

Indo-European Mythology I

Kirk S. Thomas

ADF Member no. 2296

Generalist and Clergy Study Programs

Question 1: List and discuss the primary sources for the mythology of three Indo-European cultures, including their dates of origin and authorship (if known). Discuss any important factors that may cause problems in interpreting these sources, such as the existence of multiple revisions, or the presence of Christian or other outside influences in surviving texts. (minimum 300 words)

Germanic/Norse – The only sources we have from ancient times were foreign writers, such as the Roman Tacitus, who wrote in the 1st century CE. He felt that Rome had much to learn about their German adversaries.¹ His *Annales* commemorated the crushing Roman defeat by the German tribes at Teutoburgerwald in 9 CE and in his *Germania* he sketched a sympathetic picture of those “noble savages”² The main problem with these sources (and the other Roman references) is that they were written by people outside the culture, and thus prone to distortion and misunderstanding. The German/Norse tribes did not achieve literacy until later under the influence of Christianity. The Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*, was written about 1000 CE, which was long after Christianization, so while it is full of information on the pagan past, it is still influenced by the new religion.³

In Scandinavia, and particularly Iceland, however, Christianity came late. It was not adopted officially until 1000 CE, hundreds of years after much of the rest of Europe. In the twelfth century, an Icelandic writer, Snorri Sturluson, decided to write down and preserve the quickly vanishing myths and tales of his people. His *Prose Edda* is the book from which our main impression of northern mythology comes.⁴ While there is no doubt that Christian influences exist in this work, it is the best we really have, apart from a set of poems, the *Poetic Edda*, which are far more opaque. Saxo Grammaticus, a 12th century Danish scholar also wrote about mythology, and he wrote interesting works about the Gods, but his work is written in bad, stuffy Latin and has none of the charm of Snorri’s work.⁵

Celtic – We actually know very little about the Gaulish Celtic religion, most of it coming from inscriptions found by archeologists and also from Roman historians. 1st century BCE Greek writer Posidonius wrote a first hand account of his travels in Gaul, which has not survived, but he was later quoted by many Greek and Roman writers, including, to a disputed extent, Caesar.⁶ Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico* is the first place we really see the Gaulish pantheon, but he unhelpfully equates all the Celtic Gods to Roman ones.⁷ He was also writing propaganda to convince the Roman Senate and people to support his conquest of Gaul, so his writings need to be taken with a grain of salt.

The people of Britain were linguistically very closely related to the Gauls in the Brythonic branch of the language. Christianization came fairly early to Britain, and the only surviving myths are those of the Welsh (such as the *Mabinogi* and other tales) which come from the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest*⁸ which were not written down until the High Middle Ages⁹ and as such have probably undergone many changes since pagan times.

In Ireland, however, things fared better than in Wales. It was never conquered by the Romans and didn’t Christianize until the 5th century CE. The literate monastic tradition also meant that the tales were written down at an early date, far closer to the pagan times than in Wales. Of course, these pious monks also influenced what they wrote.¹⁰ The primary sources were the antiquarian texts such as the *Dindsenchas* (‘Place Traditions’), *Coir Anmann* (‘Fitness of Names’) and especially the *Libor Gabala Erenn* (‘Book of the Conquests of Ireland’) from the 12th century and the *Cath Maige Tuired* (‘Battle of Mag Tuired’).¹¹

Vedic – The basic texts of Vedic literature are the *Samhitas* (Collections) of the four *Vedas* (which means 'knowledge' and 'wisdom'). These are groups of hymns in verse to and about deities. There is the *Rig-Veda* used for recitation, the *Sama-Veda* for chanting, the *Yajur-Veda* for liturgy and the *Atharva-Veda* named after a group of priests.¹² These hymns are quite old – they were created before the later Vedic period, which began around 800 BCE,¹³ putting the Vedas around 1000 BCE. In the later Vedic period (800 – 300 BCE) other texts were written around the four Vedas, such as the *Brahmana* ('Priestly Books') and *Sutra* (ritual books) which, while helping scholars understand the original four Vedas, also introduced later opinions from a culture radically evolving away from the old Vedic culture at high speed. So what we read in the Vedas has little or no context – what was culturally obvious to the writers is unknown to us today.¹⁴

Question no. 2 – Name and describe three different schools of interpretation of myths (e.g. 'nature symbolism', allegory, fragmented history, social engineering, psychological symbolism) and one major writer associated with each. Discuss which one you tend to favor and compare its strengths and weaknesses to the others (minimum 1000 words).

The realization in the late 19th century that the Indo-European (IE) languages were related sent a shock wave through the philosophical world. A common basis to language implied a proto-language, which implied a proto-culture, which also implied a proto-mythology. Suddenly scholars felt a need to reconstruct this mythology and over time, a number of schools of interpretation sprang up.¹⁵

One of the first was the 'Nature Allegory' school. Here philosophers took a reductionist approach to comparative mythology to produce allegories of a single type, such as Adalbert Kuhn's storm gods, Angelo de Gubernatis' animal allegories, Johannes Hertel's fire mythology and Georg Hüsing's moon myths. But one of the most influential figures was Max Müller's solar mythology.¹⁶

This reduction of all myth into solar myths had been foreshadowed as early as 1795 when Charles-Francois Dupuis wrote that Christ was a solar myth and the 12 Apostles were the signs of the zodiac. This was lampooned by Jean-Baptiste Peres in 1827 who 'proved' that Napoleon had not existed and had been, in fact, an allegorization of the sun god. But Max Müller argued that language was a terrible way of expressing pure thought because there was a constant danger of metaphors decaying and disintegrating. He said that myths were created to keep this from happening. So from this he postulated that the Vedic and Greek myths had originally started out as the same (as had their languages) but that the Greek god names later decayed and the Greek myths as we know them evolved out of this process. He also insisted that all myths were essentially sun myths, though he never explained why this had to be. His ideas were in favor for a long time, and even persuaded other scholars like George Cox and Robert Brown to take Greek and Oriental myths and put them all into solar contexts.

But others, such as Andrew Lang, totally disagreed with him. They publicly disagreed for decades during the last part of the 19th century. And by the time Max Müller died in 1900, his theory had collapsed and IE comparative mythology was discredited for a long time.¹⁷

In the first half of the 20th century, another school came about. It was the 'Cambridge' or ritualistic school, which was centered around Frazier's *Golden Bough* and E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) and which was drawn from Jane E. Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) and *Themis* (1912). Harrison had decided that myth was merely ritual put into words with both being two sides of the same coin. She asserted that over time the rituals were lost and only the myths survived. These classical scholars brought ethnology and anthropology to the study of myth, and came up with such concepts as "unraveling the patterns of cyclical year cults, vegetation demons, dying gods, and such."¹⁸

But this school led to excesses. One of the main ones was Margaret Murray's works, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), *The God of the Witches* (1933) and *The Divine King in England* (1954) which declared that there were "remnants of a pagan 'Dianic' cult rampant in Christianized Europe, complete with ritual human sacrifice thinly disguised as legal executions"¹⁹ of such notables as

Thomas Becket and William Rufus. Of course, so many people were executed in medieval and later England that it would be easy to come up with a list of suspects.

Lord Raglan, in his book *The Hero* (1936) asserted that the pattern of a myth was more important than the person in it, that the ritual formula was more important than history. He thought that the story of Robin Hood, for instance, was the important thing, and the existence of the man was totally irrelevant. The hero for Lord Raglan was just a bundle of themes and any real persons as heroes were only coincidental. In 1956 he even held that Leif Erikson was only a variation on the old Irish voyage stories and that the hero might have come to the New World from Asia in the form of Quetzalcoatl.²⁰

But the other great movement in the 20th century was the psychological one. Joseph Campbell's, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), with the hero as archetype, influenced the Jungian branch of the psychoanalytical movement. It stressed the concepts of the collective unconscious, racial memory and astrology. In 1959, Carl Jung wrote in his *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* about an encounter he had with an uneducated paranoid schizophrenic patient who was considered incurable. The patient thought he was both God and Christ. At that time, Jung was unfamiliar with mythology. He encountered the patient wagging his head and blinking into the sun, and he told Jung to do the same. When asked why he was doing this, the patient said, "Can't you see the sun's penis? When I move my head it moves also, and that's where the wind comes from."²¹ Jung thought nothing of it but made a note in the patient's records. Four years later, Jung came across Albrecht Dieterich's *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, which had a passage from a Mithraic cult papyrus which mentioned the sun disk having a tube which was the origin of the wind. Some medieval paintings show Mary getting impregnated with a pipe coming down from God. The implication was that there were ideas that we all share subconsciously from time immemorial and that these ideas were still consciously available to 'primitive' peoples and even modern children.

Personally, I think that all these approaches tend to be too one-sided and narrow. It probably behooves us to hold these ideas in mind when comparing mythology as long as they are useful, but also we should be willing to reject them out of hand when they are not. I really don't believe that there are any simple, cut and dried approaches to so complex a subject as mythology. In the late 1960's I swallowed Margaret Murray's books hook, line and sinker. Deep down I still have a fondness for the ideas of Goddess worship and the Death of Kings. But I know that while some of these themes may have some basis in fact, there is certainly no proof at this time.

Question no. 3 – Summarize a creation tale of any Indo-European culture and discuss parallels to a creation tale of any two other Indo-European cultures (minimum 300 words).

The Germanic/Norse creation tales are well known. In the beginning there was a yawning abyss called Ginnungagap (this word is cognate with the Greek word *khaos*, 'yawn').²² To the south was Muspellsheimr, full of bright and fire, guarded by the demon Sutr (Black), and in the north was Neflheimr, "Fog World", full of snow and ice. The mixing of the heat and cold caused ice to melt, and in the mixing of the vapors a creature was born, Ymir (related to **Yumiyaz*, 'Twin')²³, a great giant. He was nurtured by the milk of a great frost-born cow, Audhumla, who licked an icy salt-lick. After this salt-lick wore down it released a being named Buri, who begot Bor and the sons of Bor were the Gods Odin, Vili and Ve. They slew Ymir and from his body they formed the world, "...from his blood the sea and the lakes, from his flesh the earth and from his bones the mountains; from his teeth and jaws and such bones as were broken they formed the rocks and the pebbles."²⁴ They used Ymir's skull to make the dome of the sky and his eyebrows to make a wall between the world of men Midgard, and the home of the giants. From two trees on the seashore they created a man and woman, Askr and Embla, and gave them intellect, movement and senses. (Tacitus, in his *Germania 2*, gives the Germanic story as involving Tuisto 'Twin' born of earth, his son Mannus 'Man' and his sons the three tribal ancestors.²⁵) They also created dwarves, good at craftsmanship. The Gods created Asgard, the home of the Gods, in the center of Midgard with the World Tree, Yggdrasil overhanging it all. To the north lay Hel, reachable over mountains and wild rivers and to the east or

northeast was the land of the Giants (Jötunheimer).²⁶ They also created time and sent Night and Day driving around the heavens in a chariot. They also created a girl, called Sun and a boy, called Moon and set them moving in the sky, chased by wolves trying to devour them. When the wolf would catch the Sun and devour her would be the end of all things.²⁷

In Vedic myth we also have a Twin. Yama ('Twin' cognate with Ymir) was the first being to die and go to the Underworld and his brother Manu ('Man') introduces sacrifice and religious law. Yama and Manu were probably the original twins and Yama had to be sacrificed to make creation possible.²⁸ So 'man' sacrifices his 'twin' to make the world.

Roman myth, which found itself transferred to the civic from the religious realm in early days, also has the Twin motif. It is well known by all that Rome was founded by Romulus and Remus, and that Romulus killed Remus in a dispute over the boundary of the new city. Puhvel insists that Romulus comes from the word Rome itself, making Remus the more archaic word. We think of the pair with Romulus listed first. But in ancient formulas, the order of the brothers' names was reversed. And when one name was used for both, it was also Remus (e.g. when the Romans were called the *Remi nepotes*, or 'descendants of Remus').²⁹ So Remus may have been the primary or older twin who had to die at his brother's hand in order for the city (the 'world') to be created.

Question no. 4 – Compare and contrast the Divine War theme in the myths of three different IE cultures. (If a culture has more than one myth that fits the theme, please choose one for comparison.) (minimum 300 words)

In IE mythology, the Divine War is a war between the Gods, where the IE sky Gods fight with the land and fertility Gods. Shan Winn suggests that these myths may harken back to a time when itinerate Indo-European tribes conquered the agricultural folks who were already living on the land. In the myths, the two sets of Gods make a truce and the fertility Gods are incorporated into the pantheon, though at a lower level.³⁰

In Norse mythology, this is seen in the War of the Aesir and Vanir. This is seen in some of the verses of the Poetic Edda and mainly in the Prose Edda. This was the 'first war in the world' according to the Prose Edda.³¹ The Aesir, or sky Gods, were led by Odin, God of wisdom and skilled in magic and included Thor, the thunder God. Njord and his son Freyr and daughter Freya, led the Vanir, the land and fertility Gods. The Aesir attacked, but the Vanir retaliated by sending Gullveig (meaning Gold-passion, Gold-Power or Gold-drunk) to corrupt the Gods.³² She cast spells over them and enflamed their appetites for gold and sex. Odin threw his magical spear at the Vanir and burned Gullveig three times, but she was reborn each time. Eventually a truce was called between the Aesir and the Vanir, and hostages were exchanged. The Vanir sent Njord and Freyr to the Aesir, and the Aesir sent Honir (rational thought) and Mimir (cognate with memory - wisdom) to the Vanir (and to mankind).³³

Roman mythology gives us another 'civic' myth in the Rape of the Sabine Women. Romulus, King of Rome, has lots of male subjects (who have no fertility for the city by themselves, like the Aesir) but no women (the fertility figures). He invites the Sabines over to a great festival, whereupon the Roman men make off with the Sabine women and rape (marry) them. When fighting ensues between the Romans and the Sabine men, the women come in between them and beg for the fighting to stop, so that they would lose neither their fathers nor their new husbands. When the feud ends, Roman society (pantheon) is made up of a mixture of the two sides.³⁴

Irish mythology is similar but with a major difference. In this myth, the king of the Tuatha de Danaan (the people of the Goddess Danu), Nuada, loses a hand in the first Battle of Mag Tuired and so is no longer fit to be king. After he abdicates, a half-Tuatha, half-Fomoiré named Bres is elected with the women's vote to be King. Bres is an expert at agriculture, making him a fertility God. He mistreats the Tuatha, though, and when things finally come to a head at the Second Battle of Mag Tuired, the Tuatha defeat the Fomoiré once and for all. Bres is given an amnesty on the condition that he teach the Tuatha all the secrets of agriculture. But other than Bres, all the other Fomoiré

are eliminated and not incorporated into the society of the Tuatha. A Divine War takes place, but it doesn't end up in a major compromise like in Rome and Germany.³⁵

Question no. 5 – Describe the fate of the dead in the myths of two different Indo-European cultures. Where do they go? What do they do to get there? Who meets them? Are there deities associated with death and the Land of the Dead? How do the dead interact with the living? (minimum 300 words)

In Norse mythology we have a couple of different interpretations of where the dead go. The most famous is Valhalla, that great hall in Asgard where Odin feasts with pork and mead those mighty warriors who have died in battle. Here, Odin is indeed the God of the Dead (Warriors, at least) and his Valkyries are the ones who bring the souls to His hall. Odin's horse Sleipner would carry the dead to the Underworld, and this horse had eight legs. It is interesting to note that a funeral bier carried by four bearers could be considered to have eight legs.³⁶

In the story of the death of Baldr, however, it is to Hel in the far north that His soul goes. Odin sends his son Hermodr to bring Baldr back, and after crossing the river Gjöll, Hermodr rides Sleipner "downward and northward" until reaching the gate of Hel. There he finds Baldr in the High Seat with the Goddess Hel (Loki's daughter). She agreed to let Baldr go only if all of nature would lament his death, something that never completely happened.³⁷

In ancient Greek religion, we draw first from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. There, when a person dies, his psyche leaves the body. This is not a soul that bears sensations and thoughts, but rather something more like a phantom image. The word psyche means 'breath'. If the person is not buried properly, his psyche cannot go to the lands of death and so in the *Iliad*, Patroclus begs Achilles for a true and proper burial.³⁸ And the living have nothing to fear from the dead – the shades are without force and without consciousness.³⁹

There are contradictions as to where the Land of the Dead lies. In the *Odyssey* it is away at the edge of the world, and in the *Iliad* it is directly below in the earth. In the *Odyssey*, Hermes escorts the murdered suitors, leading them with his magic staff "past the Oceanos and the White Rock, past the Gates of the Sun and the people of dreams and on to the meadow of Asphodelos" which may be construed as meaning an ash-strewn meadow.⁴⁰ In the *Odyssey* the gates of Hades are found at the confluence of rivers – the river of fire (Pyriphlegethon), and the river of wailing (Kokytos) which is a branch of the Styx. These flow into the Acheron where the ferryman Charon takes the dead to the Gate, which is guarded by a 3-headed dog, Cerberus. The Land of the Dead is ruled over by Hades, the brother of Zeus, and his wife Persephone.⁴¹

However, there are hints of other Lands of the Dead as well. There is a terrible pit, Tartaros, where evil people are punished. The Titans, enemies of the Gods, are there as well. Persephone, Goddess of the Dead, has the ability to demand punishment for evil-doers forever, so appropriate offerings may be in order.⁴²

In the fourth book of the *Odyssey*, there is mention of the Elysian Fields, a place of the most favorable climate at the edge of the world ruled over by Rhadamanthys. To be able to enter Elysium is the fate of only a select few, and means to avoid death. Elysium is a word that comes from a place or person struck by lightning, something unusual at best.⁴³

There are similarities here that also correspond with Vedic myth. When Manu kills Yama, the murdered twin is transported to a paradise where he ruled the dead among rivers and pasturelands. This is very similar to the Elysian Fields and was a place where only special or heroic folks might go. Valhalla is also a place reserved for special people, in this case great warriors. So it appears that in IE myth there is a wonderful place where special people, at least, can go.

Question no. 6 – Myths often reflect the social structure of the cultures from which they come. Generally describe the social divisions in two different Indo-European cultures

(e.g. Dumezil's Priest/King-Warrior-Provider division, or the Vedic Brahmin-Kshatriya-Vaisya-Sudra castes) and show how they are reflected in that culture's myths (minimum 300 words).

In Vedic India, the social divisions that would later be cast in stone were already visible. At the top of the heap were the *Bramana* (Brahmans, which originally meant 'effective verbal construct, formula, prayer') who were the intellectuals and priests. They were followed by the *Ksatriya* (which means 'rule, dominion') who were the warriors, followed by the *Vaisya* (which means 'villagers, economic classes') and who were the herders, cultivators and artisans. These three castes were the *arya* (Aryans) while the last caste, the *Sudra*, were *an-arya*, or non-aryan, the indigenous, dark skinned people conquered by the Vedics.⁴⁴

The Vedic Gods also followed this tripartite system. They divided their Gods into Adityas ('sovereigns'), such as Mitra, the God of contracts, a basically benevolent God of security. Also there is the Aditya God, Varuna, who is the enforcer of those contracts. He is a remote, devious and mysterious figure. The other Adityas are minor Gods of, basically, abstractions.⁴⁵

The next division of the Vedic Gods were the Rudras, those of warlike character. The main Rudra God was Indra. The consummate warrior, Indra also has his darker side, fighting and feuding with his fellow deities. He was the warrior deity, storm god and dragon killer.⁴⁶

The final division of the Gods were the Vasus (meaning, essentially, wealth). They primarily are the Asvins, the pair of divine horsemen. The Rig Veda describes them as rescuers of the people.⁴⁷

Ancient Celtia also had society divided into a tripartite system. At the top were the Druids, those intellectuals who were the Seers, Judges, Bards and Magicians of their people. Also in this class were the Kings/Chiefs, who were drawn from the next level down. Below them were the Warriors, such as Finn of the Fianna in Ireland. And at the bottom were the artisans, farmers and merchants. Caesar, writing about Gaul, said that the top two classes were the only ones with any rank or honor at all, and that the great mass of the people were held almost in the place of servants.⁴⁸

In religion, the tripartite system is very clear in their Gods. The three Gods Esus, Taranis and Teutates fill these functions perfectly. While we don't know a lot about their cults, we do know what their names mean. Esus means 'Lord' (cf. Latin *erus*, 'master'). Taranis means 'Thunder' (cf. Welsh *taran* and Irish *torann*, 'thunder') and Teutates means 'people' (cf. Old Irish *tuath*, 'people', Welsh *tud*, 'country' and Latin *totus*, 'all').⁴⁹

Question no. 7 – Explain how each of the following elements of ADF ritual does or does not resonate with elements of two different Indo-European cultures. You need not use the same two cultures as a basis of comparison for each element. For example, you may compare and contrast the concept of the Earth Mother in Greek and Vedic cultures, and Deities of the Land in light of Irish-Celtic and Breton-Celtic cultures (minimum 100 words each).

Earth Mother

Deities of the Land

Deities of the Sea

Deities of the Sky

Outsiders

Nature Spirits

Ancestors

Earth Mother – Many Neopagans today see the Earth Mother as the entire planet, while others, particularly Celtic reconstructionists, see Her more as either a River or Land Goddess, a Goddess of Sovereignty along the lines of the Irish Boann or Danu and the Welsh Don. Both of these approaches are valid. In ancient times both these models existed.

The ancient Germanic Goddess Nerthus, for instance, was called 'Terra Mater' by Tacitus, and he equated her with the simple Roman Earth Mother.⁵⁰ Her image was carried around through the villages in an enclosed cart, bringing fertility to the people during peaceful festivities. This would have ensured a time of no wars when farmers could prosper.⁵¹ After the procession, Her image would be washed in a lake and the attending slaves then killed to preserve the mystery. Her shrine was housed on an island making the water connection even stronger. It is interesting to note that later the Norse would turn Nerthus into a male god, giving many of her attributes to Njordr and Freyr.⁵²

In ancient Greek religion there is some evidence of a Mistress of Animals, or a Mother Goddess in Minoan cult, but these interpretations are based on pretty slim evidence and cannot be relied upon.⁵³ While Homer has Okeanos (Ocean) giving birth to the Gods, Hesiod has Gaia (Earth) giving birth to Ouranos (Heaven) and then marrying him, giving birth to the Titans (from whom the Gods come).⁵⁴ But the cult of Gaia was never really very important in practical terms, even though She was often thought of as the "prototype of all piety", as the Earth that sustains but also imposes obligations on the people. In practice, her worship was primarily confined to the pouring of libations, particularly the practice of carrying water to a cleft in the ground.⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that in ADF ritual, the Earth Mother is usually given oats or other grains or some liquid poured on the ground, evoking the ancient Greek practice.

Deities of the Land – In ADF, we usually see the Land as embodying the spirits of nature and fertility, the middle world where we all live. In the ancient world, the fertility aspect was quite clear.

The Germanic/Norse Vanir were fertility Gods. Freyr was often depicted as very phallic, and was indeed shown as such at the cult center of Uppsala. He patronized peace, prosperity and fecundity. His sister Freya was a love goddess. They, and their father Njordr, had cults that included some possible homosexual and incestuous elements which were very touchy subjects to the macho Germans.⁵⁶ This could indicate that the cults came out of indigenous ones that the IE Germans later conquered.

Another set of Land Gods might be the Irish Fomoiré. These Gods came before the Tuatha and could have been the deities of a conquered people. They had the secrets of agriculture, and after the 2nd Battle of Mag Tuired, the half-Fomoiré Bres is allowed to stay on condition that he teach his agricultural knowledge to the Gods.⁵⁷

Deities of the Sea – In Greek religion, the main Sea deity is Poseidon. He is also a very ancient deity, worshipped at Pylos in Mycenaean times as the principle God. It is in the epics that He is seen as a God of the Sea. In the *Iliad*, Homer says that Kronos had three sons, Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. When they overthrew their father, the world was divided between them with Zeus taking the sky, Hades the Underworld and Poseidon the sea.⁵⁸ He was a very popular God among the Greeks, and was the master and helper of fishermen. His trident comes from the method of tunny fishing, and these fish were offered to Him as a first fruit of the sea. The storm at sea was also His dangerous power, though it could also be a saving power, as when a huge storm destroyed the Persian fleet off Thessaly in 480 BCE, causing the Greeks to form a new cult of Poseidon Soter, or saviour. He was also known as the Earth Shaker, causer of earthquakes.⁵⁹ While there were also minor deities of the sea, Poseidon was the main one.

The Irish Manannán mac Lir could have his name translated as Manannán, son of the Sea. There's not much known about Lir – he might be the God of the deep sea. Manannán, however, is closely associated with the sea, as in the story of the Voyage of Bran, where Bran sees Manannán riding his two-wheeled chariot over the sea. He tells Bran that to Him, the sea is like solid land, and he compares the fish to calves and describes the beautiful lands beneath them.⁶⁰ After He apportions the Sidhe mounds to the various Gods after the coming of the Sons of Mil, He doesn't take one for himself but rather lives across the sea at Emain Ablach (Emain of the apple trees).⁶¹

Deities of the Sky – The first sky deities that come to mind are the great storm Gods of antiquity. The Proto-Indo-European (PIE) word, **Dyeus*, means “shining sky”. The ancient God was **Dyeus Pater*, or Bright Sky Father. This name becomes Jupiter in the Roman and Zeus in the Greek. In the Germanic, the “d” in PIE becomes “t”, giving us the Norse God Tyr from **Dyeus*, which in English would be the God Tiw, whose name is in the word, ‘Tuesday’.⁶²

In ADF we often refer to the Gods as the ‘Shining Ones’. This comes from the idea of the Sky Gods, the Gods of the shining sky.

In the Norse, the Aesir would be the Sky Gods. Thor, God of Thunder, is an obvious choice. He carried a great hammer that destroyed what it struck – an obvious reference to thunder and lightning.

The eagle is a bird often associated with Sky Gods, such as Zeus and Jupiter. In Welsh myth, the God Lleu Llaw Gyffes turns into an eagle when seriously injured by his wife Blodeuedd’s lover Gronw Pebyr.⁶³ These solar associations are hard to miss.

Outsiders – In ADF we often refer to the Outsiders (or Outdwellers) as “those spirits not aligned with our ways.”

In Greek myth, these would be the Titans, those who came before the Gods of Olympus and were overthrown by them. The father of the Gods, Kronus, so feared for his rule that he swallowed each of his children after they were born. Only through a ruse did Zeus not suffer the same fate, and He survived to force His father to disgorge Zeus’ siblings. The Titans were also the monsters of the time, such as Typhoesus, son of Earth and Tartaros, who rebelled against the Gods, only to be destroyed by Zeus’ thunderbolt.

The Norse Outsiders could be the Giants. Thor the Thunder God is positively allergic to them. He attacks the sea serpent whose coils encompassed Midgard,⁶⁴ and the Giants also would be part of the attacking force that assails Asgard during Ragnarok, the final battle.⁶⁵

Nature Spirits – In ADF, we often think of the Nature Spirits as spirits of the land or of our homes, as well as animal totems. The animists among us see spirit in all things, from stones to plants to mountains, etc.

In Greek religion, the Olympian Gods overshadowed everything, but underneath this level, every town or village would worship its river or spring. Rivers as Gods and springs as divine nymphs is deeply rooted in practice. In the Iliad, Zeus summons the Gods into assembly on Mount Olympus and this includes the all the nymphs and rivers.⁶⁶

In Irish lore, the nature spirits are best represented by the sidhe-folk. These fairies may have been the less able members of the Tuatha (those that had no skill). They lived in the mounds and interacted with humans, often in mischievous ways. Sometimes they would show wonders, and sometimes just cause trouble.⁶⁷

Ancestors – In ADF, we often think of the Ancestors as those dead who are kin of blood (direct relations), kin of heart (those unrelated dead we love) and the dead of that land (which could be past Native Americans, etc.).

In ancient Greece, the cult of the dead was a method of affirming the identity of the group, which would assure its continuation. Until late classical times, the psyche or soul of dead people was not thought to be a continuation of personality (see above). However, it was customary to pour libations to the dead in order to assure that prayers would reach them. Also, there could be no burial without a funeral banquet. And holocausts, offerings where the animal was burned whole, were especially reserved for the cult of the dead.⁶⁸

In Celtia we have the legends surrounding Samhain, the great feast of the dead. The sidhe-mounds were open and their inhabitants were abroad that night. The souls of the dead returned and were visible. In Wales, doors were left unbolted and the hearth prepared for the visit of dead relatives.⁶⁹ While the ancestors were expected at this time, there is little evidence that they were ever worshipped.

Question no. 8. – Discuss how the following seven elements of ADF’s cosmology are (or are not) reflected in the myths of two different Indo-European cultures. For this question, please use the same two cultures as a basis of comparison for the entire question (minimum 100 words each).

Upperworld

Middleworld

Divisions of Middleworld (e.g. 4 Quarters, 3 Triads, 8 Sections)

Nether/Underworld

Fire

Well

Tree

In this question, I shall use the Germanic/Norse and Irish cultures.

Upperworld – In ADF cosmology, we look at the Upperworld (or the Heavens) as the place of the Shining Ones and the fount of Order. It is also connected to the Sky and Fire.

In Norse mythology, the closest thing we have to an Upperworld is the home of the Aesir, Asgard. This divine realm had many halls in it, including Valaskjalf, a hall roofed in silver where Odin had his seat and could view all the worlds at once. Another hall was Valhalla, where dead warriors were brought to feast. A hall roofed in gold, Gimli, was where the righteous men went after death.⁷⁰ As the chief Gods, the Aesir would have brought order to the world.

In Irish mythology, the Gods live on the earth in Ireland until the coming of the Sons of Mil. After losing to men, the Gods retreat underground to their Sidhe mounds. These magical places are often called the Otherworld. While some of the Druid Gods, like Lugh, can call upon the weather, there is no obvious Upperworld. This could be due to changes made by the Christian monks who re-wrote the stories.

Middleworld – The Middleworld is the place where we all live, between the Heavens above and the Underworld below. The Land Spirits live here with us, and it is where the World Tree grows, connecting all.

Midgard is the Middleworld in Norse mythology. There is a wall made of Ymir’s eyebrows that protects it from the land of the Giants. This world of men is surrounded by a great sea, and in the sea is the World Serpent, *Midgardsormr*, who bites its own tail.⁷¹

The Middleworld in Irish mythology would be Ireland in the time of the Sons of Mil, or men. Here all the great sagas take place, from the feats of the Fianna to the stories of CuChulainn. The Gods intervene, but this is essentially the world of men.

Divisions of Middleworld – If we think of Norse Midgard as everything excluding Asgard and Hel, then we have the land of men, the lands of the Giants (Utgard), and the great surrounding sea. The fact of the divisions does not appear to be of great mythological significance.

In Irish lore, however, Ireland (the Middleworld) is divided up into 5 provinces, one in each direction and one in the middle. The provinces also have meaning. To the west is Connacht (learning), to the North is Ulster (battle), to the south is Munster (music), to the east is Leinster (prosperity), and in the center is Meath (Kingship).⁷² It is interesting to note that Wales could also be split up into 5 provinces.⁷³

Nether/Underworld – In ADF cosmology, the Underworld is the place where the Ancestors dwell, and the place where the earth power, the powers of potential, arise. It is also connected to the sea and the Well.

There was definitely a place in Norse mythology under the world where the dead could go. This was Hel, ruled by the Goddess of the same name. The entrance to Hel was in the north, beyond mountains and wild rivers. When Baldr died, this is where his soul went, and where Odin's son Hermodr went to try and fetch him.⁷⁴

During the invasions of Ireland by the Sons of Mil, their King, Donn, offended Eriu and died during the invasion. He was laid to rest in the House of Donn, a rocky island off the west coast of Munster, which became the assembly place of the dead on their way to the otherworld.⁷⁵ It may also be that the other magical islands to the west of Munster are associated with the dead, such as the home of Manannán mac Lir, Emain Ablach (Emain of the Apples).

Fire – The Fire in ADF cosmology is that which transmutes and transforms, and the eye of Heaven. It is related to the Heavens, the Sky and the ordering power of the universe.

The Thunder God, Thor, in the *Kjalnesinga Saga* is said to have had a temple with an altar covered with iron, on which there was a sacred fire that was never allowed to go out.⁷⁶ As a Thunder God, Thor would also be associated with lightning, or celestial fire. Thor embodied order as opposed to the Giants, say, who embodied chaos.

At Uisnech in Ireland, Mide, chief Druid of the people of Nemed, lit the first fire. It blazed for seven years and was used to kindle every chief fire and chief hearth fire in Ireland.⁷⁷ This could easily be seen as bring the order of fire, essential to good living, to the land.

Well – In ADF cosmology, the Well can symbolize the powers of potential and the mouth of earth. It is our connection with the Underworld and is also related to the sea. The Well can also be seen as a spring or pool.

The famous Spring of Mimir lies at the foot of Yggdrasill, the World Tree, in the land of the Giants. This waters of this spring contained wisdom and understanding. At the foot of the tree in Asgard was the Well of Urd, the spring of fate, where everyday the Gods would gather and hold their courts of law and settle disputes. And by this well lived three maidens, the Norns, named Fate, Being and Necessity, who ruled the destinies of men.⁷⁸ It is the process of drawing out the waters that orders the power.

The 'white-rimmed' well at Uisnech, inhabited by salmon, was at the base of the 9 hazel trees of wisdom. Their nuts would fall into the well causing bubbles of mystic inspiration to form which would flow out in the streams, or they would be eaten by the salmon. Those destined to eat the nuts or the salmon would receive the gifts of the seer and the poet. This well was the source of the river Boyne, the river Shannon and the chief 7 rivers of Ireland.⁷⁹

Tree – In ADF cosmology the Tree lives in the Middleworld and connects all the Worlds of Heaven, Midworld and Underworld. The Tree is also related to the Land.

The Norse World Tree, Yggdrasill, is at the center of the world. It is a giant ash whose branches stretch out over the earth and heavens alike. Its three great roots grow into Asgard, the land of the Giants and the land of the dead. The tree was continually threatened even while it thrived. There was a great eagle at the top, and a great serpent gnawing at the roots. The eagle and serpent were constantly at war with each other, and a squirrel would run up and down the trunk of Yggdrasill carrying insults from one to the other.⁸⁰

Trees are very important in Irish lore, including the magical writing system of the Ogham, based on the sacred trees. The 9 hazel trees of wisdom, dropping their nuts into the well at Uisnech, granted

the gifts of seer and poet to whoever ate them.⁸¹ Birch trees were associated with love, and rowan trees with protection. Trees in Ireland did not connect the worlds, but did grant wisdom.

Question no. 9 - To what extent do you think we can offer conjectures about Indo-European myths in general? Are the common themes strong enough that the myths seem like variations? Or are the differences so powerful that the themes are less important than the cultural variation (minimum 300 words).

We have to be careful when we make generalizations about IE myth based primarily on which culture we are talking about. Greek myths are so heavily contaminated with influences from the Middle East that very little IE material is apparent. One way the Greeks still have IE influences is in some of the Gods, i.e. Zeus primarily (from the *Dyeus Pater PIE God), though Hera, Poseidon and Ares are also formed from IE roots.⁸²

Some other themes, however, seem to cross over many cultural lines. The sacrifice of Twin by Man is seen in Vedic, Norse and Roman myth. The Divine War shows up not only in those three but in Celtic as well. The tripartite division of society and the heavens also shows up frequently (though in the Germanic/Norse culture it exists in the heavens but not any longer on earth). The association of horses and sovereignty appear in Vedic, Welsh and Irish sources (and possibly in the Roman).

The theme of God and Virgin appears in the Vedic in the story of Madhavi whose sexual unions and renewed virginity save her father from damnation and 4 Royal lines from extinction.⁸³ In Welsh mythology, Math, God of magic, cannot live except in time of war unless His feet are in the lap of a virgin. In Roman legend, Numitor of Alba Longa lost his kingship until his virginal daughter miraculously conceived and bore the grandson Romulus, sired by Mars. Odin's Valkyries are virgins, and Snorri lists two Goddesses as virgins, one of which, Gefjon, enables Odin to physically take possession of his first piece of land on His way to conquer Sweden.⁸⁴

While the stories for all these may differ, the themes remain the same. There are common mythological threads in many of the IE cultures that cannot be ignored.

¹ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (New York, Penguin Books, 1990), p. 14.

² Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 189.

³ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ John T. Koch, Editor, *The Celtic Heroic Age* (Malden, MA, Celtic Studies Publications Division of VonKamecke Corporation, 1994), p. 5.

⁷ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 174.

⁸ Patrick K. Ford, Translator and Editor, *The Mabinogi and other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977), p. x.

⁹ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

-
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 27.
- ²⁵ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 219
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 219.
- ²⁷ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 28.
- ²⁸ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 286.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 288.
- ³⁰ Shan M.M. Winn, *Heaven, Heroes, and Happiness* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, Inc., 1995), p. 61.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 62.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 164.
- ³⁵ Ibid., page 181.
- ³⁶ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 142.
- ³⁷ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 214.
- ³⁸ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 195-197.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 197.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 198.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 45.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-50.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 51-54.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 58-59.
- ⁴⁸ Winn, *Heaven, Heroes, and Happiness*, p. 53.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 44-45.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 256.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 137.
- ⁵² Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 205.
- ⁵³ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 11-12.
- ⁵⁴ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 27.
- ⁵⁵ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 175.
- ⁵⁶ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, pp. 205-209.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p.178.
- ⁵⁸ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 136.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 137.
- ⁶⁰ Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (New York, Thames and Hudson, 1961), p. 315.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 39.
- ⁶² Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, pp. 19-21.
- ⁶³ Ford, *The Mabinogi*, p. 106.
- ⁶⁴ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 202
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 220.
- ⁶⁶ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 174.
- ⁶⁷ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 66, 137, 156, 220, 221, 227, 260, 299.
- ⁶⁸ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 190-199.
- ⁶⁹ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 89-90.
- ⁷⁰ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 28.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 27, 32.
- ⁷² Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 122-123.
- ⁷³ Ibid., pp. 173-179.
- ⁷⁴ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 214.
- ⁷⁵ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 97.
- ⁷⁶ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 79.

⁷⁷ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 157.

⁷⁸ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 161.

⁸⁰ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, pp. 26-27.

⁸¹ Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 161.

⁸² Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 17.

⁸³ Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, pp. 259-260.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-268.