

BOOK REVIEWS

Daniel E Gershenson, *Apollo the Wolf-God. Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Monograph 8. Maclean, VA: Institute for the Study of Man, 1991. pp. v + 156

- Question: Where did they get fire and utensils for that?
Answer: They took fire from the servants quarters and made spits of wood. Pots they took from the servants quarters and they singed away the hairs and ate nothing raw.
- Question: Had the witness often take part in such meals and feasts?
Answer: Yes, how could it be otherwise?
- Question: What happened to the smaller livestock he had taken?
Answer: They had eaten them up too.
- Question: If they were transformed into wolves, why had they not eaten the meat raw, like wolves?
Answer: That wasn't their way; instead they ate it like human beings, roasted.
- Question: How could they manage it if they had wolves heads and feet, as he had said they did, and could not hold a knife or prepare a spit or do the rest of the work needed?
Answer: They didn't need any knives for it, because they tore the meat with their teeth and stuck the pieces on whatever sticks they found with their feet, and when they ate it they were like people once again, except that they did not use bread; they took salt with them from the servants quarters when they went out.
- Question: Did they fill themselves up on it and did the devil eat with them?
Answer: He said yes to the former and no to the latter.

This passage, believe it or not, is taken from a transcript of the cross-examination of an eighty-year old were-wolf called Thies, held in Livonia — present-day Latvia — in 1691. Thies had not practised as a were-wolf for some years and he was therefore describing events in the past, but he was still a current were-wolf, because the rules did not allow him to leave the fraternity until he had found somebody to replace him in this role. It emerges from the whole transcript that the function of the fraternity was to assure good harvests.

The implications of this document suggest endless problems and opportunities for the interpreter; perhaps most striking the collision of rationality, as we would recognize it today, with inherited beliefs which seem to defy our rationality. Almost the last context in which one would expect this testimony to be used, is that of the mythology of the Indo-Europeans. All the same, it is characteristic of Indo-European studies that Daniel Gershenson's *Apollo the Wolf-God* should pay attention to old Thies: the crucial evidence that G. finds here is that for Thies the role of the were-wolves connects with the agricultural fertility of the area; this, in turn, confirms the finding of the rest of the book that the

tradition of were-wolves and of wolfish behaviour connects, not just with war and conflict, but also with agriculture and agricultural production. In other words, Gershenson's theory uses the evidence of Thies to show that the wolf fraternity was concerned, not just (to put it into the terms of Georges Dumézil's theories) with the second function (that of war), but also with the third function (that of agriculture and production).

In many ways, *Apollo the Wolf-God* is an admirable and convincing book. It is full of learning, of unexpected links and insights ranging over continents and periods: it establishes chains of such connections by which no reader can fail to be impressed. Apollo connects with the wolf; this wolf is identified with the wind, especially winds that rise mysteriously from the earth; he therefore connects this world with the world of darkness and death and chaos; in other words, this is the wolf who finds his most familiar form to-day in the wolf who huffs and puffs and blows down the house of the little piggies. Apollo himself is the master of the wolf: he is the god of calm and light and reason, controlling the dark forces and the passages between dark and light. The chain of connection goes on to include many of the other aspects of Apollo and his cult: the mole cricket; the black weevil; the hamster; the cock-chaffer; the ergot of cultivated grains — all have a place in the argument. All these multiple phenomena turn out to be crucial to agricultural production or to success in warfare, where Apollo represents the calm, calculating warrior, as opposed to the wild berserker, who belongs in the realm of the other war-god, Ares.

The evidence for all this is drawn from a bewildering multiplicity of sources, predominantly Greek but also Roman, Nordic, Celtic and Slav. Thies, the Latvian peasant, plays the role of the final link in the chain which has stretched across Europe and Asia and from prehistoric times, until the end of the 17th century. The critic's reaction to all this has to be very much like the reaction to the work of Dumézil himself, in whose shadow much of this construction rests. Gershenson is in fact concerned to extend Dumézil one more step into completeness: Dumézil himself believed that the Greeks were so innovative that they had moved away from the Indo-European traditions of their ancestors and his structure is built with very little reference to them. Gershenson thinks that he can find a nexus of connections which places the Greeks back in the centre of Dumézil's creation.

Gershenson, however, is not always a very careful follower of Dumézil. The structure of Indo-European mythology has to rest on very clear and carefully maintained logical foundations. These are: 1) that the structures should not occur outside the Indo-European language-speaking races; 2) that the peculiarities of Indo-European mythology never arise naturally, but are always inherited from the past. Coincidences, therefore, imply continuity, not accident. If the examples used come from outside the Indo-European area, or from areas of Semitic, rather than Indo-European influence, then the whole picture begins to crumble away. Most damaging of all is the possibility that the particular connections could arise independently as a result of natural conditions, without transmission through the great continuity of Indo-Europeanism through the centuries. But Gershenson is not careful in this way; he is quite happy to discover that there is a correspondence between the Indo-European monster slain by Apollo and Leviathan from the book of Job (pp. 90-93). He is also happy to find tribes in remote parts of the world whose customs are suggestively analogous to those of the Indo-European wolf fraternities, known from the various sources in different parts of Europe and Asia. For instance, the association of wolf and raven is not only I.-E. but appears also among North American Indians (97); worse still, it turns out (62-3) to reflect a natural relationship between the two species that might

have been observed anywhere in the world. This is all very illuminating, but destructive of the supposed ideology.

One possible reaction to these objections is to say that what Gershenson has in mind is not really a pattern of behaviour peculiar to Greeks and Indo-Europeans generally, but a nexus of connections which could be found in any part of the world at any time; but of course that would be a very different book and a very different theory. The whole point of Dumézil's perspective is that an unknown pre-historic tribe has projected its modes of thought into the different traditions, ideologies and languages of the different Indo-European speaking peoples; the result is a characteristic and identifiable structure based on three functions (law, war, production). If you abandon the architecture of that theory, then you have to think again from scratch, perhaps producing a new mixture of Dumézil and Eliade. That is a horrifying prospect and it is not what Gershenson is seeking to do.

There is also an unresolved question about the medium through which the patterns of thought postulated in this theory are carried from generation to generation. There seem to be two contenders: one is that it is simply borne in the languages: that somehow this structure of languages encodes a triadic conception of human activity and theology and that this surfaces, either in the main organising principles of society, or perhaps in occasional outbursts within the society. Secondly, it could be some kind of biological race characteristic imprinted in the genes of the supposed Indo-European races and not imprinted in the genes of other races. Advocates of Dumézil of course deny that this is what the theory means and presumably non-racist explanations have to rest heavily on the theory of transmission by language, so it is Indo-European language speakers to whom the whole theory refers.

The danger is that all the learning and ingenuity generates theories with no particular location. After all, the collection of data was not available even to learned Greeks: are they supposed to have known it all, but not recorded it? or do the theories explain how their beliefs and practices came into existence, but not what they meant at the time? or is the real objective to reconstruct the religious archetype, meaningful only in the social context of the lost Indo-European ancestors themselves? For even if the idea of religious structures carried in I.-E. languages is a valid one, they must have taken on new contexts and new meanings in each new time and place. This is a book that raises much light, but also much darkness; is Wolfish Apollo the right guide?

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F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC — AD 337*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993. pp. xxix + 587.

How Roman was the Roman Near East, and precisely what did this Romanness signify? What was the Greek City, and to what extent did it contrast with the surrounding territory? In what sense can we speak of the unity of the region and its common characteristics, and in what way did local cultures and local traditions survive, in their original form, or in a new, Greek or Roman guise? What was the Roman Empire's attitude to local and regional traditions and how successful was it in applying its policies? What were the major trends of development from Augustus to Constantine and do they reflect deliberate policy or rather responses to the requirements of the hour? With what precision can we