior whose body spanned the heavens. "Impetuous Indra in his might exceedeth wide vast mid-air and heaven and earth together."<sup>5</sup> A similar passage is the following: "Indra, Impetuous One, hath waxed immensely: he with his vastness hath filled earth and heaven."<sup>6</sup> Most impressive, perhaps, is the following passage: "He filled the earthly atmosphere and pressed against the lights of heaven."<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the *Veda* there seems to be a decided emphasis upon the fact that Indra's sudden growth to gargantuan proportions was nearly instantaneous with his birth:

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<sup>1</sup>Puhvel refers to the Vedic traditions as "faithfully preserved linguistic petrifacts." *op cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>I:61:14

<sup>3</sup>I:63:1

<sup>4</sup>V. Ions, *Indian Mythology* (London, 1968), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>III:46:3

<sup>6</sup>IV:16:5

<sup>7</sup>I:81:5

"Deeming him a reproach, his mother hid him, Indra, endowed with all heroic valor. Then up he sprang himself, assumed his vesture, and filled, as soon as born, the earth and heaven."<sup>1</sup>

The precocious growth of the Indian war-god constitutes a serious problem of interpretation, one which will occupy us later in this monograph.

## **THE DEFEAT OF THE DRAGON AND THE RELEASE OF THE SUN**

Significantly, it was shortly after his birth that Indra battled and eventually slew the dragon Vritra. Vritra's great crime lay in his concealment of the sun and imprisonment of the waters, however this is to be interpreted. In defeating the dragon, Indra secured the release of the sun together with the life-giving waters. This primeval event is the subject of countless passages in the *Rig Veda*:

"Moreover, when thou first wast born, O Indra, thou struckest terror into all the people. Thou, Maghavan, rentest with thy bolt the Dragon who lay against the waterfloods of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

Another typical passage celebrates Indra as follows:

"I will declare the manly deeds of Indra, the first that he achieved, the Thunder-wielder. He slew the Dragon, then disclosed the waters, and cleft the channels of the mountain torrents. He slew the Dragon lying on the mountain; his heavenly bolt of thunder Tvaster fashioned. Like lowing kine in rapid flow descending the waters glided downward to the ocean."<sup>3</sup>

Here, as so often in the Vedic texts, the life-giving waters are compared to cows.<sup>4</sup>

Indra's decisive role in the release of the waters is emphasized again and again in the Vedic texts: "Vritra he slew, and forced the flood of water forth."<sup>5</sup> A similar passage is the following: "Thou in thy vigor having slaughtered Vritra didst free the floods arrested by the Dragon."<sup>6</sup>

It was the release of the sun, however, which marked Indra's finest hour: "He who gave being to the Sun and Morning, who leads the waters, He, O men, is Indra."<sup>7</sup> Brown summarized this primeval episode as follows:

"The sun, it is stated many times, was won by Indra. It had been in darkness...His mighty deed is that he gains the sun, which he set in the sky after slaying Vritra."<sup>8</sup>

## **THE SUPPORT OF HEAVEN**

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<sup>1</sup>IV:18:5 Indra's rapid growth and rise to power is also apparent in the following passage: "Him who hath waxed by strength which none may conquer, and even at once grown to perfection." *Ibid.*, V:19:2

<sup>2</sup>IV:17:7

<sup>3</sup>I:32:1-3

<sup>4</sup>We will seek to provide an explanation of this imagery in our forthcoming monograph on Indra's role in the Creation.

<sup>5</sup>I:85:9-10

<sup>6</sup>IV:17:1

<sup>7</sup>II:12:7

<sup>8</sup>W. N. Brown, "The Creation Myth of the Rig Veda," *J. of Am. Oriental Society* 62 (1942), p. 97.

Upon securing the release of the sun, Indra is said to have offered it some form of support.

"He who, just born, chief God of lofty spirit by power and might became the God's protector. Before whose breath through greatness of his valor the two worlds trembled, He, O men, Is Indra...He who fixed fast and firm the earth that staggered, and set at rest the agitated mountains, Who measured out the air's wide middle region and gave the heaven support, He, men, is Indra." <sup>1</sup>

Often it is simply stated that Indra raised the sun: "Indra hath raised the Sun on high in heaven, that he may see afar; He burst the mountain for the kine."<sup>2</sup> The following passage is of similar import: "When thou hadst slain with might the dragon Vritra, thou, Indra, didst raise the Sun in heaven for all to see."<sup>3</sup> Here Griffith cites a gloss of Sayana, a celebrated commentator on the *Veda*: "Didst free the Sun which had been hidden by Vritra."<sup>4</sup>

Closely related to this act, it would appear, is Indra's role in the spreading out of the earth. Again, the testimony on this subject is too extensive to quote in full:

"Thou, Indra, hast spread out the earth's high ridges, and firmly fixed the region under heaven."<sup>5</sup>

"He spread the wide earth out and firmly fixed it, smote with his thunderbolt and loosed the waters."<sup>6</sup>

The spreading out of the earth is directly related to the release of the heavenly waters, once again compared to cattle:

"Unbarred the firm doors for the kine of Morning, and with all the Angirases, set free the cattle. Thou hast spread out wide earth, a mighty marvel, and, high thyself, propped lofty heaven, O Indra."<sup>7</sup>

The heavenly cattle also figure prominently in the following hymn, which brings together in a single account many of the aforementioned motives:

"Thou hast established in her seat, O Indra, the level earth, vast, vigorous, unbounded. The Bull hath propped the heaven and air's mid-region. By thee sent onward let the floods flow hither. He who withheld the kine, in silence yielded before thy blow, O Indra. He made paths easy to drive forth the cattle. Loud breathing praises helped the Much-invoked One. Indra alone filled full the earth and heaven, the Pair who meet together, rich in treasures. Surya transgresses not the ordered limits set daily by the Lord of the Tawny Coursers."<sup>8</sup>

Other passages hint at Indra's participation in the separation of heaven and earth: "He stayed and held the heaven and earth asunder."<sup>9</sup> As we have come to expect by now, this event is said to have occurred shortly after his birth:

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<sup>1</sup>II:12:1-4

<sup>2</sup>I:7:2-3

<sup>3</sup>I:51:4

<sup>4</sup>R. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rig Veda* (Delhi, 1973), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>I:62:5

<sup>6</sup>I:103:2

<sup>7</sup>V:17:6-7

<sup>8</sup>III:30:9-12

<sup>9</sup>V:44:24

"Before the High God, at his birth, heaven trembled, earth, many floods and all the precipices. The Strong One bringeth nigh the Bull's two parents."<sup>1</sup>

Here Griffith adds: "The meaning of the second line is, Indra brings near, but holds apart, the heaven and the earth, the parents of the mighty Sun."<sup>2</sup>

Indra's involvement in the ordering of heaven and earth would appear to cast him in the role of creator or demiurge. Among Sanskrit scholars Brown was among the first to emphasize this aspect of Indra's mythus:

"Most briefly he became lord of the cosmos. He released the Waters, generated the sun, the sky, the dawn or, as stated elsewhere, he and Soma made the dawn shine, led forth the sun with its light, supported the sky, spread out Mother Earth, having struck away Vritra from them. Or, again, having slain Vritra, he proceeded to creation. He is, therefore, called visvakarman "All-Maker, Creator" and lord over all creation."<sup>3</sup>

### THE SOMA DRINKER

Indra is notorious for his thirst for Soma, and countless hymns allude to its immediate and dramatic influence upon the god.<sup>4</sup> Upon drinking it Indra's body swelled to a gigantic size, filling heaven and earth. According to a tradition found in the *Atharva Veda*, Indra's body "became a great mountain" upon consuming the Soma.<sup>5</sup>

Consider also the following passage:

"High heaven unsupported in space he stablished: he filled the two worlds and the air's mid region. Earth he upheld, and gave it wide expansion. These things did Indra in the Soma's rapture. From front, as 'twere a house, he ruled and measured; pierced with his bolt the fountains of the rivers, And made them flow at ease by paths far-reaching, These things did Indra in the Soma's rapture."<sup>6</sup>

Strangely enough, Indra seems to have developed this taste for Soma shortly after his birth:

"Many are Indra's nobly wrought achievements,...He beareth up this earth and heaven, and, doer of marvels, he begot the Sun and Morning. Herein, O Guileless One, is thy true greatness, that soon as born thou drankest up the Soma."<sup>7</sup>

Indra's precocious taste for Soma is also apparent in the following passage: "Even from his birth-time Indra conquered Tvaster, bore off the Soma and in beakers drank it."<sup>8</sup> A similar passage is the following:

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<sup>1</sup>IV:22:4

<sup>2</sup>Griffith, *op cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>W. Brown, *op cit.*, p. 96. M. Bloomfield offered a similar interpretation in "The Interpretation of the Veda," in *Am. Jour. of Philology* 17 (1896), p. 434.

<sup>4</sup>As to the nature of the Soma, opinions vary enormously. Some see it as a climbing plant (*Sarcostema Viminalis* or *Asclepias Acida*), a hallucinogenic plant, others as an ambrosia-like herb, etc. In the Veda it is explicitly identified with the milk of the celestial cows.

<sup>5</sup>Brown, *op cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup>II:15:2-3

<sup>7</sup>III:32:8-9.

<sup>8</sup>III:48:4

"The day when thou wast born thou, fain to taste it, drankest the plant's milk which the mountains nourish. That milk thy Mother first, the Dame who bare thee, poured for thee in thy mighty Father's dwelling."<sup>1</sup>

It was while under the influence of Soma that Indra accomplished his greatest deeds. The following passage is typical of this motive:

"Cheered by this meath Indra, whose hand wields thunder, rent piecemeal Ahi who barred up the waters, So that the quickening currents of the rivers flowed forth like birds unto their resting-places. Indra, this Mighty One, the Dragon's slayer, sent forth the flood of waters to the ocean. He gave the Sun his life, he found the cattle, and with the night the works of day were completed."<sup>2</sup>

Macdonell has duly emphasized the importance of the Soma in the mythology of Indra:

"Soma is sometimes said to stimulate Indra to perform great cosmic actions such as supporting earth and sky or spreading out the earth. But it characteristically exhilarates him to carry out his warlike deeds, the slaughter of the dragon or Vritra or the conquest of foes. So essential is Soma to Indra that his mother gave it to him or he drank it on the very day of his birth."<sup>3</sup>

Alas, the influence of the Soma was not always positive in nature. Thus it is elsewhere said to have driven Indra to patricide.<sup>4</sup>

### **SOLAR HERO OR STORM GOD?**

Having recounted the most celebrated deeds of Indra the question arises as to their ultimate origin and significance. Certainly there are some bizarre images involved. A hero who upon birth assumes a gigantic form; an infant who rescues the gods by waging battle with a sun-eclipsing dragon; the release of heavenly waters of bovine form; etc. Were it not that such traditions conform to a widespread pattern associated with the birth of the warrior-hero one might be tempted to accept them as the product of uncontrolled fantasy.

The most common interpretation of Indra's mythology would make of it a nature-allegory, with the war-god being regarded as a personification of the sun, storm, or some other aspect of the physical world. Indra's combat with and victory over Vritra, according to the first view, signifies the sun's victorious emergence from the all-encompassing darkness of night. This view is nearly synonymous with the name of F. Max Muller, Vedic scholar and outstanding pioneer of comparative mythology.<sup>5</sup> Muller's hypothesis is distinguished by the attempt to consider the mythus of Indra as a whole, as a unified tradition, rather than as a conglomeration of isolated and originally unconnected episodes, each with varying explanations. Alas, Muller's valiant attempt to accommodate each aspect of Indra's myth to the solar allegory was not always convincing. For example, Muller would have the cows delivered by Indra signify the clouds "which, from their heavy udders, send down refreshing and fertilizing rain or

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<sup>1</sup>III:48:2 This tradition might be compared to Heracles' drinking the milk of Hera.

<sup>2</sup>II:19:3

<sup>3</sup>A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (New York, 1974), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>Ions, *op cit.*, p. 65, *Rig Veda* 4:18:12 We will return to this motive in a future monograph in this series.

<sup>5</sup>M. Muller, *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology, and Religion* (London, 1881), pp. 479, 492.

dew upon the parched earth."<sup>1</sup> Hence Indra's intimate association with fertility and fertilizing rains. Note, however, that throughout the *Veda* the cows themselves are intimately associated with the coming of light and dawn, a strange situation indeed if clouds were the original source of the bovine imagery.

If Muller's solar-hero hypothesis represents the most ambitious attempt to accommodate Indra's mythology it is far from being the sole candidate.<sup>2</sup> Others have seen in Indra a personification of the atmosphere—specifically the region between heaven and earth. This is the opinion of Griffith, for example:

"He is the God who reigns over the intermediate region or atmosphere; he fights against and conquers with his thunderbolt the demons of drought and darkness, and is in general the type of noble heroism."<sup>3</sup>

Yet another hypothesis sees in Indra a personification of the thunderstorm, the god's victory over Vritra representing rain's victory over the demon of the drought.<sup>4</sup> A. Keith may be cited as a leading proponent of this viewpoint:

"It is almost certain that in Indra we must see a storm-god, and that his exploit of defeating Vritra is a picture of the bursting forth of the rain from the clouds at the oncoming of the rainy season, when all the earth is parched, and when man and nature alike are eager for the breaking of the drought. The tremendous storms which mark the first fall of the rain are generally recognized as a most fitting source for the conception of the god, while the mountains cleft and the cows won are the clouds viewed from different standpoints. But Indra appears also as winning the sun, a trait representing the clearing away of the clouds from the sun after the thunderstorm, with which has been confused or united the idea of the recovery of the sun at dawn from the darkness of night."<sup>5</sup>

As is apparent from Keith's admission, it is difficult to account for the entire range of Indra's myths by sole recourse to the imagery of the thunderstorm. Satisfactory in some areas, it is superficial or entirely inapplicable in others.

Macdonell ran into a similar impasse, interpreting the myth of Indra's birth from the side of Prithivi as a reference to lightning: "This trait may possibly be derived from the notion of lightning breaking from the side of the storm-cloud."<sup>6</sup> The myth of Indra's separation of heaven and earth, however, Macdonell would trace to the illuminating effects of light: "Possibly the effect of light extending the range of vision and seeming to separate heaven and earth apparently pressed together by darkness, may have been the starting point of such conceptions."<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the various "naturalist" interpretations, perhaps the most popular interpretation of Indra's mythology is the socio-cultural approach spawned by the work of Georges Dumézil, the leading practitioner of comparative mythology today. Dumézil maintains that ancient Indo-European society was distinguished by a tripartite

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<sup>1</sup>M. Muller, *Comparative Mythology* (New York, 1977), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>For a survey of the various interpretations see the discussion in H. Oldenberg, *The Religion of the Veda* (Delhi, 1988), pp. 74-78.

<sup>3</sup>Griffith, *op cit.*, p. 2. See also J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion* (1961), p. 123-124.

<sup>4</sup>E. Fay, "The Aryan God of Lightning," *Jour. of Philology* 17: 1 (1895), p. 11. See also Keith, *Iranian Mythology* (Boston, 1917), pp. 264-265.

<sup>5</sup>Keith, *op cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>Macdonell, *op cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62.

structure—consisting of a sovereign, warrior, and food-producing castes respectively—and that this tripartite structure is reflected in the myths and rituals of various Indo-European peoples. Indra, according to the thesis of Dumézil, is a personification of the warrior function, and as such he should be considered the Indian homologue to the Greek Ares and Latin Mars.<sup>1</sup>

As is frequently the case in scholarly matters, there is some truth in each of the foregoing interpretations of Indra's mythology. That Indra represents some form of celestial power seems obvious in light of the explicit placement of his adventures in heaven. How else is it possible to understand the continual references to Indra filling all of heaven or freeing the sun? The question is which celestial power best suits the nature of Indra?

With regards to Muller's celebrated and much maligned solar-hypothesis, it must be concluded that it fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of the god's mythus despite the fact that there is a modicum of evidence for a solar Indra in the Vedic texts, several passages identifying Indra and Surya.<sup>2</sup> It is generally agreed, however, that these passages occur in relatively late hymns and reflect the theoretical redactions of Vedic scribes; thus they would appear to offer little insight into the origins of Indra.

Muller's hypothesis would appear to be directly contradicted by the numerous passages in the *Veda* which represent Indra as delivering—or engaging in some sort of combat with—the sun. Such traditions seem to confirm that Indra and the sun (Surya) are two separate and independent entities. The same argument applies with respect to Indra's role in the support of the sun. And these passages, needless to say, are of much greater antiquity than those which offer the equation of Indra and Surya (the situation is exactly analogous to that surrounding the Greek Apollo, who also became identified with the sun in later times, but who originally had nothing to do with the solar orb).<sup>3</sup>

With regards to the interpretation of Indra as the power inherent in the thunderstorm here too it must be admitted that meteorological imagery pervades the mythus of Indra. Even Dumézil acknowledges this point:

"It is the destiny of the warrior gods, patterned on the terrestrial warriors, to be storm gods as well...Thor, the "thunder," with his hammer, like Indra with his thunderbolt, has obvious nature-god significance."<sup>4</sup>

Why a god patterned after a social caste would come to take on features of the natural world is left unanswered by Dumézil.<sup>5</sup>

The question, however, is not whether Indra bears the characteristics of gods commonly regarded as storm gods. That he does is obvious to all. The question, rather, is whether these supposed storm gods have any relation to modern conceptions of the storm or whether they trace instead to some more formidable celestial power? As we will attempt to demonstrate, the evidence favors the latter hypothesis. At this point it is sufficient to note that the interpretation of Indra as the thunderstorm fares no better than the solar hypothesis, utterly failing to account for the mythus of the great warrior god. How is it possible to conceive of a thunderstorm as supporting the sun, for example? From whence derives the tradition of the infant Indra's precocious growth or taste for Soma?

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<sup>1</sup>Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion* (Chicago, 1970), Vol. 1, pp. 207-209.

<sup>2</sup>Macdonell, *op cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>See E. Cochrane, "Apollo and the Planet Mars," *AEON* I:1 (1988), pp. 57-58.

<sup>4</sup>G. Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, *op cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>5</sup>Puhvel likewise speaks of a coalescence of Indra's warlike and atmospheric figurations. *op cit.*, p. 60.

Finally, there can be little doubt that Indra represents the Indian god of war. Whether this should be regarded as offering support for Dumézil's tripartite hypothesis is subject to question, however. In the first place, Indra's relation to the warrior function is self-evident and might be accommodated by many different theories. In the second place, it is well-known that numerous ancient cultures have analogous war-gods, despite the fact that many of these cultures are non-Indo-European in origin. Thus it may well be that some more universal explanation may be required to account for Indra's mythus.

There are various other problems with Dumézil's tripartite hypothesis. Burkert, for example, observes that the expected tripartite structure is scarcely to be found in Greek tradition, despite the fact that Greek myth is the best documented of the Indo-European races.<sup>1</sup> Dumézil's leading disciple, C. Lyttleton, admits that aside from the figure of Heracles, Greek myth represents "an otherwise rather barren field from Dumézil's point of view."<sup>2</sup> Problems with Dumézil's tripartite thesis, however, do not weaken the strength of his identification of Indra as the Indian homologue of the Greek Ares and Latin Mars, based as it is on solid comparative research.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it is my opinion that this identification offers the most promising base upon which to launch a new interpretation of the Indian god's mythology.

### THE PLANET MARS

Throughout his vast writings on the subject of comparative mythology Dumézil never once seriously considered the possibility that the gods of the warrior function—Ares, Mars, and Indra—might have a celestial component.<sup>4</sup> This is not surprising, perhaps, given the fact that few other scholars of the twentieth century have been any more open-minded towards this possibility; influenced in this opinion, no doubt, by the disrepute associated with the solar-school of Müller and his followers.<sup>5</sup> The fact remains, however, that Ares and Mars were explicitly identified with the planet Mars by their respective peoples, ancient peoples from Babylon to Germany, and from India to Greece, regarding that planet as embodying the warrior-function.

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<sup>1</sup>W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology* (Berkeley, 1973), p. 125. Littleton elsewhere attempts to explain away the absence of a clear tripartite structure in Greece as a result of a merging of their traditions with those of pre-Indo-European peoples. See "Georges Dumézil and the Rebirth of the Genetic Model: an Anthropological Appreciation," in G. Larson, *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1974), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Other scholars have noticed the resemblance of Indra with Mars and Ares, of course. See Fay, *op cit.*, p. 14. G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock* (New York, 1953), pp. 16, 93. Velikovsky himself was of a similar opinion. See *Worlds in Collision* (New York, 1950), pp. 266, 279.

<sup>4</sup>Writing of the religion of the Romans, for example, Dumézil observed: "The sun and the moon have scarcely any role in their religion, while the stars have none at all, nor the firmament." *Archaic Roman Religion, op cit.*, p. 177. Elsewhere Dumézil remarks of Mars' religion that: "He does not have a naturalistic aspect." p. 209.

<sup>5</sup>See the remarks of G. Larson in *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 3-4. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, p. 2, suggests that the general failure of modern scholars to accept the merits of comparative mythology traces to the excesses of Müller's solar interpretation. In the last century it was common to seek a celestial component for Indra's cult. See E. Moor, *Hindu Pantheon* (London, 1810), p. 260. Among modern authors, D. Cardona has noted striking parallels between the myths of Indra and the Greek Jupiter, arguing that the Indian god is best understood as a personification of the planet Jupiter. See D. Cardona, "Indra," *KRONOS* 7:3 (Spring, 1982), pp. 19-24.

Consider also the case of Heracles. As a comparative mythologist, Dumezil could not help but recognize the striking parallels which exist between Indra and Heracles (we will have occasion to refer to these parallels repeatedly throughout the remainder of this monograph).<sup>1</sup> Indeed Dumezil devoted the better part of two books to the documentation of their similarity.<sup>2</sup> Once again, however, Dumezil ignored the identification of Heracles with the planet Mars, common in Hellenistic times.<sup>3</sup> If Heracles was identified with Mars the possibility arises that Indra bore some relation to the red planet as well.

## VERETHRAGNA AND VAHAGN

It has been known for some time, thanks to the pioneering researches of Benveniste and Renou, that Indra's chief epithet, Vrtrahan—"smasher of resistance"—finds an exact counterpart in Iranian traditions surrounding the hero Thraetona, who was known by the epithet of Verethragna.<sup>4</sup> Regarded by many as the Avestan Heracles, Thraetona received this epithet by virtue of his defeat of the dragon Azi Dahaka.<sup>5</sup>

That many of the sacred traditions of the Indians and Iranians go back to a common source is well-known. The numerous correspondences between Indra and Thraetona are a case in point. Vrtra's epithet Ahi ("serpent") is cognate with Azi, the name of the Iranian dragon; while Indra's weapon vajra is cognate with vazra, the club-like weapon of the Iranian hero. Greenebaum concludes:

"These linguistic similarities, together with the epithets involved, and the similarity in themes would seem to indicate that a tradition of the slaying of Vrtra Azhi Dasa was common to Indic and Iranian myths."<sup>6</sup>

Overlooked, however, is the fact that Verethragna stands as the middle-Persian name for the planet Mars in texts dating to Sassanid times (AD 226-640).<sup>7</sup> That the identification of Verethragna and Mars goes back to still more ancient times was maintained by B. L. van der Waerden (who cites the Persian scholar Duchesne-Guillemain):

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<sup>1</sup>The great Greek scholar Wilamowitz had earlier called attention to the resemblance between Heracles and Indra, as did L. Schroeder, but it was the groundbreaking article of F. Schroder that confirmed the relationship. See F. Schroder, "Indra, Thor und Herakles," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 76 (1957), pp. 1-41. The latter scholar was particularly important with regard to the development of Dumezil's views.

<sup>2</sup>G. Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago, 1969); *The Stakes of the Warrior* (Berkeley, 1983). Here Dumezil was influenced by the masterful analysis of Schroder, who showed that Heracles and Indra shared numerous attributes in common. For our discussion here it is enough to note that Schroder documented that each was a dragon-slayer, had a prolific appetite, and was intimately associated with the support of heaven.

<sup>3</sup>W. Roscher, "Planeten," *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Hildesheim, 1965), p. 2527. See also B.L. van der Waerden, *The Birth of Astronomy* (New York, 1974), p. 190.

<sup>4</sup>E. Benveniste & L. Renou, *Vrtra et Vrthragna* (1935). See the discussion in Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, op cit., pp. 115-138. See also S. Greenebaum, "Vrtrahan-Verethragna: Indian and Iran," in G. Larson, *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 93-97.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup>van der Waerden, *op cit.*, p. 187.

"The identification of the planets with great gods must be a relict from an earlier period...As we have seen, the identification of planets with gods is fundamental for horoscopic astrology. Now this kind of astrology originated in the Achaemenid period (539-331 B.C.) and spread over the whole ancient world during the Hellenistic period (after 330 B.C.). Therefore it seems reasonable to assume that the identification of planets with Persian gods took place during the Achaemenid or early Hellenistic period."<sup>1</sup>

The Iranian Verethragna finds a close homologue in the Armenian hero Vahagn (Vahagn is apparently the Armenian transcription of the Parthian name Verethragna), of whom little is known apart from the fact that he too was renowned as a dragon-slayer.<sup>2</sup> All that remains are a few fragments of the myth of his tumultuous birth, described as follows by Moses of Chorene (the leading historian of Armenian lore):

"Heaven and earth were in travail, the purple sea was in travail; a red reed had its birth in the seas, from the stems of the reed came forth smoke, from the stems of the reed came forth a flame, and from the flame sprang a young man; this youth had fiery hair, also a beard of flame, and his eyes were suns."<sup>3</sup>

As Dumezil points out, this fascinating little vignette compares well with several incidents in Indra's career. Indra too, it will be remembered, had first sprang forth under similar conditions of universal distress:

"Indra, endowed with all heroic valor. Then up he sprang himself, assumed his vesture, and filled, as soon as born, the earth and heaven."<sup>4</sup>

Vahagn's residence within the reed-stem Dumezil would compare to an episode in the *Mahabharata*. There Indra is represented as hiding in a lotus stalk upon assuming a minute form at the time of his battle with the dragon.<sup>5</sup> Comparing the two traditions Dumezil wrote:

"Not only is there a parallel in events, but also a coincidence in name: these two scenes, so close in their overall plans, are bound up with the Armenian and Indian forms of one and the same figure. The most straightforward attitude, the one most respectful of the materials, is not to assume the convergence of two late and independent fantasies; rather it is to suppose that Iranicized Armenia has transmitted to us a form of Verethragna, still closely resembling his Indo-Iranian prototype which...was enabled to survive for a long time in more than one part of Iran, just as the itihasa [a sacred tradition], the source for the epic traditions, may have conserved the same material in India, outside the Vedic literature."<sup>6</sup>

Dumezil's recognition of Indra and Vahagn as mythical homologues has generally gained acceptance. Lincoln summarized the current status of debate as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>van der Waerden, *op cit.*, p. 188. As this author points out, the identification of Verethragna and Mars is found already in Antiochus (c. 62. B.C.).

<sup>2</sup>G. Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago, 1970), p. 122. See also Carnoy, *op cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup>Moses of Chorene, *History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 123. The first scholar to make this comparison appears to have been Schroder, *op cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>IV:18:5

<sup>5</sup>Dumezil, *op cit.* pp. 124-125.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

"The first point which we must note is, as has long been known, the name Vahagn is a loan word into Armenian and is derived from Avestan Verethragna (=Skt. Vritrahan). The story of his birth from a flaming reed has been connected with an Indian itihasa tradition telling of the reenergizing of Indra. Thus we are virtually certain that Vahagn is a dependent variant of the Indo-Iranian warrior-god, who was known as both \*Vrtraghna, 'smasher of resistance,' and \*Indra, 'the manly, the strong.'"<sup>1</sup>

If the relationship of Vahagn to Indra is generally acknowledged, the resemblance of Vahagn with Heracles has long been recognized.<sup>2</sup> Thus Moses of Chorene followed up his brief account of the hero's birth with the observation:

"All sing of this one, I have heard it with my own ears; they thus recount in song along with cymbals, his battle with the dragon and his victory, and they sing of him in every way as of the heroic deeds of Hercules."<sup>3</sup>

In lieu of Vahagn's resemblance to both Heracles and Verethragna it comes as no surprise to find that Varhran—the Pahlavi transcription of the Armenian Vahagn—was identified with the planet Mars.<sup>4</sup> The explicit identification of these three heroes with Mars must command our attention. And even if it be granted that each of these identifications traces to a common astrological system—which is possible—the decisive point remains that ancient skywatchers from three different cultures saw fit to identify their favorite hero with the red planet.

The ramifications of these identifications for an analysis of Indra's mythus would seem obvious. If we are to trace the mythology of the Indian god to ancient beliefs associated with the planet Mars, however, it must be expected that this identification will enable us to explain various aspects of the god's cult, such as Indra's role in the support of heaven, the ability to assume a gigantic form, pivotal role as dragon-slayer, etc. We begin our analysis with Indra's role as the support of heaven.

## THE WORLD PILLAR

In light of Indra's intimate association with the support of heaven, several scholars have speculated that ancient conceptions of the World Pillar pervade this aspect of his mythology.<sup>5</sup> One of the most common motives in ancient mythology, the World Pillar was believed to connect the Earth with the heavens above, at the same time offering a means of communication and travel between the various worlds. As to the objective reference of the World Pillar modern scholars typically assume it to have reference to the North celestial axis. This view was neatly summarized by one leading scholar as follows:

"The regular diurnal movement of the stars round an axis at the North Star, the reasons for which neverending rotation were earlier unknown, gave birth to an idea that their apparent center of the universe was formed by some object which could be

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<sup>1</sup>B. Lincoln, "The Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myth," *History of Religions* 16:1 (1976), pp. 50-51.

<sup>2</sup>"Armenian authors regularly translate Heracles as Vahagn." So wrote B. L. van der Waerden, *The Birth of Astronomy* (1974), p. 190.

<sup>3</sup>Moses of Chorene, *History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 123. Lincoln, *op cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>van der Waerden, *op cit.*, p. 187-190.

<sup>5</sup>F. Schroder, "Indra, Thor und Herakles," *Zeitschrift fur Deutsche Philologie* 76 (1957)

represented in concrete forms, and which was, in addition, believed to support the roof of the sky."<sup>1</sup>

The World Pillar was associated with various images by the ancient skywatchers. One of the most common is that of the World Mountain, of which the Hindu mount Meru offers a classic example. In addition to forming the support of heaven, Meru is said to have formed the celestial axis, above which stood the Pole Star.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, however, Meru was specifically invoked as the support of the sun.<sup>3</sup> This latter stipulation presents a problem, inasmuch as the current sun bears little relation to the north polar axis. And yet the Hindu sources are quite emphatic about this point: indeed it was said that the sun both rose and set upon Meru.<sup>4</sup>

Other prominent images associated with the World Pillar include the World Tree or Celestial Spring. Eliade offered the following summary of this symbolism:

"The symbolism of the World Tree is complementary to that of the Central Mountain. Sometimes the two symbols coincide; usually they complement each other. But both are merely more developed mythical formulations of the Cosmic Axis (World Pillar, etc.)."<sup>5</sup>

Certainly it is significant to find that Indra—in addition to being invoked as the supporter of heaven—is variously invoked in the forms of a tree, spring, and mountain. F. Schroder, for example, observed that there was an ancient ritual in which the god was specifically identified with a May-pole like tree, the Indra-tree.<sup>6</sup> The embodiment of Indra in a pole-like form is also apparent in the following passage from the *Veda*: "The priests have raised thee up on high, O Satakratu, like a pole."<sup>7</sup>

In the *Veda* Indra is addressed as "Mount Indra."<sup>8</sup> Also relevant here is the tradition found in the *Atharva Veda*, quoted earlier, in which it is said that upon drinking Soma, Indra's body became "like unto a mountain."<sup>9</sup> Vedic hymns elsewhere compare Indra to a spring: "We will pour Indra forth as 'twere a spring of wealth."<sup>10</sup>

Further grounds for interpreting the myth of Indra in terms of the imagery of the World Pillar comes from the fact that acknowledged homologues of the Indic god likewise bear an intimate relation to ancient conceptions of the World Pillar. The Norse Thor, for example, was also said to support heaven, and as microcosm came to reflect macrocosm, so too did Thor come to be identified with the main supporting pillars of individual temples and dwellings.<sup>11</sup> Here Turville-Petrie observes: "As Thor upheld the

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<sup>1</sup>U. Holmberg, *Finno-Ugric Mythology* (Boston, 1927), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>I. Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," *History of Religions*, (1983), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>*Epigraphica Indica*, 12:203 Cited in Mabbett, *op cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>*Aitareya Brahmana* 14:6:44 Mabbett, *op cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup>M. Eliade, *Myths, Rites, and Symbols* (New York, 1975), p. 380.

<sup>6</sup>Schroder, *op cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>I:10:1

<sup>8</sup>I:121:12

<sup>9</sup>Brown, *op cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup>II:16:7 Indra is elsewhere said to have dwelt in a heavenly well of honey. See Keith, *op cit.*, p. 29. Note also that Verethragna is associated with a fountain of manliness in Iranian tradition. See F. Muller, *The Zend-Avesta* (New York, 1898), pp. 238-239.

<sup>11</sup>The same symbolism is associated with the war-god in Mexico, where pillars in the temples of Huitzilopochtli were said to uphold heaven. See B. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Austin, 1979), p. 146.

world, he upheld the temple and many another building."<sup>1</sup> The same scholar goes on to point out that it was on account of Thor's intimate association with pillars that Tacitus identified the Norse god with Heracles, the latter's connection with pillars being proverbial in Greek tradition.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was Heracles' role as the supporter of heaven which inspired the ancient Greeks to identify their favorite hero with the Egyptian god Shu, the latter figure being consistently represented as upholding heaven with his outstretched arms.<sup>3</sup>

Significant here—in lieu of our finding that Indra's homologues Verethragna and Vahagn were each identified with the planet Mars—is the puzzling fact that Mars itself was intimately associated with ancient conceptions of the World Pillar. In *A Dictionary of Symbols*, for example, Cirlot reports that: "The Tree of Life, when it rises no higher than the mountain of Mars ... is regarded as a pillar supporting heaven."<sup>4</sup>

Additional support for Cirlot's statement comes upon consideration of the Babylonian traditions surrounding Nergal, the Babylonian war-god identified with the planet Mars. An epithet of Nergal, *Meslamtae*—thought to signify the "luxuriously sprouting Meshu-tree"—confirms that he bore an intimate relation to the Babylonian World Tree (Meshu), described as follows in an early hymn: "That pure tree. . .whose roots reached as deep down as the bottom of the underworld. . .whose top reached as high as the sky of Anum."<sup>5</sup>

As we have demonstrated elsewhere, the name *Meshu* is cognate with *Mashu*, the Akkadian name of the World Mountain. It was claimed of this mountain, as it was of the Hindu Meru, that it presided over the rising and setting of the sun.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to his relationship to the Tree of Heaven, Nergal/Mars is said to govern the ground of heaven, Akk. *isid same*, the place where the sun rises.<sup>7</sup> The same god, however, was also known as *Lugal-ki-du-su-a*: "King of the spot of the Sun's going down."<sup>8</sup> The peculiar association of Nergal with the place of the rising and/or setting of the sun, in our opinion, reflects the intimate association of that planet-god with ancient conceptions of the World Pillar.<sup>9</sup>

Two questions confront us at this point. How did the planet Mars come to be associated with ancient conceptions of the World Pillar? And, granted that it did, how does that finding contribute to our understanding of the mythology of Indra? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to refer once again to previous articles in this

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<sup>1</sup>E. Turville-Petrie, *Myth and Religion of the North* (New York, 1964), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103. Tacitus, *Germanicus* 3, 34. For the pillars of Heracles see E. Cochrane, "Heracles and the Planet Mars," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 100-105.

<sup>3</sup>R. Roeder, "Schow," *RML, op cit.*, p. 566. Scholars have called attention to the resemblance between Indra and Shu of course.

<sup>4</sup>J. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, 1962), p. 330.

<sup>5</sup>L. Cagni, *The Poem of Erra* (Malibu, 1977), p. 32. Jacobsen translates the name *Meslamtae* as "who issues forth from the Mesu tree." T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, 1970), p. 65. p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 59-60.

<sup>8</sup>See K. Tallquist, *Akkadische Gottterepitheta* (Helsingforsiae, 1938), p. 391.

<sup>9</sup>It is Nergal's association with the World Pillar, most probably, which accounts for another of the god's epithets, *Lugul-an-sa-qar*, "lord of the pillar." See K. Tallquist, *Akkadische Gottterepitheta* (Helsingforsiae, 1938), p. 390.

series, where it was argued that a decisive key to the mythology of the hero is Mars' particular role in an unusual celestial configuration associated with Saturn.<sup>1</sup>

## THE POLAR CONFIGURATION

In *Worlds in Collision*, Immanuel Velikovsky argued that the universal myth of the dragon-combat reflected a celestial drama of recent occurrence, one which featured the planet Venus in a wildly erratic orbit. In that bold and highly controversial book Velikovsky set the stage for a revolution in mythological analysis by suggesting that universally recurring mythical images—such as the dragon, witch, or warrior-god—reflect the common experience of ancient man in the face of spectacular cataclysms associated with planetary agents.

It was while researching *Worlds in Collision* that Velikovsky stumbled upon the monumental discovery that the planet Saturn played a prominent role in ancient mythology, one wholly out of proportion with respect to its present modest appearance. This finding subsequently received valuable support via the extensive researches of the historians Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, who likewise found the planet Saturn to be a major player in ancient mythology and religion.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the authors of *Hamlet's Mill*, who favored a uniformitarian explanation of Saturn's prominence in the ancient traditions (via the precession of the equinoxes), Velikovsky explained Saturn's surprising prominence by suggesting that the Earth had once moved in close proximity to the giant planet, with Saturn dominating the skies in a sun-like fashion.<sup>3</sup> Following up the groundbreaking researches of Velikovsky, Talbott and Cardona began to lay the foundation for a radical reconstruction of ancient history, one in which Saturn assumed a fundamental role.<sup>4</sup> According to the thesis jointly defended by the two scholars, the planet Saturn once loomed large in the north polar skies, visually joined to the Earth by a heaven-spanning pillar of fiery material. This colossal celestial apparition was the aforementioned World Pillar, upon which sat Saturn as the ancient sun-god. That the planet Saturn did not move from its position atop the pillar accounts for the widespread and otherwise inexplicable belief of ancient peoples that the ancient sun-god both "rose" and "set" upon the same great mountain.

In recent years it has become apparent that other planets also participated in the formation of the configuration associated with Saturn.<sup>5</sup> According to the reconstruction offered by Talbott and myself, the planet Mars originally appeared in close proximity to the planet Saturn, apparently sharing a common axis together with Venus and Earth. During the course of the evolution of this configuration, which can be followed in great detail in ancient myth, the positions of the respective planets were subject to substantial fluctuation. Mars, for example, appeared early on to be in the center of Saturn, from which point it later migrated to a position visually beneath Saturn. The ebb and flow in the positions of the various planets along and about the axis, in large part, is the history

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<sup>1</sup>E. Cochrane, "Apollo and the Planet Mars," op cit.; "Heracles and the Planet Mars," op cit.; D. Talbott, "Mother Goddess and Warrior-Hero," *AEON* I:5 (1988), pp. 38-65; *idem*, "Servant of the Sun God," *AEON* II:1 (1989), pp. 37-52.

<sup>2</sup>G. Santillana & H. von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston, 1977).

<sup>3</sup>See the discussion in I. Velikovsky, *Mankind in Amnesia* (New York, 1982), pp. 97-100.

<sup>4</sup>D. Talbott, *The Saturn Myth* (New York, 1980); and D. Cardona, "The Sun of Night," *KRONOS* III:1 (Fall 1977); "The Mystery of the Pleiades," *KRONOS* III:4 (Summer 1978). See also the many articles by these two writers in *KRONOS* and *AEON*.

<sup>5</sup>E. Cochrane, "The Spring of Ares," *KRONOS* XI:3 (Summer 1986), pp. 15-21; D. Talbott, "On Models and Scenarios," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 5-15.

of the gods, and ultimately provided the primary impetus for the creation of the world's mythology.

## INDRA'S INFANCY

If we avail ourselves of this simple outline, tentative and physically improbable though it may be, the mythology of Indra begins to unravel and offers sure signs that its ultimate aetiology is near at hand. The tumultuous occasion commemorated in the myth of Indra's birth has its reference in the expulsion of Mars from the near vicinity of Saturn along the axis towards Earth.<sup>1</sup> Upon its initial displacement from Saturn, Mars appears to have moved perilously close to the Earth, looming large in the turbulent skies overhead. Recall again the Vedic description of Indra's epiphany: "Indra, endowed with all heroic valor. Then up he sprang himself, assumed his vesture, and filled, as soon as born, the earth and heaven."<sup>2</sup>

Indra's ability to assume a gigantic form is a decided point of emphasis in the Vedic hymns, and more than one scholar has called attention to the prominent role of the root *vr̥dh*, "to increase, or swell," in his mythus.<sup>3</sup> A stock epithet of the god—*pravr̥ddha*—emphasizes this ability to swell, signifying "swollen, enlarged, expanded, increased, violent."<sup>4</sup>

Indra's propensity for swelling, according to the thesis offered here, refers to the simple fact that the planet Mars appeared to increase in size or "swell" as it moved towards Earth along the shared polar axis.<sup>5</sup> Such a scenario, perhaps, accounts for the Vedic reference to Indra's precocious growth to the point where his body obscured the lights of heaven: "He filled the earthly atmosphere and pressed against the lights of heaven."<sup>6</sup>

Numerous other passages in the *Rig Veda* reiterate that Indra's gargantuan form dominated the skies, extending from heaven to earth: "The heaven itself attained not to thy greatness when with one hip of thine the earth was shadowed."<sup>7</sup> Griffith compares this passage to another in which Indra announces: "One side of me is in the sky, and I have drawn the other down."<sup>8</sup> Gonda, similarly, cites I:103:1, which likewise places a part of Indra in heaven, the other part on earth. Here Gonda points out that, "both parts combine so as to form a *ketu* (which may mean 'ensign', but also 'an unusual phenomenon such as a comet or meteor')."<sup>9</sup> The unusual apparition associated with Indra's *ketu*, in our opinion, was the fiery comet-like debris which extended along the polar axis, thus uniting, as it were, heaven and earth.

It is probable that Indra's peculiar relationship to the Sun/Surya in certain Vedic hymns can be traced to the appearance or movement of Mars along the polar axis (Surya=the planet Saturn). Consider, for example, the following passage: "What time

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<sup>1</sup>D. Talbott, "Mother Goddess and Warrior-Hero," *AEON* I:5 (1988), pp. 47-54; D. Talbott, "Servant of the Sun God," *AEON* II:1 (1989), pp. 37-52.

<sup>2</sup>IV:18:5

<sup>3</sup>See Dumezil, *op cit.*, p. 126, who cites Renou and Bergaigne.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, *op cit.*, p. 644.

<sup>5</sup>Here one is reminded of the Polynesian name for the planet Mars: Horo-pukipuku, "Quick-swelling." See R. Williamson, *Religion and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia* (Cambridge, 1933), Vol. I, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup>I:81:5

<sup>7</sup>III:32:11-12

<sup>8</sup>Griffith, *op cit.*, p. 178. X:119:11

<sup>9</sup>J. Gonda, *The Indra Hymns of the Rg Veda* (Leiden, 1989), p. 17.

thou settest near the Sun thy body, thy form, Immortal One, is seen expanding."<sup>1</sup> How else but upon the astral nature of Indra is it possible to account for such imagery?

In addition to presenting a terrifying apparition in the skies, the ability to swell came to form an essential component of the furor which characterized the war-god's customary demeanor, epitomized by the epithet *susmintama*, "most impetuous one."<sup>2</sup> A passage cited earlier is typical: "Indra, Impetuous One, hath waxed immensely: he with his vastness hath filled earth and heaven."<sup>3</sup>

Indra's impetuous nature inspired him to commit numerous excesses. More than one Vedic hymn, for example, alludes to some sort of assault directed at Surya: "Waxed strong in might at dawn he tore the Sun's wheel off. Bright red, he steals away their speech."<sup>4</sup>

Here, as elsewhere in the *Veda*, Indra is described as being red in color, a significant detail indeed if the Indian war-god was actually the planet Mars, the red planet *par excellence* of ancient skywatchers the world over.

## THE YOUTH

If there is one outstanding feature of the Vedic career of Indra it is surely the fact that the god accomplishes most of his greatest feats while yet an infant. This bizarre and wholly unnatural motive would appear to be universal in nature. Prominent examples include Heracles' strangling of the serpents while yet in the cradle; Apollo's infantile defeat of the Python; Huitzilopochtli's defeat of Coyolxauhqui and the 400 warriors immediately upon his birth; Horus' defeat of the dragon of chaos while still a babe; and Cuchulainn's many exploits while yet a mere boy.<sup>5</sup>

Various epithets of Indra emphasize the god's youthful nature. The epithet *Yuvan*, for example, signifies "youth."<sup>6</sup> Here it is not too much to say that most ancient war-gods bear a similar epithet although the celestial connotations of the epithet have yet to be considered. The Tamil war-god Marukan, for example, was known as the "Young One."<sup>7</sup> Throughout the *Edda* the Norse Thor bears the epithet *sveinn*, signifying a "boy or youth."<sup>8</sup> The Egyptian Horus, similarly, was known as the "youth."<sup>9</sup> The same motive can be found in the New World, the Aztec war-god Tezcatlipoca being known as *Telpochtli*, "the Young Male."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>IV:16:14

<sup>2</sup>Gonda, *op cit.*, p. 61. Here it is significant to note that Nergal bears an analogous epithet: mamlu, "impetuous." See Weiher, *op cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>IV:16:5

<sup>4</sup>I:130:9 We will return to this image in part two in this series, where it will be shown that Indra's assault of the sun-god has an analogue in the Greek account of Heracles' assault of Helios. On this latter tradition see E. Cochrane, "Heracles and the Planet Mars," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 90-94.

<sup>5</sup>On Heracles and the serpents see Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 1:33. On the combat of Apollo and Python see the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, lines 300-304. For Huitzilopochtli's exploits see H. B. Alexander, *Latin American Mythology* (New York, 1964), p. 60. On the deeds of Horus see *The Coffin Texts*, IV:219ff.

<sup>6</sup>Williams, *op cit.*, p. 820.

<sup>7</sup>D. Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* (Princeton, 1980) p. 280.

<sup>8</sup>J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (Gloucester, 1976), Vol. 4, p. 1348.

<sup>9</sup>T. Allen, *Horus in the Pyramid Texts* (Chicago, 1916), p. 19. The epithet hrd nhn means "the young child."

<sup>10</sup>Brundage, *op cit.*, p. 87.

The Indian war-god of the Epic period, Skanda, identified with the planet Mars, was also known by the epithet of Kumara, which connotes a "youth."<sup>1</sup> To be more precise, the word *kumara* signifies a youth whose sacred lock of hair is yet unshorn.<sup>2</sup> This conception forms a striking parallel to the Greek *kouros*, signifying a youth or juvenile not yet of the age of puberty, but specifically a youth whose hair is yet unshorn.<sup>3</sup> Apollo, of course, was the Classical ideal of the *kouros*, and Greek representations of the god generally reflect his youthful appearance.<sup>4</sup> The same imagery surrounds the Egyptian war-god Horus, who was known as Horus the Child when wearing the lock of hair, a symbol of youth.<sup>5</sup> (That the lock of hair itself had a celestial dimension will be the subject of a future monograph in this series).

A common epithet of the Babylonian war-god Nergal was *sul*, "youth."<sup>6</sup> In his detailed analysis of Nergal's cult, E. Weiher concluded that the concept of "youth" could not be divorced from the concept of "hero."<sup>7</sup> Why this is so he could not divine. The same scholar also found it difficult to explain the dual nature of Nergal as the planet Mars and god of the underworld, concluding only that the planetary identification of the war-god extended back to Old Babylonian times. In our opinion the conceptual link between "youth" and "hero" would appear to reflect the plain fact that the archetypal warrior-hero performed his greatest deeds shortly after his birth.<sup>8</sup> As the astral identification of Nergal suggests, the reference-point for these widespread traditions would appear to be the circumstances accompanying the mythical birth of the planet Mars.<sup>9</sup>

## THE FUROR OF THE CHILD HERO

The period marked by Mars' expulsion from the near vicinity of Saturn was a time of frenetic activity on the part of the red planet. Prior to settling into a stable position within the polar configuration, Mars appears to have periodically bobbed up and down the axis, alternately waxing large and waning, at the same time bearing the brunt of the considerable gravitational and electro-magnetic effects that would naturally have accompanied such an event. This occasion furnished the ancient skywatchers with their first preview of what was to become a characteristic trait of the Martian-hero;

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<sup>1</sup>M. Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1872), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Griffith, *op cit.*, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup>Liddell & Scott, *op cit.*, p. 838.

<sup>4</sup>For the identification of Apollo with the planet Mars see E. Cochrane, "Apollo and the Planet Mars," *op cit.* See also M. Theodorakis, "Apollo of the Wolf, the Mouse and the Serpent," *KRONOS* 9:3 (Summer, 1984).

<sup>5</sup>See E. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 469.

<sup>6</sup>Weiher, *op cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>A related conception finds the planet Mars being viewed as the archetypal son or child of the ancient sun-god. Hence the apparent philological relation between the word Mars and words connoting "young man" or "child". Examples include the Greek *meirax*, "boy," Old Indian *marya*, "young man," and Akkadian *maru*, "son." The attendants or satellites of Mars, in accordance with this conception, were viewed as a band of youths or warriors. That this is the most probable origin of the term Maruts will be the subject of a future monograph in this series.

<sup>9</sup>The tiny appearance of the Martian hero against the backdrop of the giant sun-god would also have contributed to his being viewed as a child, of course. The paradox, aptly illustrated in the scholars' confusion over Thor, is that the same heroic figure appears at one time as a small child and elsewhere as a giant.

namely, the hero's berserker-like "furor," distinguished by wild outbursts of activity (followed by periods of quiescence), gross fluctuations in form, and an enveloping iridescent glow.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, Indra's status as a child-hero has parallels from around the world. A comparative study of such figures will go a long way towards illuminating the rambunctious infancy of Indra, alluded to again and again throughout the *Veda*, albeit in an elusive manner. A classic example of the child-hero is offered by the Celtic Cuchulainn, and inasmuch as Dumezil documented several intriguing parallels between the Celtic hero and Vedic god, we will digress for a moment to discuss this fascinating figure.

Variouly described as "a little immature lad," "a young bit of a little boy," and a "beardless, hairless boy," Cuchulainn's prowess as a warrior manifested itself at a very early age. Indeed, the youthful hero first came to the attention of his elders when, upon invading the city of Emania from afar, he routed 150 members of the king's boy-corps at various sports.<sup>2</sup> It was the slaying of a monstrous hound which guarded the kingdom of Culann, however, which marked Cuchulainn's greatest accomplishment and won him his name, which signifies "the hound of Culann."<sup>3</sup> This Herculean feat was accomplished at the tender young age of seven.

Cuchulainn became renowned for the furor which would periodically overtake him, compelling him to great feats of valor and strength. On one occasion, for example, the hero performed the proverbial "hero's salmon-leap," which propelled Cuchulainn across the bridge of the netherworld kingdom of Scathach.<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, the heat engendered by the hero's furor is said to have melted the snow around him for a distance of thirty feet.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the generation of intense heat, it is said that whilst undergoing his furor Cuchulainn "became crimson all over," shook violently, and assumed a gigantic form. The epithet *Riastradh*, "The Distorted One," commemorates the radical distortion of features which distinguished the Celtic hero at such times. The *Tain Bo Cuailgne* describes the hero's furor as follows: "It was then that, as before, Cuchullin's distortion came on, and he was filled with swelling and great fulness, like breath in a bladder, until he became a terrible, fearful, many-colored, wonderful Tuaig (giant)."<sup>6</sup>

Yet if the furor of the child-hero aided him in the defense of the Irish borders, it also inspired him to numerous excesses, the thoughtless slaughter of hundreds of men accompanying such outbursts on more than one occasion. A leading scholar of Celtic lore offered the following observation: "Now when Cuchulainn was distorted with anger

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<sup>1</sup>The fiery apparitions commonly associated with the aurora borealis would, presumably, be as nothing compared to the electrical effects associated with the polar configuration, especially during the period marked by the near approach of the planet Mars to the Northern skies.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, "Tain Bo Cuailgne," pp. 136-137. All Celtic manuscripts cited in this article are from Hull's collection. E. Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* (London, 1898).

<sup>3</sup>Because of his slaying of the hound, Cuchulainn was bound to take the hound's place as guardian of Culann's lands, hence the name.

<sup>4</sup>Hull, "The Wooing of Emer," p. 75. For evidence that Scathach's domain was actually the underworld see Hull, *op cit.*, p. 291. This episode is closely paralleled by the leap of Finn across the threshold of the Queen of the netherworld in Gaelic tradition. See J. Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Hull, "Tain Bo Cuailgne," p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 193.

and battlefury, he became gigantic in size, and made no distinction between friends or foes, but felled all before and behind equally."<sup>1</sup>

How are we to understand such traditions? Why would Celtic bards associate Cuchulainn—in many respects the ideal of Celtic valor—with indiscriminate slaughter? And what is the objective basis for the bizarre furor which distinguished the youthful hero?

Dumezil suggested that the myth of the Celtic hero commemorated certain rites of initiation in which the warrior's furor was intentionally aroused, whether through isolation, drugs, mutilation, deprivation, or some other mood-altering technique.<sup>2</sup> No doubt there is some basis for drawing these comparisons. Unanswered by Dumezil, however, is the question from whence derives the inspiration for the rituals themselves?

If we are to hold true to our thesis that the child-hero represents the planet Mars we must seek the explanation of his strange furor (and of the rituals which sought to commemorate and humanize the phenomenon) in the ancient appearance of that planet. The emphasis on Cuchulainn's crimson color, explicitly coupled with the ability to swell and assume a gigantic form, must recall the sudden swelling of the ruddy-colored Indra. And swelling was specifically associated with the planet Mars by Polynesian skywatchers, as we have seen elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Recall further that it is in the cults of the Greek Ares and Latin Mars that one meets with this strange berserker-like furor, where death is dealt out with an indiscriminate zest. Ares, the god inherent in the savagery of war and battle, was invoked by Homer as "the manslaughtering, bloodstained stormer of walls."<sup>4</sup> Ares' demeanor was typically described by such epithets as *lyssa*, signifying "martial rage, raving, frenzy", and *mania*, signifying "madness, frenzy."<sup>5</sup> His propensity for fighting first for one side, then for another, earned him the epithet *aloprosallos*, "fickle."<sup>6</sup> Significantly, this word is said to be derived from the root *allomai*, signifying "to spring, leap, or bound."<sup>7</sup>

The Latin god Mars, similarly, became synonymous with the rage and fury of war.<sup>8</sup> A frequent epithet coupled with Mars is *saevio*, "to rage, be fierce, vent one's rage."<sup>9</sup> It is the epithet *caecus*, "blind," as Dumezil observed, which best captures the essence of the god:

"The ambiguous character of Mars, when he breaks loose on the field of battle, accounts for the epithet *caecus* given him by the poets. At a certain stage of furor, he

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<sup>1</sup>J. Rhys, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (London, 1898), p. 439

<sup>2</sup>Dumezil, *op cit.*, pp. 135-137.

<sup>3</sup>E. Cochrane, "Velikovsky and Oedipus," *AEON* 1:6 (1988), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>*Iliad* 5:31

<sup>5</sup>Sauer, "Ares," *RE*, (Stuttgart, 1893-1940), p. 658. See also Liddell, *op cit.*, pp. 909, 920. The word *lyssa* translates literally as "wolf's madness," and recalls the lupine nature so often ascribed to the Martian hero. Classic examples include Apollo Lykeios, Mars, and Lykurgos. See E. Cochrane, "Apollo and the Planet Mars," *AEON* 1:1 (1988), pp. 58-59.

<sup>6</sup>*Iliad* 5:831, 889. See also Liddell, *op cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65. This propensity for leaping has now been observed in the cult of Ares, Cuchulainn, Vahagn, and Indra. Suffice it to say that it forms an archetypal characteristic of the Martian hero.

<sup>8</sup>With the Latin word Mars one might compare the Greek word *margos*, signifying "raging mad, furious." Liddell, *op cit.*, p. 921.

<sup>9</sup>F. Leverett, *Lexikon of the Latin Language* (Boston, 1850), p. 789.

abandons himself to his nature, destroying friend as well as foe...By virtue of these very qualities of furor and harshness, Mars is the surest bulwark of Rome against every aggressor."<sup>1</sup>

It is doubtless no coincidence that this description of Mars is equally applicable to the Celtic Cuchulainn. Cuchulainn too, moreover, was equipped with the epithet blind, an Irish kenning stating simply "Cuchulainn the Blind."<sup>2</sup>

Fundamental to the blindness accorded the Latin war-god and Celtic hero—indeed of the concept of blind rage, which so often characterizes the rampage of the warrior-hero—is the fact that the planet Mars itself was deemed to be blind! De Santillana and von Dechend drew attention to this particular point in *Hamlet's Mill*:

"There is a peculiar blind aspect to Mars, insisted on in both Harranian and Mexican myths. It is even echoed in Vergil: 'caeco Marte'."<sup>3</sup>

Comparative scholars have long drawn on Celtic lore in their analyses of ancient myth, reasoning that inasmuch as the Celts became isolated early on from other cultures, remaining relatively free from Latin influence, there is a strong likelihood that their sacred traditions have preserved archaic elements. This suspicion is confirmed with regard to the mythus of the warrior-hero by numerous passages in Celtic manuscripts. Consider the following description of Cuchulainn's furor from the *Tain Bo Cuailgne*:

"Then it was that he suffered his riasradh, whereby he became fearsome and many-shaped, a marvelous and hitherto unknown being. All over him, from his crown to the ground, his flesh and every limb and joint...quivered as does a tree, yea, a bulrush in mid-current. Within his skin he put forth an unnatural effort of his body: his feet, his shins, and his knees shifted themselves and were behind him...Then his face underwent an extraordinary transformation: one eye became engulfed in his head so far that 'tis a question whether a wild heron could have got at it where it lay against his occiput, to drag it out upon the surface of his cheek; the other eye on the contrary protruded suddenly, and of itself so rested upon the cheek. His mouth was twisted awry until it met his ears. His lion's gnashings caused flashes of fire, each larger than the fleece of a three-year-old-wether, to steam from his throat into his mouth...Among the clouds over his head were visible showers and sparks of ruddy fire, which the seething of his savage wrath caused to mount up above him...His hero's paroxysm thrust itself out of his forehead longer and thicker than a warrior's whetstone. Taller, thicker, more rigid, longer than a ship's mast, was the upright jet of dusky blood which shot upwards from his scalp, and then was scattered to the four airts."<sup>4</sup>

It is a remarkable fact that the imagery of Cuchulainn's furor—bizarre as it is—has numerous parallels throughout the ancient world. The seething wrath of the quivering Celtic hero can't help but conjure up the spectacle of the Biblical Samson, himself a blinded berserker identified with the planet Mars, a primary manifestation of whose

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<sup>1</sup>Dumezil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, *op cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, "The Siege of Howth," *op cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>G. de Santillana and H. von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston, 1977), p. 176.

<sup>4</sup>Hull, *op cit.*, pp. 174-175.

furor was likewise a "hot anger" and terrible "shaking."<sup>1</sup> And as Samson died beneath the pillars of Dagon, so too did Cuchulainn meet his death while bound to a pillar.<sup>2</sup>

Such parallels confirm the archetypal nature of the Celtic imagery and raise a host of intriguing questions. Is it possible to conjecture that the Tain's eerie account of Cuchulainn's furor preserves a figurative description of the great cataclysms which shaped the physiognomy of the planet Mars? In the grotesque contortions of the hero is it possible to see the convulsions of the planet Mars as it participated in a spectacular game of tug-of-war writ large in the skies?<sup>3</sup> Being the smallest of the planets participating in the configuration associated with Saturn, Mars must have suffered significant distortion of its atmosphere and tidal crust as it moved up and down the axis, waxing large and then waning.<sup>4</sup> Such tremendous forces would almost certainly have precipitated the spontaneous eruption of volcanoes of colossal proportions. Evidence of volcanic activity, of course, is abundant on Mars, which has some of the most impressive volcanoes yet discovered in this solar system.<sup>5</sup> Whether it was volcanic activity or some other visual phenomenon associated with the polar configuration which provided the inspiration for the imagery of Cuchulainn's furor, one thing is clear—the Irish poet does not have a mortal hero in mind:

"Among the clouds over his head were visible showers and sparks of ruddy fire, which the seething of his savage wrath caused to mount up above him...His hero's paroxysm thrust itself out of his forehead longer and thicker than a warrior's whetstone. Taller, thicker, more rigid, longer than a ship's mast, was the upright jet of dusky blood which shot upwards from his scalp, and then was scattered to the four airts."

## INDRA AND THE RELEASE OF THE WATERS

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<sup>1</sup>Judges 16:30 For the identification of Samson with the planet Mars see de Santillana and von Dechend, *op cit.*, p. 176. Cuchulainn's distortion of form, similarly, finds a certain parallel in the "bowing" of Samson under the strain of the Philistine pillars.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, *op cit.*, p. 259. The episode of Samson acting as a "sport" to his Philistine captors forms an analogue to Cuchulainn's routing the King's child-corps at various sports. Is it coincidence, or common origin from a celestial archetype, that makes Cuchulainn be remembered as a great judge?

<sup>3</sup>According to Hall, in fact, it is difficult to account for the radical distortion of the northern face of Mars by any other means apart from its participation in the polar configuration associated with Saturn. See F. Hall, "Solar System Studies: Part Two," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 29-31.

<sup>4</sup>The closest parallel in the current solar system, perhaps, is offered by the tidal distortion of Io as it is buffeted about between Jupiter and Ganymede. The result is tremendous surface tension resulting in the release of untold volumes of volcanic debris.

<sup>5</sup>It stands to reason that if the thesis presented here is correct—that Mars recently orbited in close proximity to Saturn and experienced great cataclysms of thermal distress—remanent magnetism will most probably be found in the rocks and lava of Mars. The situation is analogous to Velikovsky's own expectations with regard to the possibility of remanent magnetism on the Moon. If anything one might expect more dramatic results upon Mars given that planet's perturbations while under the influence of Saturn's relatively powerful magnetic field. For a discussion of this aspect of Velikovsky's work see R. Treash, "Magnetic Remanence in Lunar Rocks," *Pensee* 2:2 (1972), pp. 21-23.

Intimately associated with the expulsion or "birth" of Mars was the release of a vast quantity of fiery debris, consisting—it would appear—of water, ice, asteroids, and dust. Initially forming a great cloud spanning the north polar heavens, where it came to obscure the ancient sun-god, the cloud served as the backdrop against which the various exploits of the youthful warrior were enacted. After an indeterminate period of time, however, the cloud was dispersed and the darkness dispelled. Shortly thereafter the form of the polar configuration began to evolve, prominent features including the congelation of a series of bands about the axis and the formation of a brilliant pillar spanning heaven. Creation had begun. As the most active power in the heavens at the time, the Martian hero was ascribed a prominent role in each of these developments.

Upon completing his youthful exploits the planetary-hero would settle into a stable position within the polar configuration. Visually the red planet appeared to have receded to a position beneath or to the "south" of Saturn.<sup>1</sup> As Mars settled into its new position within the configuration, the celestial waters followed suit, inundating the red planet as they flowed along the axis, where they became gathered into a fiery apparition supporting Saturn. Mars' assumption of a fixed position within the polar configuration brought to an end a period of destructive activity on the part of the red planet, and was a key sign that order had been reestablished in the cosmos. Mars was no longer the rambunctious youth threatening the very existence of the cosmos; rather it appeared to have been defeated or otherwise subdued. No doubt its diminished movement contributed to this conception, as would, perhaps, the gradual neutralization of the electro-static forces accompanying the expulsion of Mars along the axis. The appearance of the bands, finally, gave rise to the appearance that Mars was "bound" into its new subordinate position.

A prominent episode in the career of Indra, as we have seen, is the leading forth of the waters: "Savitar, God, the lovely handed, led us, and at his sending forth we flow expanded."<sup>2</sup>

The numerous references to Indra's role in directing the waters downwards have led many scholars to visualize him as a god of fertility, a dispenser of the rain. The original reference for these traditions, however, would appear to be the aquatic birth of Mars, coupled with the inundation of the red planet beneath the "waters" emanating from Saturn/Venus and the subsequent channeling of the waters along the polar axis.

"Thou settest free the rushing wave of waters, the floods' great swell encompassed and obstructed. Along steep slopes their course thou turnest, Indra, directed downward, speeding to the ocean."<sup>3</sup>

"The streams unceasing flow to Indra." <sup>4</sup>

Should there be any truth to our hypothesis it follows that the reputation of Indra as storm-god will also trace, at least in part, to the association of the tempestuous red

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<sup>1</sup>A common motive found the warrior hero being assigned the governorship, or consigned to, the Underworld. Notable examples include Nergal, Gilgamesh, Maui, Shu, etc. Another common motive finds the Martian hero being banished or physically expelled by the King of the gods. Eurytus' chasing Heracles from the palace of Oechalia is a case in point. See R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* (New York, 1982), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>III:33:6

<sup>3</sup>V:17:11-12.

<sup>4</sup>II:30:1

planet with the spectacular deluge associated with the release of Saturn's fiery waters. The key to the imagery is the fact that the waters first became released during the cataclysmic circumstances associated with the expulsion of Mars.

"Before the High God, at his birth, heaven trembled, earth, many floods and all the precipices. The Strong One bringeth nigh the Bull's two parents."<sup>1</sup>

Indra's epiphany as storm-god is elsewhere linked to the cascading waters from on high: "A stormer, thou has made the stormy waters flow down, O Indra, like the running waters."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the *Veda* Indra himself is compared to a flood.<sup>3</sup>

Indra's stature as a storm-god can best be understood, in our opinion, by comparison with analogous traditions surrounding Nergal. Again and again the epiphany of the Akkadian war-god is compared to a storm-flood:

"The advance of the lord is the onrush of water, the devastating deluge."<sup>4</sup>

"Flood, which covers the unruly Land, first of the Great Gods."<sup>5</sup>

"Nergal, lord of storm and carnage, able to bring about Deluge."<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere it is said of Nergal: "Youth, whose uprising is a Hurricane, is a Flood-storm, beats down all Fiendlands."<sup>7</sup> Here the words for Hurricane and Flood-storm are, respectively, *mer* and *amaru*, both of which are almost certainly cognate with the name of the red planet.<sup>8</sup>

## THE FLOODING OF MARS

A universal mythological motive finds the hero being born into—or in close proximity to—a large body of water. Recall again the aquatic birth of Vahagn, closely paralleled by traditions surrounding Perseus, Oedipus, Maui, Lug, Finn and numerous others. An intriguing example of this motive comes to us from ancient India and concerns the birth of Skanda, a war-god known to have usurped many of the functions of Indra in later times. While there are several different versions of Skanda's birth, the most popular one emphasizes the volatile nature of the youthful god, making him be born from the fiery seed of Shiva:

"The seed itself is fiery and uncontrolled, and the gods' cannot bear it—it splits open their stomachs and pours out to form a lake. In other versions the same motive applies to the Krittikas, the six wives of the sages who become the foster-mothers of Skanda: the seed enters them through their buttocks and is torn from their stomachs.

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<sup>1</sup>IV:22:4

<sup>2</sup>I:174:9

<sup>3</sup>I:11:6 See also the comments of Griffith, *op cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>M. Schretter, *Alter Orient und Hellas* (Innsbruck, 1974), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup>Weihler, *op cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>The Latin word Mars is apparently derived from a root mar, duplicated in the Oscan form of the god's name: Marmar. This word finds an exact parallel in the Akkadian Marmar, god of war and storm. The root of the latter word, according to Astour, is the Sumerian word mer, "wind." See M. Astour, *Hellenosemitica* (Leiden, 1967), p. 299. See also E. Cochrane, "The Spring of Ares," *KRONOS* XI:3 (Summer 1986), p. 21.

Skanda is sometimes said to have burst from Parvati's womb after she drank the golden water of the lake formed from Siva's seed."<sup>1</sup>

Skanda's fiery birth amidst a great outflux of water offers a certain parallel to the birth accorded Shu in Egyptian sources, who, depending on the version of the event, is either spat out or otherwise expelled by the ancient sun-god amidst an immense outpouring of fiery material, from whence derives the pillar-like support of the sun.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Budge pointed out long ago, the Egyptian account of the emission of Shu preserves the explicit relation between the pouring out of the god and the pillar-like support, the word *ashesh*—expressing the idea of "pouring out" but also "supporting"—being used of Shu's birth.<sup>3</sup>

In light of a general correspondence between the birth myths surrounding Skanda and Shu it is significant to find that the name of Skanda likewise traces to a root signifying an "emission, to be emitted, to be poured out."<sup>4</sup> That the reference for this language was the World Pillar—poured out in conjunction with the birth of the warrior-hero—is confirmed by the apparent relation between Skanda and *skambha*, the latter word being used of the World Pillar throughout the *Veda*, signifying "prop or support."<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing traditions associated with Skanda and Shu assume a profound significance in light of the former's explicit identification with the planet Mars, and offer yet more evidence in support of the intimate association of the red planet with ancient conceptions of the World Pillar.<sup>6</sup>

## THE DUNKING OF THE HERO

If the most common interpretation of the expulsion of Mars finds the warrior-hero being born into a large body of water, another widespread motive finds him being dunked or inundated with water. Indian myth, for example, makes Skanda the recipient of a celestial baptism. Thus in the *Mahabharata* we read that upon the war-god's birth the gods: "all poured water upon Skanda."<sup>7</sup>

A related motive, one which received a good deal of discussion at the hands of Dumezil, finds the incandescent warrior-hero being subdued, calmed, or otherwise brought to his "senses" by being immersed or dunked in water. The classic case,

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<sup>1</sup>Shulman, *op cit.*, p. 46. Another version recorded in the *Skanda Purana* finds the god springing from sparks emanating from the forehead of Siva. See Shulman, *op cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>E. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York, 1969), Vol. II, pp. 90, 299. It is not without interest that in a later Vedic hymn Indra was said to have sprung or been spat from the mouth of Purusha, the world giant from whose body the world was formed. *Ibid.*, X:90:13 The birth of the god amidst a great outflux of water, from which the World Mountain would eventually arise, is also apparent in the myth surrounding the birth of Huitzilopochtli. There, too, the great war-god is born into a lake, from whence arises the sacred Mt. Capultac. See Brundage, *op cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>See also the discussion in Talbott, *op cit.*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, *op cit.*, p. 1140.

<sup>5</sup>Williams, *op cit.*, p. 1141. See also the discussion in de Santillana and von Dechend, *op cit.*, pp. 227, 232-233.

<sup>6</sup>That Shu is identifiable with the planet Mars has been shown by Cochrane and Talbott. "Heracles and the Planet Mars," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 102-105. D. Talbott, "Mother Goddess and Warrior Hero," *AEON* 1:5 (1988), pp. 52-54.

<sup>7</sup>*Mbh.* 9:45

perhaps, is the treatment of Cuchulainn at the hands of the Ulates. According to the *Book of Leinster*:

"To calm his anger, they brought him three vats of cold water. They put him in the first vat and he gave the water such powerful heat that it burst the staves and the rings of the vat as one cracks a nutshell. In the second vat, the water made bubbles as big as fists. In the third vat the heat was that which certain men can withstand and others cannot withstand. Then the furor of the small boy diminished."<sup>1</sup>

If our interpretation of the events surrounding the "birth" of the warrior-hero is on the right track, one would understand the dunking of Cuchulainn as reflecting the immersion of Mars within the fiery waters which accompanied its expulsion from the immediate vicinity of Saturn. Inasmuch as these waters came to collect along the polar axis—itsself conceived of as a giant fountain or spring—and inasmuch as Mars' assumption of a position within this configuration brought stability to the configuration, it could be said that the inundation of the planet-hero subdued him or otherwise brought him under control.<sup>2</sup> The rambunctious, red-hot youth spanning heaven and earth had become the subdued pillar-god, the servant of the sun-god. Hence it is significant to note that Cuchulainn, immediately after being dunked by the vats of water, is said to have taken his place at the feet of the king.<sup>3</sup> Nor is it without interest that Irish tradition makes the hero die bound to a pillar.<sup>4</sup>

As Dumézil points out, there is a remarkable parallel to the dunking of Cuchulainn in Ossetic myth.<sup>5</sup> There the dunking of the infant-hero Batraz takes place immediately upon his birth: "Like a spout filling everything with flame, the child—a child of blazing steel—drops headlong to the seven cauldrons below; but they are unable to cool him." Eventually, however, the hero's aunt succeeds in cooling him. Of Batraz it is said: "The child will henceforth live in the sky, from which he will descend in a burst, incandescent as at his birth, whenever some danger or scandal threatens his kin."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from Dumézil, *op cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Another common motive makes the fiery hero heat the waters to such an extent that they remain hot to this day. The passion of Heracles, for example, was described as follows: "His blood hissed and bubbled like spring water when red-hot metal is tempered. He plunged headlong into the nearest stream, but the poison only burned fiercer; these waters have been scalding hot ever since." See Graves, *op cit.*, p. 201. Hence the intimate association between Heracles and hot springs in Greek lore.

<sup>3</sup>Dumézil, *op cit.*, p. 134. See also the accounts in Hull, *op cit.*, pp. 147, 154.

<sup>4</sup>Hull, *op cit.*, p. 259. This Celtic tradition finds a certain parallel in Euripedes' *Heracles*. There the Greek strongman, upon murdering his children in a fit of madness, is plunged into a prolonged sleep by Athena and bound to a pillar. See *The Complete Greek Drama* (New York, 1938), Vol. I, p. 1039. The import of both traditions is that the warrior-hero became subdued upon being bound to a pillar. Note also that Cuchulainn's favorite haunt was the plain of Murtheim, a site which, like Heracles' original domain, the plain of Marathon, almost certainly qualifies as a celestial Campus Martius.

<sup>5</sup>With the dunking of Cuchulainn at the hands of the Ulates I would compare the treatment of Ares at the hands of the Aloeds (Ulates was originally spelled Ulades). See the *Iliad* 5:385-386. The Aloeds' imprisonment of Ares, not unlike the treatment of Cuchulainn at the hands of the Ulates, resulted in the war-god being weakened (to the point of death according to ancient sources).

<sup>6</sup>Dumézil, *op cit.*, pp. 137-138.

Dumezil prefaces his analysis of the Batraz myth with the following observation: "This hero of the Nart legends, if one may rely on certain strong indications, has taken upon himself and thereby conserved a part of the mythology of the 'Scythian Ares,' the latter, in the last analysis, an heir of the Indo-Iranian Indra."<sup>1</sup>

To Dumezil's masterful analysis there is little to add apart from the observation that here, too, he has overlooked the explicit placement of Batraz in the sky: "The child will henceforth live in the sky." As the Ossetic counterpart of the Greek Ares, Indian Indra, and Irish Cuchulainn, Batraz is properly identified with the planet Mars.

In summary, it is hardly necessary to point out that this hypothetical flooding of Mars with cosmic debris could hardly have occurred without having had a significant impact upon the physiognomy and chemistry of the red planet. Notable immediately is the fact that the surface of Mars is criss-crossed with countless "rivulets" indicative of having recently been subjected to substantial quantities of water.<sup>2</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from an analysis of ancient mythology is that the unique scarred physiognomy of Mars is of recent origin.

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<sup>1</sup>Dumezil, *op cit.*, p. 137. With Batraz' fall into 7 cauldrons, one might compare Ares' fall in battle at the hands of Athena. According to the *Iliad* 21:405-408, Ares' body covered 7 acres upon his fall.

<sup>2</sup>R. Haberle, "The Climate of Mars," *Scientific American* 254: 5 (May 1986). Noting that the numerous channels on Mars are evidence of flowing water, the writer offers the following interpretation: "Not all the channels are evidence of a warmer climate; some could have been formed by water flowing under an insulating layer of surface ice in a climate not substantially warmer than the one today. Many of the channels, however, resemble surface runoff networks, with tributaries converging into a single valley. Assuming these channels were carved by water flowing at the surface, then the global average temperature at the time must have been above 0 degrees C. (Today it is about -53 degrees.) From the number of meteorite craters superimposed on the runoff channels their age has been estimated at roughly 4 billion years. Hence it appears Mars was comparatively warm for the first half-billion years or so of its history." p. 56. For a markedly different interpretation of the evidence see the comments of Fred Hall, "Solar System Studies: Part Two," *AEON* I:4 (1988), pp. 30-33.