JASO 24/2 (1993): 119-131

REVIEW ARTICLE

DEBATING DUMÉZIL: RECENT STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY

N. J. ALLEN

WOUTER W. BELIER, *Decayed Gods: Origin and Development of Georges Dumézil's 'Idéologie Tripartie'* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 7), Leiden etc.: Brill 1991. xv, 239 pp., Selected Bibliography, Index. Gld120.00/$68.75.

BRUCE LINCOLN, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Foreword by Wendy Doniger), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1991. xxi, 270 pp., Figures, Indexes. £35.95/£14.25//$51.75/$20.75.

GREGORY SCHREMPP, *Magic Arrows: The Maori, the Greeks and the Folklore of the Universe* (Foreword by Marshall Sahlins) (New Directions in Anthropological Writing; gen. eds. George E. Marcus and James Clifford), Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press 1992. xviii, 217 pp., Works Cited, Index. $47.00/$16.95.

DUMÉZIL (1898-1986) was an intellectual anomaly. He operated in the disciplinary space that lies between Indo-European comparative linguistics, comparative religion, and half-a-dozen specialized philological disciplines, but would have liked to have been recognized first and foremost as a historian. Yet there is a case for saying that in spirit his work is closer to anthropology than to any other discipline.

He was *par excellence* a comparativist, concentrating on the older Indo-European world, but was far from ignorant about other cultures (in particular,

Chinese, Turkish, Caucasus and Quechua). He used written sources but, like many anthropologists, was interested in them largely for what they could reveal about the unwritten traditions that shaped them. His work does indeed bear on myth, ritual and pantheons, but it goes far beyond 'religion', in any narrow sense of the word. It bears on social structure, law, ethnomedicine, narratives of all sorts including pseudo-history, but above all on the *ideology* that provides the more or less unitary framework for all these aspects of society, and for others. And he advanced strong claims. In all the main domains of the Indo-European-speaking world, he claimed, the ideology transmitted from the original period of unity remains detectable in particular contexts—at the very least we are dealing with cultural processes extending over millenniums. Unless the early Indo-Europeans turn out to have been extraordinarily unrepresentative, Dumézil's claim ought to affect how we think in general terms about non-literate societies and the possibilities for comparing them. *Provided*, that is, that his claim is justified.

There are many reasons why Dumézil's work is controversial. Some of them are good, or at least reasonable, and relate to real issues on which he may have been wrong. For instance, I have argued elsewhere that his notion of a 'tri-functional' Indo-European ideology was incomplete: in addition to his three main categories or clusters of ideas (pertaining respectively to the sacred, to force and to abundance), we need to recognize a fourth, pertaining to 'otherness' and covering both transcendence/totality (which is valued) and exclusion/nothingness (which is devalued). Such an addition opens the way to certain other revisions (Allen 1991; forthcoming a). But the present discussion concentrates on the 'bad' reasons why Dumézil is too little appreciated.[1]

Belier's book, formerly a Leiden doctorate, will please those—and they are many, for instance most historians of early Rome (cf. Poucet 1988)—who would like to continue comfortably ignoring the challenge posed by Dumézil. Its aim is (somewhat oddly) to 'reconstruct' and evaluate Dumézil's theory for its usefulness, but not to determine its correctness (p. xii). It is little interested in Dumézil's intellectual roots, in the other scholars who have developed his ideas, or in the primary sources he analysed, and concentrates on summarizing or excerpting from the oeuvre. A chapter on concepts and methods is followed by four others organized by region and topic and tracing the changing formulations. The conclusion is—or seems to be, for the wording is muted and elusive—that Dumézilian theory, aesthetically pleasing though it may be, is of minimal scientific

1. The invitation to review the books listed above provided a welcome opportunity to take a broader look at a number of recent studies concerned with comparative mythology, particularly Dumézilian, but not exclusively so.

value, that it is too vague to allow of verification or falsification, and that its application is imprecise and inconsistent.

Looking back over his oeuvre (which amounts to some 17,000 published pages), Dumézil himself distinguished three main phases (see 'Bibliographie' in Cahiers pour un temps 1981: 340-44). From his initial Frazerian phase little remained that he still judged useful; in 1938 the first glimpse of the trifunctional pattern ushered in a quarter century of rapid exploration; and 1966 saw the beginning of the summing up, the *phase du bilan* (the 1980s seem to me to constitute a fourth phase). Starting with quotations from 1924, Belier concentrates on the second phase, and although he lists the later publications, he makes little use of them. This is to work the wrong way round. A better approach to assessing the oeuvre would be to start with the mature formulations of phase 3, and work backwards only where it proves necessary for particular purposes. As Dumézil himself often observed, phase 2 saw many changes in particular interpretations, but Belier's implicit charge—that the changes somehow vitiate the mature work—is groundless.

Dumézil did not present himself as a theory-builder (*'je ne suis pas théoricien, ni "dumézilien"'* (1987: 121)), and Belier's attack on Dumézilian 'theory' is in part a rhetorical device (an unconscious one?). Dumézil's strength lay in his sensitivity to common patterns found in different contexts, and in the prodigious erudition he drew on while exercising this sensitivity. No doubt all intellectual activity involves some sort of theory, but in Dumézil's case it was not so abstruse as to require much 'reconstructing'. It consisted essentially of two things: the application to extralinguistic domains of culture of the venerable family-tree model of language relationships (an endeavour already well established in the nineteenth century), and a fairly straightforward abstract formulation of the similarities of pattern that he observed. Belier neglects other Dumézilians (the term *is* convenient) on the grounds that they have not developed the theory, merely used it. However, the contrast between theory and application makes little sense: most of Dumézil's own work after the early 1940s consisted of 'applications', i.e. of the recognition of new contexts in which the trifunctional pattern is manifested, together with elaboration of previous analyses and exploration of the relationship between new and old.

Immersed as he was in the nitty-gritty of the texts, and little interested in theorizing *per se*, Dumézil's account of the notion of *fonction* is less full than it might have been. Belier is quite wrong, however, in thinking that the word is synonymous with *activité*. Having established that it *covers* activity (1958: 18f.), Dumézil goes on to emphasize that there is more to it. To paraphrase, the functions supplied the proto-Indo-European speakers with a heuristic and/or with classificatory principles that applied well beyond the realm of social structure. The eighteen lines of Dumézil's text that define the individual functions are not vague, and could well have been quoted *in extenso*. Belier might also have meditated on the final sentence of the passage: 'these are not a priori definitions but the convergent teaching of numerous applications of the tripartite ideology' (ibid.).

In other words, a function is a domain within an ideology, a unit within a structure of ideas. As I have argued elsewhere (Allen forthcoming b), *function* and *ideology* in Dumézil's writing are much like *class* and *form of primitive classification* in Durkheim and Mauss's, and an analysis of the early Indo-Europeans in terms of the former is no stranger than an analysis of the Zuñi in terms of the latter.

Belier's chapter on methods not only fails to come to grips with 'function', but also, by neglecting the later works, misses Dumézil's 'requirements of good sense', the rules that he recommends to those claiming to identify trifunctional patterns. The elements of an ensemble should be 'distinct, solidary, homogeneous and exhaustive', as well as *obviously* pertaining to the relevant function (1979: 72). The rules are not always easy to apply, but again they are not vague.

Belier sees Dumézil as having recourse to a number of 'auxiliary hypotheses' to explain departures from what his theory predicts. The language is again tendentious and prejudicial, as if Dumézil (the would-be historian!) should *expect* to find identical manifestations of the trifunctional ideology in all branches of the Indo-European world. For instance, one of the 'auxiliary hypotheses' is the 'Zoroastrian reform', which explains why the trifunctional list of Zoroastrian 'archangels' (the Amesha Spentas) differs from the polytheism reconstructable for earlier periods of Indo-Iranian religion. But the problem for the comparativist is to give an account of both the similarities and the differences: how *could* this be done without postulating some change? It is no use merely referring to one of the non-comparativist Iranianists who disputes Dumézil's position (which other specialists support).

Here and there one finds useful tabulations of information, but in general the book's organization is unhelpful. Thus chapter 3, on the 'Tripartite System', starts with a section on India, covering social structure and theological patterns in the Vedic hymns, but it is not until chapter 6, 'Tripartita Minora', that we meet the similar pattern of gods in the *Mahâbhârata*. The implied distinction between major and minor manifestations of the ideology is arbitrary and misleading. There are many details meriting criticism, but the underlying problem is one of general attitude. By casting its vague pall of doubt over the whole undertaking, and by failing even to *try* to discriminate between the aspects of the oeuvre that are well founded and those that are not, this backward-looking thesis has little to offer those curious about the present status and future possibilities of the field.

Bruce Lincoln at least engages with the primary sources. Regarded by Mircea Eliade as his most brilliant student (so Wendy Doniger's foreword tells us), Lincoln devoted his doctorate to a comparison between early Iranians, as known from the texts, and East African cattle herders, as reported by ethnographers. The thesis as published (Lincoln 1981) combined Indo-Iranian lexical/ideological comparativism with a more materialist approach to pastoralism as a mode of

production. The first half of Lincoln's new book expands the former interest and assembles a number of the author's papers from around 1980. The main aim is to reconstruct proto-Indo-European conceptions relating to death and the Other World. The next hundred pages shift the emphasis from dying to killing. We move from the *Iliad*, via an overview article on war and warriors reprinted from Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, to other forms of violence, especially sacrifice, and to forms of ideological oppression, for example of females in early Zoroastrian ethnophysiology. Whereas the first part of the book reflects, so we are told, the loss of a beloved grandfather, the second reflects a growing enthusiasm for Marxist political attitudes, especially for the analysis of myth as an attempt to legitimize domination. The last thirty pages, comprising 'Polemic Pieces', essentially constitute an attack on Dumézil, of whose politics Lincoln disapproves.

Lincoln is curiously ambivalent about his own earlier pieces: while he judges that they retain some value (p. xiii), he has agreed to republish them only at Wendy Doniger's urging (p. 125). His unhappiness arises partly because the papers reflect a family-tree view of the Indo-European language group, which he now takes to be problematic, partly because (persuaded by an Italian friend) he now thinks common myths arise not from common descent but from common social structures and historical situations; and partly again (p. 124) because the essays pay insufficient attention to competing versions of myths. Neither of the first two objections is cogent, but if the third shows awareness of a tendency to oversimplify, then it has some substance. There is indeed a pervasive tendency to tidy up the materials so as to produce a neat and unitary picture. For instance, an essay on Druids maintains that for Celts and other Indo-European peoples 'healing is a process precisely inverse to that of sacrifice' (p. 181). All healing? All sacrifice? Precisely?

An additional reason for unhappiness ought to have been the number of mistranslations, a fault noted in these pages by John Penney (1987) in relation to another of Lincoln's books. Rashly, the author alludes to his own 'philological rigour' (p. xiii), and seems to take pride in making his own translations (p. 1 n.); but the mistakes are often elementary ones. Here is a small selection: Greek *pempô* means send or escort, not lead (pp. 23, 85); *hikonto* means arrived, not were off (p. 78); *khreôntai* (in the context) means use, not need (p. 190); *horkion tamnô* means take an oath, not cut an oath! (p. 196); a sentence from Plato is curiously garbled (p. 49), and a passage from Aeschylus purportedly suggesting that Agamemnon and Menelaus are twins does not do so (p. 40); Latin *cui plurima canities* means 'whose copious grey hair', not 'most of whose...' (p. 63); Sanskrit *yâna* means vehicle (in general), not ferry-boat (p. 69). Since most of the essays are reprints, it is odd that such errors have not been noted and corrected. But perhaps not so odd after all, in a writer whose thoughts, according to Doniger's foreword, 'progress at roughly the speed of light'.

The opportunity might also have been taken, when reprinting a paper on warrior 'rage' in Homer, to inform the reader that Dumézil examined the essay (1983: 181ff.) and concluded that it was entirely mistaken. Does Lincoln have an

answer to the particular criticisms? He does take up a critique of his 1981 book by Mary Boyce (1987), who holds that ancient Iranian society was bipartite, consisting of priests and herdsmen but not warriors. Lincoln convincingly defends the trifunctional view of Dumézil and Benveniste. In doing so, however, he attacks the book by Wikander (published in German in 1938) on Indo-Iranian bands of warrior youth, disapproving of its 'ideological underpinnings and resonances'. These he exemplifies by the Swedish scholar's description of the god Indra as 'Führer' of the Maruts (storm spirits). But the German word is natural in the context, and the objection is ridiculous.

The final section consists of a *TLS* review from 1986 of the third volume of Dumézil's *Esquisses*, a discussion of Dumézil's methods as applied to the vexed question of 'The One-Eyed and the One-Handed', and an attempt to demonstrate that he condoned Turkish massacres of Armenians. The first of these pieces proclaims a shift of scholarly attention from traditionally academic discussion of the findings and legitimacy of Dumézil's comparativism to the ideological underpinnings of his life and work; but in so far as this has taken place, it represents a byway, not to say a dead end. Arguments about Dumézil's friendships during the 1920s and '30s are irrelevant to the intellectual challenge posed by trifunctional theory. Dumézil inclined to the Right, indeed to monarchism, whereas his political critics, such as the classicist Momigliano, incline to the Left; but no hard evidence exists to show that Dumézil's political views significantly affected his comparativism. As Lincoln admits, the matter turns largely on the interpretation of silence. It is perfectly true that Dumézil did not spice his academic publications with such comments as would commend him to a politically correct American academic in 1990; but why should he have?

As we have seen, Lincoln accepts the Dumézilian view of a proto-Indo-European tripartite division of labour, but he too, like Belier, fails to grapple with the application of the notion of 'function' outside social structure. All one learns here (p. 61) is that Lincoln doubts the Dumézilian view of the pantheon, partly because, as has been noted by others, the deities appearing in the 'canonical' trifunctional sets and the deities having reconstructable proto-Indo-European names do not overlap. This is to overrate the importance of etymology in cultural comparativism, and to ignore very many careful analyses that extend far beyond the gods. When Lincoln does approach a Dumézilian theological formulation, his choice is unfortunate. Dumézil argued for a homology between two Scandinavian deities and two legendary heroes of early Rome, so that Odin the One-Eyed:Tyr the One-Handed::Cocles:Scaevola. Accepting this basic homology, Lincoln criticizes Dumézil's narrowness in developing it. But he would have done better to criticize the Odin–Cocles component. Even if Odin is first-functional, which I doubt, Cocles is not, and he does not clearly outrank Scaevola. For once, the similarities *are* most likely coincidental. Although Dumézil frequently returned to this analysis, it is among his least satisfying.

The last chapter of Lincoln's book exhumes a paper from 1927 in which Dumézil analyses certain massacres drawn from the myths of ancient Greece, India

and the Old Testament; but the attempt to elicit from it evidence of Dumézil's deep moral deficiency is a flop. One wonders why Lincoln so desperately seeks such evidence.

The vacuity, not to mention the malice and ignorance, of the political attack on Dumézil is definitively demonstrated in the recent book by Eribon (1992). Best known for his biography of Foucault, Eribon had enjoyed conversations with Dumézil for some years before he edited the 1987 volume of *Entretiens*, which, together with the posthumous collection of Dumézil's essays published in 1992, comprises the easiest and best introduction to the oeuvre to appear so far. Stung by the groundless rumours that his friend had Nazi sympathies, Eribon has now produced a study of Dumézil's university career and of the academic subculture in which he worked. He draws on many unpublished documents and letters, and has discovered a series of newspaper articles on foreign affairs, which Dumézil wrote in the 1930s under the pseudonym Georges Marcenay. We now know for certain that Dumézil approved of Mussolini. On the other hand, he abhorred Hitler and Nazism, and not only did he have a number of friends and supporters who were Jews, but his contemporaries in the 1930s detected in his work not the least whiff of antisemitism.

Two other recent books situate themselves within the Dumézilian tradition: Emilia Masson's *Le Combat pour l'Immortalité* (1991) and Françoise LeRoux and Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h's *La Société celtique* (1991). Educated in Yugoslavia, Masson interweaves her Hittite material with Slavic, using little-known sources from Belgrade libraries, as well as some material gathered by interviewing Vlachs in north-east Serbia. She is not suggesting any special Hittite–Slav relationship, merely that both are particularly archaic Indo-European cultures.

Although the Hittite *language* is certainly linked with Indo-European, specialists have generally held that the *culture*, and especially the religion, owe much more to the non-Indo-European cultures of the area—the names of the gods are of Hattic origin. Masson wants to view the religion too as essentially Indo-European, and a priori the idea is well worth exploring. Dumézil himself did little in this area. He frequently cited a famous treaty contracted around 1380 BC between Hittite and Mitannian rulers, since the gods invoked include the canonical Vedic trifunctional grouping of Mitra–Varuna, Indra and the Nâsatyas. He also analysed in trifunctional terms the Hittite ritual for luring deities away from enemy towns, and encouraged the pioneering study by Sergent (1983), a paper inadequately acknowledged by Masson. As for the Slavs, while Dumézil was confident that the vast folklore material would be of value to comparativism, he thought the sources too scanty to permit reconstruction of an articulated theology (1968: 624ff.; 1983: 193ff.).

Since Masson opens by claiming to be working in posthumous collaboration with Dumézil, it is disquieting that she ignores his views on his own intellectual development, as well as his advice on prudent methods of argument. Masson's earlier chapters, dealing with winter and spring festivals, draw heavily both on Frazer and on Dumézil's work from the 1920s, treating the latter as authoritative; but Dumézil himself thought his early work had shown '*un laxisme consternant, tant dans la détermination des éléments comparables que dans l'appréciation des ressemblances*' (1987: 118). The three functions, so central to his mature view of the specificity of the Indo-European heritage, hardly appear here before page 225, and his view of the relation between the three *functions* and the three *levels* of the cosmos (that they are distinct phenomena occasionally brought together), is simply ignored.

In fact, Masson's view of Indo-European ideology departs fundamentally from Dumézil's. Take her admiration for Nodilo (1834–1912), a little-known Croatian mythologist. One is always pleased if the reputation of worthy pioneers can be resuscitated, but alas there are good reasons why the Indo-European comparativism of Max Müller's generation is generally judged to have achieved practically nothing. There is all the difference in the world between assembling Indo-European triads, as Nodilo apparently did, and following Dumézil in recognizing three *functions*, which are expressed in some triads and not others, and which may perfectly well underlie quartets, quintets (such as the Vedic gods), sextets (Amesha Spentas) etc. However, somewhat like her supporter, the Indo-Europeanist Haudry (who has been criticized with force by Dubuisson (1991)), Masson sees the three cosmic levels as more fundamental than the three functions, and as having provided the model on which the Hittites and other Indo-Europeans organized the world around them, their society, pantheon, life, even their bodies (Masson 1991: 199). 'Collaborators' who depart so radically and so grandiosely from Dumézil's views need to give good reasons, and, in particular, Masson needs to explain why we should regard the three-level cosmos as specifically Indo-European.

The main straightforward trifunctional interpretation concerns the Hittite grouping Sun God, Storm God, Tutelary God (^{d}UTU-us, ^{d}U-as, ^{d}KAL) which Masson claims can be henceforth aligned with such canonical triads as Jupiter–Mars–Quirinus. However her trifunctional construal has a number of difficulties and is not helped by the unconvincing argument that the frequent coupling of the Sun God of Heaven with the Sun Goddess of Earth corresponds to Dumézil's first-function dualism of Varuna and Mitra (both male!). Dumézil applauded the salutary paper by Sergent (1979), which rejected a good number of purported trifunctional analyses of Greek material, and I doubt whether, as is claimed, he would have welcomed Masson's book as providing 'confirmation' of his most important theory (Masson 1991: 231).

As in Lincoln's book (for example when he writes on humoural theory in the middle Persian *Zâd Spram*), one can find interesting material. I was particularly struck by the photograph of an elderly Vlach matron demonstrating how, in the world above our own, belts are worn around the neck, while in the world below

they are worn around the knees. Might one compare the mythical Irish Lugaid, who had two or three red stripes around his body, one being round his neck (Dumézil 1983: 237f.)? But the challenge for comparativism is not to cite or expound interesting material—of which there is no shortage—but to be convincing.

While Masson writes as a recent convert (of two to three years standing?), LeRoux and Guyonvarc'h, two Celticists from Rennes, 'discovered' Dumézil in 1948, and in turn were often referred to by him. In their recent book (1991) they discuss social structure (druids, warrior nobles, commoners) and various other manifestations of trifunctionality drawn from Irish narrative, with a quick glance at the Welsh *Mabinogion*. Their interpretation of the educators of Cúchulainn is persuasive, but too often the argument is arbitrary, even wild. One cannot simply *affirm* that the sun or the yellow broom pertain to the second function (ibid.: 103, 184), or that boar, wolf, stag are trifunctional (ibid.: 178). A crux for comparativist approaches to Ireland is provided by the Tuatha Dé Danann, a group of mythic beings deriving from the pre-Christian pantheon. Their argument that Lug is '*"hors-classe" par le haut*' (ibid.: 92) is cogent (cf. Dumézil 1968: 189 n.), but the attempt to divide the five main male figures into a first-functional 'triad of sovereignty' (Lug, Dagda, Ogma) and a pair of third-functional specialists (Dian Cecht and Goibniu) is not.[2]

A number of the formulations are odd, for example that the third function is somehow negative and lacks intrinsic quiddity (LeRoux and Guyonvarc'h 1991: 33, 133), that the tripartite ideology is outside history (ibid.: 68), or that warfare is feminine because of the passions it arouses (ibid.: 95). The references are sometimes out of date, and the writing falls far short of the lucid organization and stylistic grace of its inspirer. For all the book's good intentions, it may discourage more potential new readers of Dumézil than it attracts. Would-be friends may do more damage than overt opponents.

One such opponent is the Cambridge archaeologist Colin Renfrew. In his well-known book of 1987 (cf. his paper of 1989), Renfrew argues that the dispersal of the Indo-European speakers was associated with the spread of agriculture, and started not, as is usually thought, in the third to fourth millennium BC north of the Black Sea, but around the sixth millennium south of it. Our concern here, however, is only with chapter 10 of his book, in which he tries to cast doubt on 'the whole edifice of Dumézilian scholarship'. The main argument is that, in

2. From a four-functional perspective, the obvious construal to explore would be: Lug, god of all skills, fourth function (valued); Dagda, god of druidry, first function; Ogma, the great champion, second function; Dian Cecht, god of health (cf. the Nâsatyas), third function; Goibniu, the blacksmith, fourth function (devalued). (For a sample of high-class work by a Dumézilian Celticist, see Sterckx 1992.)

construing Indian and Celtic social stratification as descending from a common origin, Dumézil attributes to proto-Indo-European society a degree of stratification that, even at the later date, and *a fortiori* earlier, is archaeologically impossible. But Renfrew misreads the victim of his attack. Certainly, for Dumézil, the proto-Indo-European speakers had a conception of their social structure as founded on the distinctness and ranking of the three functions, but he was carefully and explicitly agnostic as to the *concrete* form or forms in which the conception was realised. One possibility among others was that the trifunctional pattern applied only to certain clans or families that specialized respectively in one of the three functions, while the mass of society was unspecialized (Dumézil 1958: 18). Renfrew cites the page but apparently stopped reading at line four. He also thinks that Dumézil *needed* to offer a concrete picture of the proto-society (Renfrew 1987: 245). But he was under no such compulsion. Though well aware of debates about the *Urheimat*, Dumézil saw them, rightly, as inaccessible to the methods he was using and essentially irrelevant to his problems (Dumézil 1958: 5).

Renfrew has other objections. Appreciating that the essence of the approach lies in seeing that A–B–C in one context resembles a–b–c in another, he doubts whether the similarities proposed are always persuasive and expresses doubts similar to those expressed by Ernest Gellner (1982) concerning Lévi-Straussian binary analyses (where the similarities would have the form: A–B resembles a–b). Of course, as we have seen, the Dumézilian literature contains a proportion of unconvincing trifunctional analyses, just as the Lévi-Straussian literature contains unconvincing binary ones. But undiscriminating doubts are valueless—the battle needs to be fought at the level of particulars and, unfortunately, non-comparativist specialists cannot always be relied on. Renfrew cites the Scandinavianist Page (1978-9), no doubt unaware that Page's objections were answered at length (Dumézil 1985: 259-98).

Renfrew concludes that in so far as they are real, the similarities Dumézil finds are to be explained not by common origins but by a combination of coincidence, parallel development or global human proclivities (of a Lévi-Straussian nature), and that however rich they were linguistically, the proto-Indo-Europeans were probably 'culturally rather simple' (Renfrew 1987: 273). Anyone who can think this simply has not come to grips with the volume and, above all, the *interconnectedness* of the evidence. It is understandable that an archaeologist should be tempted to exaggerate the possibilities of his own discipline, but as regards 'cultural simplicity' it is, I think, more for archaeology to accommodate its *interpretations* to the *facts* established by comparativism, than vice versa.

Renfrew's archaeological objection is repeated by D'yakonov in his brief 'excursus' on Dumézil (1990: 111-13). This senior and learned Russian philologist also maintains that Dumézil overemphasized the significance of language families, was wrong to limit himself to three functions (several others are suggested, in passing!), and sometimes made tenuous *rapprochements*. The third charge is true enough, and Dumézil was sometimes the first to criticize and discard his own proposals; the second shows a deep misunderstanding of Dumézil's sense of

pattern or structure. The first raises a more useful point. A priori, it is entirely natural and reasonable to look for broader forms of comparativism that transcend the language family, and this is one of the things Dumézil was doing in his Frazerian phase during the 1920s.[3] It would be perfectly reasonable also to work on a smaller scale, confining oneself for instance to the Indo-Iranian branch of the language family. However, as it turns out, the Indo-European family as a whole has, so far, offered a framework within which cultural comparison is particularly rewarding.

I should like to close with a brief discussion of a book that does not mention Dumézil but relates to this issue of broader-scale comparativism. Possibly the most influential paradigm for approaching myth (or ideology, cosmology, belief system...) is still Lévi-Strauss's, and although in his foreword Sahlins optimistically refers to his former doctoral student as 'initiating a paradigm shift', Schrempp is essentially Lévi-Straussian. He starts from a sense of affinity between Zeno's paradoxes concerning space or movement and certain tribal creation myths retailed by Lévi-Strauss, in which an original continuum gives way to discreteness when some primal element is deleted. This leads him, via the Great Chain of Being, to the Maori—for his doctorate he worked in Auckland, particularly on the Maori language. In the narrative mode of Maori cosmogony, Tâwhiri, the Wind, seems to mediate between discreteness and continuity (p. 78f.). But the Maori also have genealogical cosmologies, and Schrempp associates this dualism with Kant's antinomies, allegedly unduly neglected by Durkheim. Finally he returns to Achilles and the tortoise by looking at some foot-races in North American myths.

A bare summary of themes cannot do justice to the sheer ingenuity of the argument, but one has to ask what it *achieves*. Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss helped each other in their careers, and greatly respected each other's work (cf. Eribon 1992: 329ff.); Dumézil held that there was room for both approaches and deprecated attempts to award primacy to one or the other. However, unless individuals can think up totally new approaches to myth they have to choose between those on the market, and it seems to me *even* harder for Lévi-Straussians than it is for Dumézilians to attain results that will endure and that can be built on by others. Polynesia must possess a common cultural heritage—indeed Schrempp refers to a 'shared inventory of mythological themes' (p. 71). Would it not have been more useful in the long term to explore this historically and geographically specific and coherent body of material than to work at that lofty level of abstraction where Bororo, Greek and Maori face identical cognitive problems?

3. Compare the work of Lyle (1990) which, imaginative and adventurous though it is, is unpersuasive in its attempt to build Dumézil's functions into an ideological schema applicable to most archaic old-world cultures.

One wonders if today's world-wide comparativism will fare any better than Frazer's has.

Debates about Dumézil will certainly continue. The notion that alongside their grammar and lexicon the Indo-Europeans transmitted a body of ideas is so obviously reasonable that it can hardly fail to go on inspiring research. *Perhaps* culture changes so much faster than language (or did in this case) that all such attempts will collapse; or *perhaps* the (approximately) fifteen volumes of the mature Dumézil will one day be subjected to a critique so devastating that nothing of substance remains; but neither supposition looks plausible. Ideally the debate will steer a middle way between blanket endorsement of the mature views (which would be wholly contrary to Dumézil's own example of self-criticism), and equally undiscriminating rejection; and ideally it will be equally scrupulous in its treatment of what Dumézil says and what the sources say. Revisions will certainly be needed, but the three functions, more or less in their present form, are scarcely vulnerable. On the other hand, the social organization of knowledge (with its disciplines, departments and careers) will make for difficulties, and to wear down the opposition to Dumézil may take even longer than it did to wear down the opposition to the theory of Continental Drift.

References

ALLEN, NICK J. 1991. 'Some Gods of Pre-Islamic Nuristan', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, Vol. CCVIII, no. 2, pp. 141-68.

. . . forthcoming a. 'Romulus and the Fourth Function', in E. Polomé (ed.), *Indo-European Religion after Georges Dumézil* (Journal of Indo-European Studies Monographs 13), Washington, D C : Institute for the Study of Man.

. . . forthcoming b. '*Primitive Classification*: The Argument and its Validity', in W. S. F. Pickering and H. Martins (eds.), *Debating Durkheim*, London: Routledge.

BOYCE, MARY 1987. 'Priests, Cattle and Men', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. L, no. 3, pp. 508-26.

CAHIERS POUR UN TEMPS 1981. *Georges Dumézil* (Cahiers pour un temps), Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/Pandora Éditions.

DUBUISSON, DANIEL 1991. 'Les Lettres noires', *Les Temps modernes*, no. 544 (November), pp. 165-71.

DUMÉZIL, GEORGES 1958. *L'Idéologie tripartie des Indo-européens* (Collection Latomus Vol. XXXI), Brussels: Latomus.

. . . 1968. *Mythe et épopée, I: L'Idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines), Paris: Gallimard.

. . . 1979. *Mariages indo-européens: Suivi de quinze questions romaines* (Bibliothèque Historique), Paris: Payot.

. . . 1983. *La Courtisane et les seigneurs colorés, et autres essais: Vingt-cinq esquisses de mythologie (26-50)* (Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines), Paris: Gallimard.

DUMÉZIL, GEORGES 1985. *L'Oubli de l'homme et l'honneur des dieux et autres essais: Vingt-cinq esquisses de mythologie (51-75)* (Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines), Paris: Gallimard.

. . . 1987. *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon* (Collection Folio/Essais 51), Paris: Gallimard.

. . . 1992. *Mythes et dieux des Indo-européens* (ed. Hervé Coutau-Bégarie), Paris: Flammarion.

D'YAKONOV, I. M. 1990. *Arkhaicheskie Mify Vostoka i Zapada*, Moscow: Nauka.

ERIBON, DIDIER 1992. *Faut-il brûler Dumézil? Mythologie, science et politique*, Paris: Flammarion.

GELLNER, ERNEST 1982. 'What is Structuralisme?', in Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Rowlands and Barbara Abbott Segraves (eds.), *Theory and Explanation in Archaeology: The Southampton Conference*, New York: Acadamic Press, pp. 97-123.

LEROUX, FRANÇOISE, and CHRISTIAN-J. GUYONVARC'H 1991. *La Société celtique: Dans l'idéologie trifonctionnelle et la tradition religieuse indo-européenne*, Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France.

LINCOLN, BRUCE 1981. *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions* (Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions 10), Berkeley: University of California Press.

. . . 1986. *Myth, Cosmos and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

LYLE, EMILY B. 1990. *Archaic Cosmos: Polarity, Space and Time* (Polygon Cosmos), Edinburgh: Polygon.

MASSON, EMILIA 1991. *Le Combat pour l'immortalité: Héritage indo-européen dans la mythologie anatolienne* (Ethnologies), Paris: PUF.

PAGE, R. I. 1978-9. 'Dumézil Revisited', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, Vol. XX, nos. 1-2, pp. 49-69.

PENNEY, JOHN 1987. Review of Lincoln 1986, *JASO*, Vol. XVIII, no. 3, pp. 292-6.

POUCET, JACQUES 1988. 'Georges Dumézil et l'histoire des origines et des premiers siècles de Rome', in Charles-Marie Ternes (ed.), *Actes du colloque international 'Eliade–Dumézil' (Luxembourg, avril, 1988)*(Special Issue of *Courrier de l'Éducation Nationale*), Luxembourg: Centre Alexandre Wiltheim, pp. 27-49.

RENFREW, COLIN 1987. *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*, London: Jonathan Cape.

. . . 1989. 'Models of Change in Language and Archaeology', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, Vol. LXXXVII, no. 2, pp. 103-55.

SERGENT, BERNARD 1979. 'Les Trois Fonctions des indo-européens dans la Grèce ancienne: Bilan critique', *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Vol. XXXIV, no. 6, pp. 1155-86.

. . . 1983. 'Panthéons Hittites trifonctionnels', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, Vol. CC, no. 2, pp. 131-53.

STERCKX, CLAUDE 1992. 'Les Sept Rois de Rome et la sociogonie indo-européenne', *Latomus: Revue d'Études Latines*, Vol. LI, no. 1, pp. 52-72.

WIKANDER, STIG 1938. *Der arische Männerbund: Studien zur Indo-Iranische Sprach- und Religionsgeschichte*, Lund: Gleerupska Univ.-Bokhandeln.