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## **“Women, Cattle, and Sacred Drink: The Legitimation of Kingship in Three Mythic Contexts”**

An Honors Thesis in Comparative Mythology  
by Aaron Rester

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **Myth and Comparative Mythology**

This paper will conduct a comparative analysis of three mythological figures from three different cultures in light of the figures’ connections to a complex of ideas connecting social order with fertility and/or material prosperity. Before I dive into my argument, however, it is necessary that we first discuss what “myth” is and the past and current methodologies used in the study of myth.

The traditional starting point for an academic work dealing with “myth” is a definition of the word itself. In the introduction to her recent book *The Implied Spider*, Wendy Doniger writes:

It is customary in scholarly approaches to myth to begin with a definition. I have always resisted this, for I am less interested in dictating what myth *is* (more precisely, what it is not, for definitions are usually exclusivist) than in exploring what myth *does* (and in trying to demonstrate as inclusive a range of functions as possible).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). p. 1.

While this is a valiant attempt to avoid one of the classic pitfalls of mythology,<sup>2</sup> and I strongly agree with Doniger's emphasis on function rather than definition, it will nonetheless be useful for readers to have a working definition of "myth," so that it will be clear what I mean by the term. There are four primary characteristics shared by most myths: first, myth consists of narrative – a myth is a story. This story may be told through a variety of means: orally, textually, visually, or any combination of these, as in a ritual context. Second, a myth must be a shared narrative, meaning that it exists within a community. Often this means that it contains traditional elements that have been passed down from generation to generation. Third, a myth deals with material of religious, supernatural, and/or societal importance. Finally, myths are plastic – that is, the narrative has the ability to be reshaped according to the conscious and unconscious motives and desires of the teller and the audience.

The study of myth, or mythology, occupies an ambiguous place in the world of academia. Myth has been the subject of innumerable books and articles, yet does not, in the eyes of most academic institutions, warrant a place as a separate academic discipline. Instead, because of its broad nature, one is able to make a comprehensive study of myth only by traveling down the intersecting avenues of religious studies, anthropology, classics, and literature, with forays into various side streets and alleys ranging from psychology to political history. To study myth is to find one's self drawn into the study of nearly every sphere of human existence, as myth figures in some way in practically every one of them.

Comparative mythology, as the name implies, is a methodology which consists of examining the similarities and differences between two or more mythic systems. By "mythic system," I mean all aspects of culture related to the area of inquiry. These include textual, visual, and oral narratives, and ritual, religious, or other types of

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, when I use the term "mythology," I am referring to its formal meaning of "the study of myth," not to be confused with other usages of the term, e.g., "a system of myth," as in "the mythology of the Greeks contains numerous deities."

practice surrounding the object(s) of study. Like “mythology,” “comparative mythology” can mean different things. To scholars such as Georges Dumézil and Jaan Puhvel, whom I will refer to as Indo-European comparatists, the term refers explicitly to the reconstruction of proto-Indo-European myth through philological, textual, and archaeological evidence. To scholars such as Wendy Doniger, comparative mythology implies a much broader cultural and temporal scope of comparison.

Comparative mythology is quite an ancient scholarly pursuit. Since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, people have been comparing myths of other cultures with those of their own,<sup>3</sup> as did Caesar when he equated the gods of the Gauls with the gods of the Romans, giving Roman names to Gallic gods based on the similarities of their attributes.<sup>4</sup> The first use of the term “Comparative Mythology” appears to have occurred in Max Müller’s 1856 essay of the same name.<sup>5</sup> Müller, the most famous of the early mythologists, and his followers set the general pattern which mythologists would follow for decades: the construction of universal theories of myth that claim to be capable of explaining the origin and function of any myth, regardless of its cultural or historic context.<sup>6</sup> For Müller and his followers, myths were natural allegory, an attempt by “unscientific” people to understand their environments, and hampered by what Müller called “a disease of language” that left humans stuck in a morass of metaphor because of the inability of language to express certain ideas;<sup>7</sup> later scholars like James Frazer, Jane Harrison, and S.H. Hooke dismissed nature allegory as the absurd fantasy of philologists and looked instead to ritual as the universal cause of myth; they, in turn, found themselves dismissed by the functionalist theory of anthropologist Bronislaw

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<sup>3</sup> Lauri Honko, “The Problem of Defining Myth,” in *Sacred Narrative*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984). p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Julius Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*. trans. by S.A. Handford (Bungay, Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956). p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Richard M. Dorson, “The Eclipse of Solar Mythology,” in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958). p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> G.S. Kirk, “On Defining Myths” in Dundes, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Jan de Vries, “Theories Concerning ‘Nature Myths,’” in Dundes, pp. 30-40.

Malinowski, who saw myth as a “charter” for social behavior. Malinowski found competition in the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, to whom myths were merely manifestations of unconscious yearnings; Freud’s student Carl Jung soon put forward his theory of the collective unconscious and mythic expression screened through inherited archetypes, a theory which, due in part to its promotion by Joseph Campbell, remains the most popular view outside of academia. For a number of years, the structuralist theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss (who believes that myths are expressions and mediations of the polarities inherent in human thought), were widely accepted within the academy, only to be themselves largely discarded.

In recent years, scholars have, with good reason, begun to turn away from such universal interpretations of myth. Instead, they have focused on analysis of the mythic narrative *within* and *specific to* the culture which produced it (ideas whose roots go back to Malinowski). These analyses are informed by ideas of cultural relativism and the necessity of contextualization. They examine the ways in which society and its institutions and structures (e.g., kingship or gender) are constructed, as opposed to merely exploring how these institutions function to maintain the society, as Malinowski had done. The comparative method, with its cross-cultural comparisons and universal tendencies, and its minimizing of spatial and historical context, is routinely criticized for being the antithesis of current academic notions of specificity.

This is the most devastating critique of the comparative method, that it is ahistorical and acontextual, that it removes a narrative from its place in space and time by comparing it with another narrative to which it is not ostensibly related. I would argue, however, that while these are indeed problems that have occurred in comparative studies, they are not necessarily inherent in the method itself, but rather symptoms of faulty application. While comparative mythology must make cross-cultural comparisons, these comparisons are not baseless, for the simple reason that cultures do not exist in a vacuum, and their borders are rarely, if ever, clearly defined.

Cultural cross-pollination is an important aspect of cultural existence and change. Comparisons can, and should, be made in areas of cultural overlap, such as the ancient Mediterranean world, or in cultures derived from similar origins (as in the case, say, of the growth of both Christianity and Islam from Judaic roots) in order to give insights into the larger cultural milieu. Even in cultures without historical contacts, however, we may find value in the comparative method. According to Wendy Doniger,

Comparing contexts – more precisely, comparing the relations of texts to their contexts – might allow us to advance the comparative enterprise without lapsing into the follies of universalism, by taking a kind of middle ground... we might focus on one relatively solid intermediary path between the two extremes: cultural morphology, or the morphology of cultural types. For groups or societies that have the same sorts of structures and practices may tell the same sorts of myths...<sup>8</sup>

As Doniger makes clear, historical and cultural contextualization and the comparative method are not mutually exclusive: the two methods are complementary rather than in competition. By employing the comparative method, we may learn something about the culture being studied that might otherwise remain overlooked.

As for the criticism that the comparative method attempts to impose universal theories, it has become clear that no single theory will ever explain every myth. The folklorist Lauri Honko, who defines four different sub-groups of theory regarding myth (the historical, the psychological, the sociological, and the structural) writes that

these theories in fact overlap and complement each other to some extent. [Furthermore,] myths are multidimensional: a myth can be approached from, shall we say, ten different angles, some of which may have greater relevance than others depending on the nature of the material being studied and the questions posed.<sup>9</sup>

The scholar undertaking a comparative study of myth must recognize that the fullest understanding of the subject comes from a polymethodological approach, that is, from examining his or her material through a number of theoretical lenses, while simultaneously realizing that none of them provides a complete solution. This is so

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<sup>8</sup> Doniger, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> Honko, p. 46.

because a significant aspect of mythic narrative is its ability to simultaneously contain multiple layers of meaning. A well-known example of this is the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone. The most widely-known meaning of the myth is that it is an explanation of the origin of the seasons and the rebirth of grain every year; but the myth has also been interpreted as representing a Greek initiation rite for females<sup>10</sup> or as an illustration of how closely marriage and death were intertwined in early Greek thought.<sup>11</sup> A recognition of one of these interpretations does not preclude the other interpretations. The ability of a myth to remain relevant within the culture that claims it lies in the narrative's ability to operate on multiple levels, in order that it may be adapted to a rapidly changing social and historical context. This ability results not from some inherent quality of the myth itself, but from the imaginations of those who seek to employ the narrative for different ends.

### **Indo-European Comparative Mythology**

My intent in this paper is to conduct a comparative analysis of three mythological figures, namely the Celtic Lug (as he was known in Ireland; in Welsh he is called Lleu, and on the Continent, Lugus), the Greek (and later Roman) Apollo, and the Indian Rama. All three of these figures are products of cultures whose primary languages spring from a hypothetical "mother" language known as proto-Indo-European; thus, before I discuss in detail the objectives of this paper, a word about the proto-Indo-European hypothesis and Indo-European comparative mythology is in order.

The seed that would grow into the Indo-European hypothesis was planted in 1786, when Sir William Jones gave a lecture observing close philological similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Persian, and suggested that, along with the Gothic

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce Lincoln, "The Rape of Persephone: A Greek Scenario of Women's Initiation." *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), pp. 223-235.

<sup>11</sup> Helene Foley, *The Hymn to Demeter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

and Celtic languages, they may have evolved from a common source.<sup>12</sup> The emerging science of comparative philology soon revealed half a dozen more language groups that belonged to the Indo-European family, and with that, the race was on. According to Puhvel, these discoveries were

a revelation, but one fraught with dubious consequences for mythology for the rest of the nineteenth century. Protolanguage implies protocommunity, [which] entails protoculture, [which] points to protomyth: thus historical reconstruction had become the task of a new comparative mythology, to match the triumphs of comparative philology.<sup>13</sup>

The philological model became the model for Indo-European comparative mythology; this model is also described as a genetic model of comparison, meaning that direct descent of cultural forms can be traced from an ancient culture as it “evolved” into a modern culture.<sup>14</sup> It was here that Müller and his followers entered the scene. They were all strong advocates of Indo-European comparativism and, from the point of view of the later schools, all tragically reliant on philology for their evidence. When Müller’s nature-myth school and its philological methods went out of fashion at the end of the nineteenth century, it dragged Indo-European comparative mythology along with it.

Several decades later, however, Indo-European comparativism found a new champion in Georges Dumézil, who, influenced by the sociology of Emile Durkheim and Marcell Mauss, looked for reflections of proto-Indo-European social order in surviving Indo-European myths. He developed a theory of a tripartite social order consisting of the “functions” of the sacred/sovereign (represented in earthly society by the priest/king), physical force (the warrior), and the cultivator/producer. He and his followers have spent a great deal of time attempting to prove that the tripartite system

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991). p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> See C. Scott Littleton, “Dumézil and the Rebirth of the Genetic Model: An Anthropological Appreciation.” in *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity*, ed. by Gerald James Larson (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1974). pp. 169-179.

is evident among the existing Indo-European texts, as well as using the tripartite system as a tool to help reconstruct proto-Indo-European myths.<sup>15</sup>

Dumézil's theories, which have been hugely influential in Indo-European comparativism, have also been widely criticized. Recent criticisms have indicated that his theories contain fascist undertones related to his connections to the French political right in the years before World War II.<sup>16</sup> More widespread has been the criticism that Dumézil's tripartite system is invalid, either because it was not as central to proto-Indo-European society as Dumézil believed, or because such a tripartite system is so general that it can be recognized in cultures which had no contact with Indo-European peoples until recently.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the entire notion of reconstructing a proto-Indo-European religion has come under fire. Bruce Lincoln, formerly one of the strongest advocates of Indo-European comparativism, describes a change in his views thus:

[I]t now strikes me that the attempt to reconstruct a prototypical ("Proto-Indo-European") form from which all attested variants can ultimately be derived may actually obscure much of what is fascinating and important in myth. For while this stance acknowledges that the contents of a given myth will vary as it is recounted by different persons over time and across space, such variation is treated as a problem – or rather, *the* problem – to be undone by scholarly research: research that takes as its task the restoration of some hypothetical "original". Such research thus aims, in effect, to reverse historic processes and to recapture a primordial (and ahistoric) moment of unity, harmony, and univocal perfection.<sup>18</sup>

I heartily agree with Lincoln that the search for a "hypothetical original" should not be the final goal of the mythologist. This does not mean that such a search is not a useful or legitimate scholarly undertaking, only that such an approach can take one just so far. Mythology should not, in my view, be seen as an algebra problem, an untangling of

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<sup>15</sup> See Geroges Dumézil, *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (Bruxelles: Latomus, Revue d'études latines, 1958). See also C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, third edition (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982) for an explanation and evaluation of Dumézil's theories.

<sup>16</sup> see Lincoln (1991), pp. xviii-xviv, 231-258.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. the Hawaiian social hierarchy of ali'i (chief), kahuna ("professional"=priest), and maka'ainana (commoners).

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln, (1991). p. 123.

various problematic threads until a final answer is reached. Rather, mythology is a process in which various layers of meaning are recognized and peeled away, like the onion of the cliché, to find that there is no center, only more layers. Furthermore, to ignore the social, historical, and political context in which the later Indo-European texts, or any text, were produced is, in the words of Rita Gross, “to promote academic learning in the worst sense of the term *academic*: a collection of irrelevant information that does not affect its bearer in any way.”<sup>19</sup>

It is the duty of scholarship to be engaged with the world outside academia. This does not mean that every paper we write needs to be a revolutionary attempt to “overthrow the dominant paradigm;” it simply means that, in an area of great social significance like myth and religion, the scholar has not done his or her job if s/he does not consider the political and social contexts of the evidence.

### **Objectives of this paper**

That having been said, this paper will concern itself with documenting certain similarities surrounding the figures of Rama, Lug, and Apollo. I feel justified in undertaking this comparison due to the conjunction of a number of factors: 1) the apparent descent of the Greek, Sanskrit, and Celtic languages from a common proto-language; 2) the historical pattern believed to be shared by all three cultures of cattle-herding pastoralists conquering and intermingling with farming peoples; and 3) the close association in all three cultures of sovereignty and fertility. My aim is not to prove a common origin of the three figures (though such an origin may be suggested by the evidence I have collected), or to reconstruct the religion of a people who left no written records; rather, I hope to show that careful use of the comparative method can be useful in extracting from a myth patterns or nuances that would otherwise remain buried. Specifically, I hope to show that within the narratives surrounding Rama and Lug is found a pattern of interdependency between social order (as embodied by the

<sup>19</sup> Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). p. 11.

rightful sovereign) and earthly fertility; furthermore, I will demonstrate, though the use of the Celtic and Indian material, that such a pattern also occurs in the narratives surrounding Apollo, though it is not usually recognized as such in the Greek materials.

Thus, I will first examine the sources for, and some of the problems associated with, the study of each of the three figures. Then I will take each figure in turn and examine the recurring interdependent relationship of the themes of kingship and fertility within the narratives surrounding each figure. Most of the evidence will be drawn from textual narratives, though occasional reference will be made to visual art and ritual practices. Finally, I will examine the social and political implications of the myths examined.

## II. THE EVIDENCE

### Sources and Problems

#### *Rama*

Rama, unlike the other two figures that I will examine, is still actively worshipped by a great number of devotees. He is generally regarded as the seventh of the god Vishnu's ten *avatars*.<sup>20</sup> His story, and that of his trusty brother Lakshmana and their loyal hench-monkey Hanuman, the three of whom must together rescue Rama's faithful wife Sita from the demon Ravana, has been told and retold, grown and been refashioned in countless poems, plays, and books for hundreds of years. The story has flourished in the modern age, spawning comics, movies and television shows. Presumed by many to be the *Ur*-text of all of these versions is a long Sanskrit poem attributed to Valmiki, for which a wide variety of dates has been proposed.

In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, the divinity of Rama is questionable. It is generally acknowledged that Valmiki's work as we have it today is the result of many additions and accretions that have accumulated through the years; therefore, many scholars

<sup>20</sup> The number of *avatars* can range from four to twenty-two, see *Classical Hindu Mythology*, Cornelia Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen, eds. and trans. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978). pp. 66-71.

share the opinion described by Sheldon Pollock:

[We are told that] the theme of Rama's being a divine incarnation... was not an original part of the poem but a later addition restricted to the 'attached' passages [that is, the first and last books of the poem] and in no way informing the entire work... the divinity of the hero remains a conception that cannot be demonstrated for the five 'real' books of the poem; 'quite the contrary, there Rama is thoroughly human.'<sup>21</sup>

By the time Kampan wrote his famous work in Tamil (about the twelfth century CE), there is no question that Rama and Sita are incarnations of Vishnu and Sri-Lakshmi, respectively. Rama is described as "the Lord who long ago had risen from his precious sleep/on the snake" (5.11.2839)<sup>22</sup> and "the husband of Sri" (8.178.3594),<sup>23</sup> among other epithets that make both his and Sita's divinity clear. How did this evolution occur? A frequently accepted explanation is one similar to that of Hermann Jacobi, as described again by Pollock:

Jacobi attributes the deification of Rama to a process of euhemerization whereby the hero of a (quasi-historical) saga is merging with a popular local divinity, the resulting demi-god finally coming to be reckoned as an *avatara* of Vishnu.<sup>24</sup>

Jacobi's hypothesis agrees with the explanation offered by C. Bulcke in his article "The Ramayana: Its History and Character,"<sup>25</sup> which was, for a long time, the definitive article on the development of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Bulcke sought to determine, primarily through philological means, exactly which parts of the present text of Valmiki are the earliest, and therefore the most "authentic." Bulcke lays out three stages of transformation which he believes the story of Rama went through in leading to the

<sup>21</sup> Pollock, "The Divine King," pp. 15-21 of his translation of *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Book III. Robert Goldman, gen. ed. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1991). p. 16. Pollock himself disagrees with this view, and is describing it in order to refute it.

<sup>22</sup> *The Forest Book of the Ramayana of Kampan*, trans. by George Hart and Hank Heifetz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>24</sup> Pollock, p. 16, referring to Jacobi's *Das Ramayana: Geschichte und Inhalt, nebst Concordanz der Gedrückten Recension* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen Reprint Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> *The Poona Orientalist XXV: Silver Jubilee Volume*. M.M. Patkar, ed. (Poona, India: Oriental Book Agency, 1960).

version of Valmiki's *Ramayana* as we have it today. The first of these stages was what Bulcke called the "Rama-ballads," an unattested oral tradition that existed after the composition of the Vedic literature, but prior to the composition of Valmiki's work. As evidence for this oral tradition, he cites the fact that the story of Rama is not mentioned in the literature of the Vedic period (which ended some time around 650 BCE<sup>26</sup>), but is mentioned in parts of the *Mahabharata* believed to have been composed in the fourth century BCE. Bulcke sees this entrance of new narrative into the written corpus as evidence of an oral tradition becoming incorporated into a written one.

Bulcke's second stage is that of the composition of Valmiki's original work, which he believes to have occurred about the same time as the incorporation of the Rama tales into the *Mahabharata*, that is, the fourth century BCE. One of Bulcke's major goals is to show that the vulgate<sup>27</sup> version of Valmiki is quite different from what it was when first composed. Bulcke states:

If we strip the Rama-story as told by Valmiki of all the interpolations discernible in the vulgate, we can sum it up as follows: 'Once upon a time, there was a prince of Ayodhya and his name was Rama. Due to the cunning of his step-mother, he was banished for a time to the forests. He went into exile, and his wife, Sita, and his brother, Laksmana, gladly went with him. While they were living in the forest, an aboriginal chieftain kidnapped Sita. Rama rescued his faithful Sita, but only after many adventures and with the help of friendly aboriginal tribes. Then the time came for his exile to end and for him to return to his kingdom. He returned to Ayodhya, was crowned and reigned for many years.'<sup>28</sup> (emphasis in original)

Central to this argument is the evidence that the *Balakanda* and *Uttarakanda* (the first and last books of the poem) of Valmiki are later additions, for they have a different style of composition and a different unity of content. These two books contain the most explicit references to Rama as an *avatara* of Vishnu, as well as to Sita's birth from the furrow and her being swallowed by the earth at the end of the epic. Bulcke believes that this

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<sup>26</sup> James A. Santucci, *An Outline of Vedic Literature* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976). p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> By "vulgate," I mean the final form of Valmiki as we have it today.

<sup>28</sup> Bulcke, p. 58.

divinization occurred around the first century BCE or the beginning of the Common Era. Bulcke's third stage is the vulgate's crystallization into its final form, which he believes occurred around the second or third century CE.

### *Lug*

Lug (or Lugh) is probably the most difficult to study of the three figures addressed in this paper, despite the fact that he appears to have been the most widely-worshipped deity in the Celtic world. A number of inscriptions containing prayers to the Latinized form of his name appear on the Continent, and his name also appears in many place names, such as Lyons and London (Lugdunum). He has for many years been assumed to be the deity referred to by Caesar when he claimed that "Of the gods they [the Gauls] worship Mercury most of all."<sup>29</sup> The equation of Lug with Mercury, however, and even Lug's status as a pan-Celtic god, has recently been challenged by Bernhard Maier. Maier argues against a unified Celtic pantheon, seeing Caesar's identification of a Celtic god with a Roman god, in keeping with other classical ethnographies, as an attempt to portray a Gallic unity that most likely did not exist.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the classification "Celtic" only emerged in the nineteenth century as a linguistic label,<sup>31</sup> and, as just mentioned, implies a cultural solidarity which did not exist among the scattered tribes which made up the "Celtic" world. Thus, the dangers of overgeneralization are our first problem in the study of Lug. For that reason, I will limit my discussion of Lug to the Irish and Welsh contexts, which are the best documented and bear marked similarities to each other.

Further problems are presented by the fact that students of Celtic myth are

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<sup>29</sup> *De Bello Gallica* 6.17. trans. by Philip Freeman in *The Celtic Heroic Age*, John T. Koch and John Carey, eds. (Andover, Mass.: Celtic Studies Publications, 1997). p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> "Is Lug To Be Identified With Mercury (Bell. Gall. VI 17, 1)? New Suggestions to an Old Problem." *Eriu* 47 (1996). pp. 127-135.

<sup>31</sup> Caoimhin Ó Danachair, "The Progress of Irish Ethnology, 1783-1982." *Ulster Folklife* 29 (1983). p. 6.

unfortunately hampered by a lack of primary materials. The ancient Celts were not a literate people. Literacy among the Celtic peoples on the Continent and Britain was accompanied either by Hellenization or Latinization, which, due to the absorption of Celtic cults by Greco-Roman cults and the conflation of the two, often makes it difficult to distinguish what is Celtic and what is Greco-Roman. In Ireland, literacy was accompanied by Christianity, and there the monks capable of preserving pagan myths obviously had a vested interest in suppressing them. As a result, our sources for studying Celtic myth come either from foreign observers,<sup>32</sup> from limited Continental epigraphic and archeological evidence, or from medieval British and Irish monastic literature. This monastic literature proves to be our major source for information about Lug.

It is generally agreed that despite the relatively late dates of both the Irish and British manuscripts, the material within does contain much older elements, though there is a great deal of controversy regarding the extent to which these medieval writings can be seen as reflections of pagan beliefs or practices. This controversy is known as the “nativist/antinativist” controversy.<sup>33</sup> The nativists assert that pre-Norman Ireland was a highly conservative society that maintained into Christian times ancient Indo-European legal and social institutions. Furthermore, they claim that the Early and Medieval Irish literature extant today is the result of the transcription of oral traditions by monks who were for some reason sympathetic to the preservation of pagan material, that the extant versions “merely mark the final redaction of the contents of the manuscripts into the form in which they now exist, without bearing at all upon the time of their authorship.”<sup>34</sup>

Antinativists such as James Carney and Kim McCone, on the other hand, claim

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<sup>32</sup> For excerpts from the other classical authors who wrote about the Celts, see Koch and Carey, eds., pp. 5-38.

<sup>33</sup> For a good description of this controversy, see Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*. (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Charles Squire, *Celtic Myths and Legends* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1994). p. 12.

that the extant literature, law codes, etc. are much more closely linked to Christian models than the nativists would prefer to believe; the anti-nativists assert, for example, that a newly literate people like the Irish of the Early Middle Ages would turn for their literary models not to oral tradition, but to whatever written models are available, namely the Bible and other Christian literature. Pseudohistorical works such as the *Lebor Gabala Erenn* (“the Book of the Takings of Ireland”) attempted to explain the existence of the Irish language and people in a Biblical context by tracing their descent from Noah; but they also included in the narrative the “history” of the old pagan gods, though in a somewhat euhemerized form. Such works are examples of how closely the Christian tradition and the pagan tradition could be interwoven.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the Christian context of the preservation of stories about Lug must be kept in mind. For example, Lug’s death at the hand of Mac Cuill in the *Lebor Gabala* could be part of pre-Christian tradition, or it could be an attempt by Christian monks to demythologize or depict the demise of the influence of a pre-Christian immortal figure.

### *Apollo*

Probably the most-studied and ostensibly the best known of the three figures which I will examine is Apollo. Famous as “the most Greek of all the gods” and one of the most widely worshipped figures of the Greco-Roman world, Apollo is generally associated with music, poetry, and prophecy, as well as with sickness and healing, archery, the sun, and eventually in the Augustan period, with the Roman emperor. Apollo was a popular figure in all ancient art forms, and has continued to exert a powerful influence over the imaginations of Western artists since his revival during the Renaissance. He even appeared as the antagonist in an episode of the original *Star Trek* television series!.

Controversy about Apollo’s origins abounds. Consider the decidedly confusing

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<sup>35</sup> See John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge). 1994.

entry under his name in *NTC's Classical Dictionary*:

**Apollo**,... a name that most sources derive from *apollymi* or *apolluo*, 'to destroy', 'to kill'. Apollo the Destroyer therefore... Whatever Greek sources have been proposed, it is almost certain that, as with Aphrodite, his name is not of Greek origin. Perhaps he is somehow connected with the Hittite god Apulunas. Or maybe his name is based on an Indo-European root *apel-* meaning 'to excite', 'promote', 'procreate'... Or possibly the name derives from the Laconian verb *apellazo*, 'to hold', 'summon'...<sup>36</sup>

Daniel Gershonson, on the other hand, arguing from Apollo's frequent epithet *Lykeios*, has contended that Apollo's essential nature is that of wolf-god,<sup>37</sup> and Heinz Kothe has maintained that Apollo was originally a god of flocks and wolves whose cult migrated from the Danube Valley.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, there is no consensus about the origins of his name or his cult.

Despite his importance in even the earliest written sources, "the impression remains that Apollo is not only a youthful god, but a young god for the Greeks."<sup>39</sup> At his two main cult sites, his worship appears only about the same time as the Homeric epics. At Delos, the earliest temple, dating from about 700 BCE, belongs to Artemis, and while the central sanctuary always belonged to Apollo, it was not built until the eighth century.<sup>40</sup>

The mystery of the origin of his cult and the confusion over the origins of his name both prove to be difficulties in the study of Apollo. Furthermore, the myths about Apollo that have survived are the result of the gradual construction of a panhellenic religious and literary culture around the eighth century BCE.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it

<sup>36</sup> Adrian Room, *NTC's Classical Dictionary* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1992). p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> See Daniel E. Gershonson, *Apollo the Wolf-God* (McLean, Virginia: Institute for the Study of Man, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Jon Solomon, "Apollo and the Lyre." in *Apollo: Origins and Influences*. Jon Solomon, ed. (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994). p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, John Raffan, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985). p. 144.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Jenny Strauss Clay, "Tendenz and Olympian Propaganda," in Solomon, ed. pp. 23-4.

is probable that many older stories and regional variants have been lost or transformed in the making of this construct, thus effectively burying layers of meaning that may have previously existed within the narrative under layers of what Jenny Strauss Clay calls “Olympian propaganda.”<sup>42</sup> The uncovering of such a layer in the figure of Apollo is what I hope to accomplish in this paper, through the comparison of the Greek material with the Celtic and Indian material.

## **Fertility and Social Order**

### ***Rama/Indra and Sita/ Sri-Lakshmi***

Rama is usually presented as a paragon of kingship, the exemplar of kingly *dharma*.<sup>43</sup> As an *avatara* of Vishnu, “the Preserver,” Rama comes to earth to restore proper *dharma*. After destroying the demon Ravana and assuming his rightful place on the throne, Rama institutes in his kingdom the *ramrajya*, a period of peaceful serenity and prosperity that is still held up today in India as the ideal political model. In Indian thought, kingship and the social order are often intrinsically linked to the fertility of the land.<sup>44</sup> For example, Prthu, the mythic first king, was said to have milked agriculture and grain from the earth-cow Viraj, and during his reign the earth produced food without human effort.<sup>45</sup> This idea of fertility dependent upon the social order established by the king goes back at least as far as the Vedic story of Indra, as we shall see later in this section.

In the Rama story, the clearest link between fertility and Rama’s sovereignty occurs in the person of his wife, Sita, who very likely may have begun her career as a fertility goddess in her own right, and may in fact have been instrumental in Rama’s

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Dharma* indicates the duties and responsibilities that each member of society is supposed to fulfill, according to their gender, caste, and stage in life; when *dharma* is fulfilled, society and the universe function smoothly and properly.

<sup>44</sup> See J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

own divinization. We will see that close connections exist between Rama and Indra, the king of the gods, and between Sita and the fertility goddess Sri-Lakshmi, of whom Sita would eventually be recognized as an *avatara*.

In order to examine the link between Sita, fertility, and sovereignty, we first must examine the historical development of her character. In his article on the development of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Bulcke pays little attention to the character of Sita. In regard to the claims of other scholars that the Sita of Valmiki was related to a Sita found in the *Rig Veda*, Bulcke asserts that "[t]he Sita of the genuine Ramayana has no connection with that goddess; it is only in later times that Sita was said to have been born from the furrow."<sup>46</sup> His evidence for this is that "[t]he *Mahabharata* and the *Harivamsa* know nothing... of this preternatural birth and hold her to be the daughter of Janaka."<sup>47</sup> In Bulcke's eyes, as well as many of those who followed him, Sita's divine qualities were, like Rama's, later accretions to Valmiki's work. There is a general attitude that, as Kinsley wrote, "Sita has achieved her [divine] status primarily in relation to Rama."<sup>48</sup>

If we look at specific evidence regarding Sita, however, such interpretations of her start to falter, as some scholars have begun to point out. Compare Bulcke's statement above with the following quote from Cornelia Dimmitt: "No doubt Valmiki chose his heroine Sita for her divine qualities."<sup>49</sup> Kinsley, seemingly contradicting his statement quoted in the previous paragraph, writes: "Just why Valmiki associated the name of this deity with his heroine is not entirely clear, but that he did so consciously seems beyond doubt."<sup>50</sup>

I agree with Dimmitt's assessment for three reasons. First, even if one agrees

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<sup>46</sup> Bulcke, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> Cornelia Dimmitt, "Sita: Fertility Goddess and Shakti." in *The Divine Consort*, ed. by John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982). p. 213.

<sup>50</sup> Kinsley, p. 65.

with Bulcke that the first and last books of the vulgate (the books in which Sita's miraculous birth and subsequent descent into the earth are described) should be removed from consideration, we still find the story of Sita's birth in the second book, one of Bulcke's "authentic" books. There, Sita herself tells us that

"Truly, when [Janaka] was ploughing a round field (for the sacrifice), I appeared, splitting the earth, as the daughter of the king. While that lord of men was distributing handfuls of soil, he saw my body all covered with dirt and was amazed. Having no children of his own, he put me affectionately on his lap and said, overwhelmed with love for me, "this is my child!"<sup>51</sup> (2.110.27-29.)

This passage would certainly be considered a later interpolation by Bulcke. Pollock, however, points out the problems with identifying additions and interpolations in such a work:

[T]he reasons for identifying as insertions materials authenticated by manuscript testimony has never been clearly spelled out... Moreover, the nature of interpolation itself is complicated (though this has yet to be adequately theorized), and different kinds of motivations underlie it. Interpolation often serves, not to introduce altogether new material, but instead to make manifest the elliptical or latent; what at first sight might appear to be innovation may in reality be amplification or elucidation.<sup>52</sup>

Pollock's point is that even if one had strict rules for determining what is an insertion in the text (which we do not), this "interpolation" may be nothing more than making explicit what was already implied in the text.

Bulcke's assertion about Sita's mundane origin also fails to take into account oral tradition or the possibility of lost manuscripts. This is my second reason for agreeing with Dimmitt. If we assume with Bulcke that an oral tradition dealing with Rama existed prior to the composition of Valmiki's work, there is no reason that an oral tradition concerning Sita could not have existed alongside it, particularly since textual evidence (the *Rig Veda*) mentions a character named Sita long before Rama's first appearance in print. This hypothetical oral tradition could have provided the bridge

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<sup>51</sup> Dimmitt's translation, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Pollock, pp. 18-19.

between the Sita of the Vedas and the Sita of Valmiki.

The third and most compelling argument for agreeing with Dimmitt's view, however, comes from her assembly of a mass of evidence that shows a consistent theme of a direct relationship between Sita and nature. While I cannot repeat all of her evidence here, Dimmitt states her position thus: "Throughout the epic, nature consistently echoes Sita's actions and moods as if she were the divine mistress of plants and animals."<sup>53</sup> In support of this statement, Dimmitt quotes a number of passages from Valmiki similar to the following, in which nature responds to the exile of Rama and Sita:

No sacred fires were ordered; the sun was hidden; elephants spat out their food and cows refused to suckle their calves. Constellations dimmed; planets lost their luster and, leaving their customary paths, stood in the sky shrouded in mist... Crushed by the burden of fear, earth quaked violently while herds of elephants, warriors and horses roared aloud. (2.36.9, 11, 17b)<sup>54</sup>

While it could be argued that nature is here responding to the wrongful and unjust exile of both Sita and Rama, Dimmitt notes that when Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, nature responds again:

Struck by the rising wind, trees filled with flocks of birds of different kinds tossed their tops as if to say, 'Fear not!' Ponds with blown lotuses, with waterfowl and quivering fish mourned for Maithili [Sita] as for a joyless friend. Gathering together from all sides, lions, tigers, deer and birds, running after in a fury, followed Sita's shadow. (50.32-35)<sup>55</sup>

Even the Ashoka grove where Sita is held captive is full of flowering trees, and upon her return to Ayodhya, trees and flowers burst into bloom out of season.<sup>56</sup>

Dimmitt provides overwhelming evidence along the same lines, supporting "her role as goddess, in particular as the mistress of plants and animals and the source of the fertility

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<sup>53</sup> Dimmitt, p. 214.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.

of the earth.”<sup>57</sup> This evidence is scattered throughout all of Bulcke’s “original” books. It would be nearly impossible to make such a theme so predominant and consistent simply by adding verses; Bulcke’s theory of interpolations can not neatly explain away the frequent occurrence of this theme. It seems that when Valmiki was writing, there must have been at least an implicit connection between Sita and nature.

Let us now turn back the clock a bit and examine the growth of the character of Sita leading up to the time of Valmiki. As mentioned above, a character named Sita appears in the *Rig Veda* (which was written down, at the latest, by the ninth century BCE<sup>58</sup>). Here she appears as the personification of her name, for Sita means “furrow:”

Auspicious Sita, come thou near:  
we venerate and worship thee  
That thou mayst bless and prosper us  
and bring us fruits abundantly.

May Indra press the furrow down,  
may Pushan guide its course aright.  
May she, as rich in milk, be drained for us  
through each succeeding year.<sup>59</sup> (R.V. 4.57.6, 7)

We see here that in the earliest mention of Sita, she is linked to Indra, the Vedic king of the gods. Later, in the *Paraskara-Sutra*, she is mentioned as the wife of Indra. This connection is important, because many scholars see a thematic continuity between Indra and Rama. According to Whaling, “It appears historically that there was a transition period before Rama was realised to be an avatara of Vishnu when more stress was placed upon his continuity with Indra.”<sup>60</sup> It is certainly not hard to draw the parallel that as Indra is king of the gods, so Rama is king of men, and therefore Rama is a reflection of Indra. Whaling points to the episode of the sage Sharabhanga in Book III

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>58</sup> Santucci, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> R.T. Griffith’s translation, Dimmitt, p. 214.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980). p. 80.

of Valmiki, in which Indra, conversing with Sharabhanga at the sage's *ashrama*, withdraws to heaven upon Rama's approach, stating that he will return when Rama has performed a feat unattainable by anyone else (an allusion to Rama's future defeat of Ravana). Whaling writes, "[i]t is significant that this episode is not found in later *Ramayanas*. It sums up the attitude to Indra found in Valmiki's poem... Indra, so to speak, designates Rama as his successor in the continuing battle against demons."<sup>61</sup> The torch has been passed, in a sense, from Indra to Rama.

In this vein, Dimmitt makes the case that Valmiki consciously made use of the metaphor of Indra and his slaying of the serpent Vritra, a famous myth found in a number of sources. According to the *Rig Veda*, Vritra had imprisoned the waters of the earth (also described as cows), but Indra "slew the snake, broke open the waters; and split the bellies of the mountain... Like lowing cows, the flowing waters went swiftly down to the sea" (RV 1.32.1-2).<sup>62</sup> Dimmitt points out a number of passages as evidence for her claim; for instance, when Ravana is killed, he falls "from his chariot like Vritra felled by Indra's thunderbolt" (6.86).<sup>63</sup> Puhvel also points out that Ravana's son is called Indrasátru ("Challenger of Indra"), which is also an epithet of Vritra.<sup>64</sup> Dimmitt is not the first scholar to focus on such a parallel. Jacobi stated as early as 1893 that the battle between Rama and Ravana is "'eine andere Form des Kampfes Indras mit Vritra.'"<sup>65</sup> Puhvel, too, writes that "Rama seems to be a folk version of Indra in a post-Vedic, agricultural milieu."<sup>66</sup> Dimmitt's argument is that both Ravana and Vritra imprison the source of life – Vritra, by enclosing the life-giving waters/cows inside

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> Puhvel, p. 51.

<sup>63</sup> Dimmitt, p. 217.

<sup>64</sup> Puhvel, p. 93.

<sup>65</sup> "another form of Indra's struggle with Vritra." H. Jacobi, *Das Ramayana: Geschichte und Inhalt nebst Concordanz der Gedrückten Recensionen* (Bonn 1893). (repr. Darmstadt, 1970.) pp. 130-1. quoted by J.L. Brockington, *Righteous Rama* (Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1984). p. 195.

<sup>66</sup> Puhvel, p. 92.

himself or the mountain which he guards, and Ravana by abducting Sita, during which time nature ceases to function in a normal manner. Natural order can only be restored through the release of the waters, or the reunion of Sita with Rama. In other words, like the water, Sita is agricultural prosperity, and the source of life. Because of this, the *ramrajya* cannot occur until she is won back. In this role, Sita is nearly identical to the goddess with whom she would later become identified: Sri-Lakshmi.

In the Vedas, Sri-Lakshmi is not specifically referred to as a goddess, but the term “sri” implies prosperity and auspiciousness. In the *Sri Sukta* (a hymn appended to the fifth mandala of the *Rig Veda*, composed later than the rest of the mandala, but still believed to be pre-Buddhist<sup>67</sup>), she is referred to as two goddesses. Here, Lakshmi is described as “radiant as gold,” “moist,” “bedecked with lotus flowers.” It is said that she “bestows gold, milch cattle, horses, and human beings,” and that she has the “brilliance of and splendour of the moon and abundance personified.” Sri likewise is “delighted by the roaring of the elephant,” “dressed in gold,” “appears like a lovely lotus,” “perceptible by odour,” “ever abundant in harvest,” and said to live “in cowdung.” She is also “implored to bestow fame and prosperity,” and invoked in order to banish “want, poverty, and Alakshmi, who is characterized by dirty qualities of hunger and thirst.”<sup>68</sup> Clearly, Sri and Lakshmi, soon to be inextricably linked to each other, were capable of conferring all kinds of wealth, be it animal (elephants, cattle, horses), vegetable (the lotus, or the harvest), or mineral (gold). But their role was more complex than just bestowing wealth. As Olson writes:

The goddess known as Sri-Lakshmi was originally two different independent figures who became merged during the period of the early Upanishads. The term *lakshmi* originally meant a sign or omen of good or bad luck. Thus she became the deity representing the signs or prognostications of luck, prosperity, and well-being in the post-Vedic period, and gradually she became accepted as a goddess of wealth or fortune. The term *sri* denotes well-being, prosperity, luck, and splendor; it

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<sup>67</sup> Kinsley, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Upendra Nath Dhal, *Goddess Lakshmi: Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers & Distributors, 1978). pp. 51-2.

is associated with a complete lifetime, offspring, the life sap, honor, glory, and dignity. Thus to lose *sri* implies hunger, misfortune, and unhappiness. This abstract concept gradually evolved into the goddess Sri, who does not, however, appear as a distinct female deity before the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* (ca. 900 BCE).<sup>69</sup>

Clearly, the two goddesses who became Sri-Lakshmi represented everything that a king was supposed to provide for his people, including wealth, prosperity, and food. For this reason, kings were often great supporters of her cult, and often used her image on coins and the like. The two most frequent images of Sri-Lakshmi show her seated on a lotus and/or being showered with water (lustration) by elephants. According to Blurton,

[t]he lotus is... a symbol of fertility. Lakshmi is sometimes shown carrying lotus blooms, or even dressed in a garment made entirely from lotus petals. The elephants who lustrate the goddess are the animals which in India are always linked with royalty – only kings could afford to keep such beasts. In a hot country where water supplies are often inadequate, lustration is a powerful image. This act mirrors the royal coronation ritual of the *abhisheka*, when the head of the monarch is anointed with water. The use of this multivalent imagery reinforces the connection between the goddess and royal power. Elephants in Indian folk-lore symbolise rain, their huge grey shapes being equated with rain clouds.<sup>70</sup>

Sri-Lakshmi, associated with the fertility symbols of the lotus, water, and elephants, was invoked by kings to bestow upon them a successful reign. Here again we see the king's association with, and dependence on, water and fertility for a prosperous rule. According to Romila Thapar, "[t]he association of rain with benevolent rule was an established axiom in early Indian political thought."<sup>71</sup> This association was most clearly expressed in the character of the storm-god Indra, whose freeing of the Vedic waters has already been discussed, and with whom Sri-Lakshmi was most often associated in

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<sup>69</sup> Carl Olson, "Sri-Lakshmi and Radha: The Obsequious Wife and the Lustful Lover." in *The Book of the Goddess*. ed. by Carl Olson (New York: Crossroad, 1992). p. 126.

<sup>70</sup> T. Richard Blurton, *Hindu Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.). p. 176.

<sup>71</sup> Romila Thapar, *Exile and Kingdom: Some Thoughts on the Ramayana* (Bangalore: The Mythic Society, 1978). p. 15.

her early career, just as the Sita of the *Rig Veda* had been.

Despite Sri-Lakshmi's close association with Indra, though, he was not her sole consort; as Kinsley explains, "[s]everal myths relate the theme of Indra's losing, acquiring, or being restored to the boon of Sri-Lakshmi's presence. In these myths, it is clear that what is lost, acquired, or restored in the person of Sri is royal authority and power."<sup>72</sup> One such myth is that of the demon Bali, as found in the *Vamana Purana*, the *Padma Purana*, and the *Mahabharata*:

[W]hen Indra is defeated by Bali, the goddess Lakshmi approaches him and speaks of the cause of her coming to Bali thus: 'since you could prove your valour by defeating Indra, I am pleased with you and find in you the unparallel [*sic*] strength and high self-conscious respect for which I have been drawn towards you.' Having spoken this, the goddess enters the body of Bali... After her close association with Bali, he rules the three worlds as the sovereign ruler. The three worlds prosper due to his benevolence and virtue. During his reign the earth produces grains and fruits in plenty without ploughing; the cows give sufficient milk; trees are full of flowers and fruits, etc.<sup>73</sup>

Obviously, to be the consort of Sri-Lakshmi was to enjoy all the benefits of being a righteous king, that is, the benefits of the fruitful earth. We see the same characteristic in Valmiki's Sita:

Even the Ashoka grove where she is held captive by Ravana at his palace is full of blooming trees. (5.16)... And when Sita is rescued and her exile over, on the return road to Ayodhya trees blossom and flower out of season: 'Fruitless trees become fruitful; trees without flowers abounded in blossoms; those that were withered sprouted leaves, and the foliage dripped with honey.' (6.112)<sup>74</sup>

Sita, like Sri-Lakshmi, provided prosperity to the ruler who possessed her, even, apparently, to a demon like Ravana.

By the late epic period (ca. 400 CE) Sri-Lakshmi was "consistently and almost exclusively" associated with Vishnu.<sup>75</sup> Central to this association was the myth of the

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<sup>72</sup> Kinsley, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Nath Dhal, pp. 94-5.

<sup>74</sup> Dimmitt, p. 215.

<sup>75</sup> Kinsley, p. 26.

creation of the world by churning an ocean of milk, using a mountain placed upside down on the back of Vishnu in the shape of a tortoise; out of this sea of milk rose not only the world, but the goddess Sri-Lakshmi as well.<sup>76</sup> This myth retains a number of elements of the Indra-Vritra myth: the serpent wrapped around the mountain, for one, and also the fluid source of life –here, milk, as a fluid from a cow, is the perfect synthesis of the metaphors of cow and water used in the Vedic myth. This is emphasized by the fact that prior to Sri-Lakshmi’s emergence, Vishnu emerges from the ocean of milk “carrying a water-jar full of the nectar” which strengthens the gods and enables them to defeat their enemies.<sup>77</sup>

Clearly, Sri-Lakshmi inherited many of the functions that had originally been assigned to Sita (among other goddesses) in the *Rig Veda*. Sita and Sri-Lakshmi are both bestowers of agricultural prosperity and material wealth, and thus of royal sovereignty. This is particularly seen in the fact that they were both consorts of Indra, king of the gods, and that even after the two goddesses were associated with other figures, the resulting myths still retained elements of the Indra-Vritra archetype. Despite the assertions of some scholars (such as Brockington<sup>78</sup>) to the contrary, this seems like strong evidence of the imposition of an Indra-Vritra template onto an earlier, unrelated story. Sukumar Sen has, in fact, argued that the Rama myth is the result of the combination of a story of an exiled king with that of another myth concerned with the abduction of a king’s wife,<sup>79</sup> which is essentially the myth of Indra and Vritra (remember that as king, Indra was the consort of *sri* and prosperity).

This connection between the Vedic waters or cows, Sri-Lakshmi, and Sita suggests a new way of envisioning the growth of the characters of the Rama story into divinities. Pollock, in support of the Rama/Indra archetype theory, writes:

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<sup>76</sup> Blurton, p. 120.

<sup>77</sup> Dimmitt and van Buitenen, pp. 94-98.

<sup>78</sup> Brockington, p. 195.

<sup>79</sup> Sukumar Sen, *The Origin and Development of the Rama Legend* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1977). pp. 16-17.

I suggest that the figure of Rama, from the time the full narrative took shape in the monumental *Ramayana*, has been conceived after the model furnished by these ancient morphemes of Indian myth... When I use the term “myth” here, I have in mind a patterned representation of the world, with continuing and vital relevance to the culture, which furnishes a sort of invariable conceptual grid upon which variable and multifarious experience can be plotted and comprehended. It is this essential power to interpret and explain reality... that has gone largely unappreciated in previous mythic interpretations of the *Ramayana*.<sup>80</sup>

As I mentioned before, this idea of continuity between Rama and Indra is not new. What is new is the recognition that the key character in the transition from Indra to Rama might very well have been the figure of Sita, who, with the connotations of fertility and prosperity already inherent in her name, could easily have served as the personification of the waters released by the Indra figure. Through the direct references in the *Balakanda* and *Uttarakanda* to Rama as *avatara* of Vishnu (who by that time had surpassed Indra in popularity and usurped many of his functions), the later poets who added on to Valmiki’s work can be viewed as making explicit what was already implicit in the text.

Thus we have seen that Rama’s (or Indra’s) role as king – that is, the one who is responsible for the maintenance of the cosmic and social order- is inseparable from Sita’s (or Sri-Lakshmi’s) role as goddess of prosperity and fertility. As P. Pratap Kumar writes in his study of Lakshmi, “Sovereignty presupposes prosperity, while prosperity is certainly a part of sovereignty.”<sup>81</sup>

### *Lug/ Lleu and Sovereignty/Blodeuedd*

In Irish and Welsh myth, as well, we find the notion that sovereignty and social order are inextricably linked to the fertility of the land. This relationship is expressed through three overlapping metaphors, all of which we have already noticed in the Indian material: 1) a sexual relationship between a male sovereign and a female fertility

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<sup>80</sup> Pollock, p. 41.

<sup>81</sup> *The Goddess Lakshmi* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). p. 14.

figure, who may either be abducted or choose to end the relationship of her own free will; 2) a herd of cattle which must be won from an adversary; or 3) a divine liquid, such as the waters freed by Indra. I will now examine the occurrence of each of these metaphors in the narratives surrounding Lug.

There is fairly substantial evidence that Celtic peoples considered the king to be married to, or a consort of, the land over which he ruled. In *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, for example, the sons of Mil, while invading Ireland, are met by three women of the Tuatha de Danaan (Banba, Fotla, and Eriu [or Erin], each a name for Ireland itself), each of whom asks that her name be given to the island. When Donn, one of the sons of Mil, denies that Eriu should be granted her boon, she curses him, telling him that “thou shalt have no gain of this island, nor will thy children.”<sup>82</sup> After it is agreed that the island will retain her name forever more, she allows the Milesians to go on to defeat the Tuatha de Danaan and rule Ireland. Another example of this belief, cited by Alwyn and Brinley Rees, is Queen Medb of Connacht, who was never without “one man in the shadow of another” – meaning that each man she mated with became king, but her mind was easily changed. Rees and Rees also describe the Leinster queen Medb Lethderg, who was the wife of nine kings of Ireland in a row. “Great indeed was the power of Medb over the men of Ireland, for she it was who would not allow a king in Tara without his having herself for a wife... until Medb mated with [him] Cormac was not king of Ireland.”<sup>83</sup> Kingship, then, may have been seen as conveyed by the land itself, represented by a female figure, and could be revoked depending on the will of the land – that is, fertility and material abundance were a result of good and proper rule.

Frequently, the Celtic myths focus on the abduction of the fertility / sovereignty

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<sup>82</sup> Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover, eds. *Ancient Irish Tales* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996). p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Alwyn and Brinley Rees. *Celtic Heritage* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994). p.75.

figure by a rival of her consort,<sup>84</sup> as in the Rama/Sita story. The pre-eminent example of this is the Irish story of “The Wooing of Etain,”<sup>85</sup> which had been written down as early as the eighth century,<sup>86</sup> and which I will now summarize:

Etain is the wife of Midir, a king of the Tuatha De Danaan, but Midir’s other wife, in a jealous rage, transforms Etain into a fly which is blown about the world for many years. Finally the fly lands in the cup of a human queen, who swallows the fly and thus becomes pregnant. The daughter she bears, also named Etain, is later married to the high king of Ireland, Eochaid Airem. One day Midir appears and tries to convince Etain to elope with him. She refuses, not having any memory of her previous life, but says that she would go with him should Eochaid bid her to. Some time later, a strange warrior (Midir) appears in the court of Eochaid, and challenges the king to a game of *fidchell*, a board game somewhat similar to chess and considered to be “a game of kings;”<sup>87</sup> significantly, Eochaid says that the *fidchell* board is in the house where the queen is sleeping. Eochaid agrees to the challenge, and Midir allows him to win twice, each time handing over to Eochaid the stakes that had been agreed. Eochaid then demands that in addition to the stakes paid, Midir should have to clear a forest and build a road across a bog. Midir and his fairy troop perform the tasks in a single night, and by watching this, humans first learned to use the plow, hence Eochaid’s epithet Airem (meaning “plowman”). Midir and Eochaid play *fidchell* once more, and this time Midir is the victor, and is allowed to choose any stake he wishes. Naturally, he chooses “[t]wo arms around Etain and a kiss from her,”<sup>88</sup> much to the horror of Eochaid.

Eochaid tells Midir to return in a month to receive his prize. A month later, when Midir

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<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the change of the sovereignty figure in Ireland from agent to object, see Máire Herbert, “Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland.” in *Women and Sovereignty*, Louise O. Fradenburg, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 1992). pp. 264-275. This issue will be discussed later in this paper.

<sup>85</sup> Koch and Carey, eds., pp. 135-154. trans. by John Carey.

<sup>86</sup> Ward Rutherford, *Celtic Mythology* (New York: Sterling, 1990). p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 143.

<sup>88</sup> Koch and Carey, eds. p. 148.

returns, Eochaid and his men are feasting, and “Etain was pouring drink for the princes that night, for pouring drink was a special skill of hers.”<sup>89</sup> Eochaid and his men try to prevent Midir’s taking Etain, but he turns Etain and himself into swans and they fly off. Eochaid and his followers attempt to dig up the *síd* mound in which Midir makes his home, but agree to stop if Midir gives Eochaid a chance to win Etain back. Midir agrees, and informs Eochaid that he must identify Etain from a group of fifty women, all of whom resemble Etain. Eochaid says to himself, “My wife is the best at pouring drink in Ireland. I will recognize her by her pouring.”<sup>90</sup> He chooses one, who later turns out to be a daughter that Etain had borne him without his knowledge. According to some versions, Eochaid is eventually killed by the son whom his daughter bore to him.

This story, like that of Rama discussed above, centers around the struggle between two rivals for a queen, the results of which have serious implications for the agricultural well-being of the kingdom – the struggle for Sita results in the disordering and reordering of nature, while that for Etain results in the discovery of the plow, an instrument crucial to, and symbolic of, human beings’ ordering of nature. Stories involving Lug contain these elements as well. The abduction/elopement of a female figure, for example, figures in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion*, a group of Welsh tales compiled in the nineteenth century from materials in the White Book of Rydderch and the Red Book of Hergest, which date from the fourteenth century.<sup>91</sup> A tale known as “Math, son of Mathonwy”<sup>92</sup> tells the story of Lleu, the Welsh counterpart to Lug. Lleu is cursed by his mother that he will never have a human wife; in response, his uncle Gwydion creates for him a wife out of “the flowers of the oak, and the flowers of the broom, and the flowers of the meadowsweet.”<sup>93</sup> She is named Blodeuedd, or

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>91</sup> Rutherford, p. 50.

<sup>92</sup> “Math, Son of Mathonwy,” in *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, the Netherlands: Dragon’s Dream, 1982). pp. 67-82.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

“flowers.” One day, while Lleu is away, she meets a huntsman named Gronw,<sup>94</sup> with whom she plans to elope; first, though, they must kill her husband. Unfortunately for the illicit lovers, they only manage to turn him into an eagle, and when Gwydion tracks down the injured bird by following the trail of entrails he has left behind, Lleu is transformed back again. As punishment, he kills the huntsman and turns Blodeuedd into an owl. “Then Lleu Llaw Gyffes subdued the land a second time and ruled over it prosperously.”<sup>95</sup> Like Sita, Blodeuedd is created from the earth, and like Sita or Etain, when she is removed from the side of the hero the results are chaos and disorder; in the case of Etain, the result is the death of Eochaid, and in the case of Blodeuwedd, the result is the disabling of Lleu through his transformation into an eagle.<sup>96</sup> Lleu, like Rama, restores order through the killing of the abductor.

In his Irish form, Lug, like Eochaid and Mider, is also associated with agriculture. In perhaps the most famous story about Lug, “The Second Battle of Mag Tured,” he is presented as a newcomer to the court of the Tuatha de Danaan, which one could only enter if one was master of a skill. When Lug arrives, he is challenged by the doorkeeper, who demands to know Lug’s skill. Lug replies that he is a wright, to which the doorkeeper responds that the Tuatha de Danaan already have a wright. Lug says he is a smith, with the same response from the doorkeeper, and so on through a long list of arts. When Lug finally points out that he is the only one who is a master of *all* of those trades, the king, Nuada, challenges Lug to a *fidchell* match, just as Midir and Eochaid had done. Lug wins all of the stakes with a famous move known as the *Cro* (“enclosure”) of Lugh. Finally admitted into Tara, palace of the Tuatha de Danaan, Lugh is challenged by Oghma, who hurls a great flag-stone at him. When Lugh easily picks it

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<sup>94</sup> whose name may mean “Slayer of the Divine Man”: John T. Koch, “Some etymologies relevant to mythology in the Four Branches,” *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 9 (1989) pp. 1-11.

<sup>95</sup> *The Mabinogion*, p. 82.

<sup>96</sup> Lug too, in the *Lebor Gabala*, is said to have been killed (Koch and Carey, p. 255.), though by the son of his wife’s lover rather than the lover himself, whom Lug had already killed (pointed out to me by John Carey, personal communication. Sept. 23, 1998.)

up and hurls it back, Nuada hands over the throne to Lugh, who leads the Tuatha de Danaan to victory over their enemies, the Fomorians. Lug kills his own Fomorian grandfather (“Balor of the Baleful Eye”) and receives from the leader of the Fomorians (a king named Bres, who had unjustly been ruler over the Tuatha de Danaan as well) knowledge of how to reap, plant, and sow. Lug thus assumes his place on the throne and rules for many years.<sup>97</sup>

While no female fertility figure appears in “The Second Battle of Mag Tured,” the important agricultural knowledge acquired by Lug appears to perform the same function in this story as the return of Sita does in the Rama story, or the freeing of the cattle in the Indra story, and as we may imagine the return of Blodeuedd does in the Lleu story: the restoration of rightful kingship, from which follows agricultural prosperity. However, the presence of Blodeuwedd in the Welsh story suggests that there may have once been a female sovereignty / fertility figure present in the “Mag Tured” story, who later disappeared from the narrative. Or, in place of the female figure, there may have been a herd of cattle won by Lug. An alternate tradition states that, rather than letting Bres go at the end of the Second Battle of Mag Tured, Lug killed him through a trick: Bres would drink the milk of hundreds of cows which had been brought to him as tribute by the Tuatha de Danaan, but Lug had hundreds of wooden cows made, and filled them with a liquid which killed Bres when he drank it.<sup>98</sup> Like Indra in his victory over Vritra, Lug here reclaims his peoples’ cattle, while the liquid within the wooden cows suggests both the dual nature of the Vedic cows as both cattle and water and a divine liquid that occurs in both Irish and Indian material.

Such a divine liquid is closely connected with both Indian and Celtic kingship.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Cross and Slover, pp. 28-48.

<sup>98</sup> MacNeill, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> The association of a female figure with a royal drink occurs in other Indo-European traditions as well, most notably in Germanic tales such as Beowulf. It has been argued, however, that the Germanic adoption of this motif was a result of contact with Celts – see Michael J. Enright, *Lady With a Mead Cup* (Dublin and Portland, Oregon: Four Courts Press, 1996).

In Ireland, we find a story known as *Báile in Scáil* (meaning “The Phantom’s Frenzy” or “The Phantom’s Prophecy”), which had been written down by 1056, and in which the famous king Conn of the Hundred Battles loses his way in a mist. He is approached by a horseman, who invites Conn to his household. His host reveals himself to be none other than Lug. His consort, a young woman wearing a golden crown and explicitly called “The Sovereignty of Ireland,” pours into a golden cup for Conn a drink called *derg flaith* (which can mean either “red ale” or “red sovereignty;”<sup>100</sup> significantly, the name of two of the other Irish sovereignty figures/queens mentioned above [Medb of Connacht and Medb Lethderg] are cognate with the English word “mead” and the Welsh word for “drunk”<sup>101</sup> ). While his consort pours the divine drink, Lug recites the names of Conn’s descendants and how long each of them will reign.<sup>102</sup> This liquid may be what Etain is so skilled at pouring in the tale related above, and a similar connection between kingship and a symbolic libation offered by a royal woman is found in Gaulish legend.<sup>103</sup>

In regard to Indian kingship, many scholars have seen in these Celtic female sovereignty figures a parallel with Sri-Lakshmi<sup>104</sup>; she is, like the Irish Sovereignty, also connected with a sacred drink. As mentioned before, Sri-Lakshmi is said to have emerged from the churning of the cosmic ocean of milk, a fluid which nicely synthesizes the metaphors of the imprisoned cows or waters freed by Indra. In the *Rig Veda*, the divine liquid known as *soma* appears both as a god and as an intoxicating, strength-inducing sacred drink that is in large part responsible for Indra’s victory over Vritra (*RV I.32.3*).<sup>105</sup> In some texts Sri-Lakshmi attends the personified Soma after a

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<sup>100</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 76.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>102</sup> John Carey. “The Narrative Setting of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*.” *Études Celtiques* 32 (1996). p. 191.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert, p. 265.

<sup>104</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 75.

<sup>105</sup> O’Flaherty, p. 149.

royal sacrifice, thus bestowing royal authority on him,<sup>106</sup> and she has also been identified with Apala,<sup>107</sup> from whose mouth Indra drinks the soma.<sup>108</sup> And, perhaps, most importantly, in the *Rig Veda*, the drinking of soma is closely linked to the bestowing of the wealth and prosperity (and thus the qualities of rightful rule) which Sri-Lakshmi would soon come to personify.<sup>109</sup>

Lug is linked to a number of other female fertility/sovereignty figures as well, including his foster-mother Tailtiu, his mother Eithne and a mysterious figure called the Cailleach Bheara. Tailtiu is described in the *Lebor Gabala Erenn* in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the story of Etain:

Tailtiu, daughter of Magmor king of Spain, was the queen of the Fir Bolg. After the slaughter of the Fir Bolg in the first battle of Mag Tuired she came to Caill Cuan, and the wood was felled by her so that before the end of the year it was a plain flowering with clover.<sup>110</sup>

Tailtiu is responsible for the clearing of land and the preparation of it for agriculture, just as the triad of Mider/Eochaid/Etain was. The text goes on:

Tailtiu died in Tailtiu, so that it was named after her; and her grave is to the northeast of the assembly-platform of Tailtiu. Her funeral games were held by Lug every year, a fortnight before Lugnasad and a fortnight after Lugnasad. *Lugnasad*, that is, the assembly [*nasad*] of Lug son of Eithne, is the name of the games.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, Tailtiu is considered to be responsible for Lugnasad, a famous festival occurring around the first of August, which was connected both with the harvest and with

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<sup>106</sup> Kinsley, p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 75.

<sup>108</sup> RV 8.91. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, trans. *The Rig Veda* (London: Penguin, 1981) p. 257.

<sup>109</sup> According to Griffith, "Indra is especially the lord of Soma and its chief drinker. The exhilaration produced by drinking the fermented juice offered in libations stimulates his warlike energies and disposes him to give out of his boundless riches liberal rewards in the shape of cattle and other wealth to those who worship him." Ralph T.H. Griffith, note to RV I.IV.2. *Hinduism: The Rig Veda* (New York: Book of the Month Club Sacred Writings, 1992 [orig. pub. 1896]). p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> Koch and Carey, eds. p. 245. trans. by John Carey.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

kingship.<sup>112</sup>

Lughnasad, is, as we will see, intimately connected to both Lug's role as divine king and his relationship to female fertility / sovereignty figures. Our earliest mention of the festival occurs in the ninth-century glossary known as *Sanas Cormaic*, which describes the festival thus: "Lughnasa i.e. the *násad* of Lugh son of Ethle i.e. an assembly held by him at the beginning of harvest each year at the coming of Lughnasa. *Násad* is a name for games or an assembly."<sup>113</sup> Many stories survive explaining the origins of Lughnasad, which has been celebrated all over Ireland for well over a thousand years, though it has now been Christianized, and St. Patrick has taken the place in the stories of the original hero, whom MacNeill has shown to be Lug. MacNeill summarizes the basic plot of these stories thus:

To sum up, the dominant theme of Lughnasa is the struggle between two gods, one of whom, Crom Dubh, is a hill-dweller, owner of a bull and of a granary, corn-bringer and cultivator, feast-giver, ruler of the elements, owner of a baleful light, a possessor and a conserver of his possessions... His opponent, Lugh... is a newcomer, a traveller, clever, with superior power or skill... a dispossessor, and annexer of the other's goods for his followers, a winner of meat and corn. The victory involves dispossession, a transfer of goods, and the confinement of the defeated in a narrow place. Sometimes the struggle is for possession of a woman. Is she the corn? The name Eithne ([Lug's mother, who is sometimes named as the object of the struggle in the legends, and whose name means] kernel, grain) suggests that she was so originally.<sup>114</sup>

Such a description indicates the probable importance of Lug in early Irish thought. It also resembles the Indra / Vritra and Rama / Ravana templates discussed above: again we see the struggle between two adversaries for wealth and fertility or prosperity, sometimes personified as a woman, sometimes as cattle (the bull and meat of MacNeill's description), and sometimes as fertility itself (represented here by corn, and in the Indian material as plant life or the imprisoned waters).

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<sup>112</sup> The survivals, myths, and history of Lughnasad have been marvelously documented in Maire MacNeill's invaluable work *The Festival of Lughnasa*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). "Lughnasa" is an alternate spelling.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.

In addition to being a harvest festival, Lughnasa was marked by assemblies known as *oenachs*, great gatherings presided over by kings. Oenach Tailten was the most famous, and best documented of these gatherings. It was purported to take place at the burial place of Tailtiu, and was presided over by the king who claimed high-kingship over Ireland.

Teltown (Telton) may originally have been the sacred place of a small community but by early historic times it had become an appanage of the high-kingship and to preside over the Oenach was recognized as the effective and symbolic right of the high-king. Tailtiu, it seems, was not a royal residence: it was a pagan cemetery, the site of legendary battles, and the place of an annual assembly.<sup>115</sup>

Such assemblies were often the setting for supernatural events involving a sovereignty figure. MacNeill gives an example of a version of the meeting of the king's son with the goddess of sovereignty:

Daire, the king, presided at the Oenach. It had been prophesied that a son of his called Lugaid would rule Ireland; but he had six sons called Lugaid. As the sons raced horses at the Oenach the king asked a druid which son would succeed him and the druid replied that it would be whichever one of them caught a fawn which came then into the assembly. The sons pursued the fawn into Leinster (i Laignib), and the one called Lugaid Laige or Mac Niadh caught it. One by one, they sought a night's lodging in a house in which there was a hideous hag who would grant it [lodging] only on condition of mating with her. Only Lugaid Laige had the courage to accept and in his arms she turned into a beautiful woman and revealed that she was the sovereignty of Ireland. Next morning the sons found themselves on the open plain with no sign of house or hag. They returned to Tailtiu and told their story after which the men of Ireland dispersed from the Oenach.<sup>116</sup>

The *oenach*, by assembling the subjects of the king, seems to have served the function of being a physical manifestation of the social order which he maintains. According to Rees and Rees, "[a]ssemblies... represent both a return to the original unity and the re-

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322-3. A similar story, though not involving an *oenach*, is told about the sons of Eochaid Mugmedon, who are offered a drink of water (reminiscent of the *derg flaith*) by the hag in exchange for a kiss – Niall, who accepts the trade, becomes king and mythical ancestor of the historical kings of the Ui Neill clan. See Koch and Carey, pp. 192-7.

creation of order.”<sup>117</sup> The fact that such assemblies were usually held at the graves of female divinities, or were associated with appearances of the goddess of sovereignty, would have further emphasized the idea that the king ruled with divine sanction, and with the blessing of the land itself.

The embodiment of sovereignty, prosperity, and fertility occurs again in a figure known as the Cailleach Bhéarra. She appears in both Irish and Scottish folklore, and under another name, Bui, was said to have been a wife of Lug. She seems to have fulfilled roles both as a shaper of landscape and as a symbol of sovereignty, and in some tales provides the hero with a magic drink that confers sovereignty or strength. Also, her name as a wife of Lug (Bui) may be derived from the Indo-European *\*Bovina*,<sup>118</sup> meaning “cow-like one.”<sup>119</sup> We saw in the Indic material that Sita and the waters/cows freed by Indra perform similar functions as Bui; that is, they bestow prosperity upon the rightful ruler and his people.

The question now arises as to why this overlapping of feminine and bovine imagery occurs so often in the context of narratives about kingship and fertility. Women were an important symbol of fertility in each of the cultures we are examining because of their capacity to give and sustain life; this association in turn led to symbolic association with political power, since ideas of fertility and sovereignty were so closely linked. In addition, the ability to support – and thereby “possess” – a large number of women, either as wives or subjects, would likely have been symbolic of a military leader’s might. The possession of cattle was viewed in the same light, which explains why the two images so often overlap. The use of cattle imagery makes sense if we consider how extremely important cattle were to the Indo-European peoples.

According to Lincoln,

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<sup>117</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 143.

<sup>118</sup> The asterisk indicates a hypothetical, unattested proto-Indo-European word, reconstructed from existing Indo-European languages.

<sup>119</sup> Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, “Continuity and Adaptation in Legends of Cailleach Bhéarra.” *Béaloideas* 56 (1988). pp. 153-178.

Cattle were the very basis of the I-E economy, forming the essential measure of wealth and means of exchange. The animals supplied milk and meat, the main elements of the food supply; hides for clothing, blankets, bags, and shields; bones for tools; dung for fuel; and urine for disinfectant. They were also crucial to the social order, serving as bridewealth and wergild.<sup>120</sup>

Such dependence on cattle would presumably have imbued those who acquired many animals with great economic and political power. As various groups of Indo-Europeans settled down in conquered territories and began adopting agricultural lifestyles (so the theory goes), cattle became less important, but their myths about cattle-raids remained, and the cattle now became, as in the case of the cows freed by Indra, symbols of agricultural abundance as well as material wealth and political power.

Thus, in the narratives surrounding Lug, we have found a set of themes similar to those identified in our discussion of Rama and Indra: both involve the struggle between two adversaries over an object (woman, cattle, or liquid) which represents earthly fertility and material abundance and/or political sovereignty. The destruction of the adversary and the (re)claiming of the object allows the hero to restore an order that had been destroyed by his enemy's possession of the object.

### *Apollo and Themis?*

Those readers who are familiar with the body of material regarding Apollo may already be asking how such a model applies to the Greco-Roman god. Certainly Apollo is renowned for his combat with the Python, and this combat has frequently been compared to that of Indra and Vritra or of Rama and Ravana;<sup>121</sup> but Apollo was seemingly not a god of kingship, nor do we normally associate him with fertility, or with female fertility figures. To find a similar pattern at work in the character of Apollo requires a closer look into the material surrounding him, and a gathering together of

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<sup>120</sup> Bruce Lincoln, "The Indo-European Cattle Raiding Myth." *The History of Religions* 16 (1976) p. 62.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959). pp. 194-209.

many fragments to construct a conceptual whole.

Let us turn first to the issue of fertility and prosperity. Fertility is one of the last things which would be included in modern popular conceptions of Apollo, which have been so heavily influenced by Renaissance depictions of the god. Yet in the ancient world, he often played such a role. One of his major festivals in Athens was the *Thargelia*, “The Festival of First Fruits,” and in the festival’s celebration in Eleusis, Apollo Pythios was celebrated, with Apollo playing a significant part in relation to Demeter, the personified grain. Furthermore, a number of his many epithets related to a role in agriculture: *Sitalkas*, for example, at Delphi, meaning “of grain’s glory,” or *Eriphyllos*, meaning “of abundant foliage.” Also, according to Plutarch, Apollo Pythios (usually understood as “slayer of the Python”) was worshipped in Eretria and Magnes as the giver of fruits or wheat.<sup>122</sup> It is significant, given the agricultural context of the combat myths involving Rama and Lug, that Apollo Pythios was worshipped as an agricultural/fertility figure. Furthermore, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, after besting the dragon, Apollo’s taunts of the Python are filled with references to fertility:

And Phoebus Apollo boasted:  
'Rot right there now,  
on the ground that feeds man.  
You won't live anymore  
to be a monstrous evil to humans  
who eat the fruit of the earth that feeds so many...  
but right here on the black earth  
the bright sun will rot you.'  
Phoebus said this, gloating over her,  
and darkness covered her eyes.  
And the sacred power of the sun  
rotted her out right there,  
which is why the place is called Pytho (rot),  
and why they give the lord  
the name Pythian, because it was right there  
that the power of the piercing sun  
rotted the monster out. [emphasis mine]<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Gershonson, p. 39.

<sup>123</sup> Lines 188-209. Translation by Charles Boer, in Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner, *Classical Mythology* (Mountain View, CA, London, & Toronto: Mayfield, 1995). pp. 164-5.

This passage is, of course, an etymology of the place-name “Pytho” (rot), but seen in context with the evidence mentioned above, it gives us another indication that a connection existed between Apollo Pythios and fertility and earthly abundance. The implication in this passage is that in the act of rotting, the Python becomes part of the “ground that feeds man,” and thus the monster itself becomes food for humans – a sort of divine fertilizer. Thus, as Rama’s, Indra’s, and Lug’s victories over their foes allowed the hero’s people to partake of the wealth their foes had held captive, so too does Apollo’s victory over the Python result in earthly abundance.

Nor does Apollo lack the company of female fertility figures, the most important of which is his twin sister Artemis. She was a goddess of both wild animals and of childbirth. Images of her such as that found in Ephesus, with its many breasts, “emphasize Artemis’s power as a sustainer of animal as well as human life.”<sup>124</sup> The etymology of her name, like Apollo’s, is unclear, but some have attempted to explain her name as coming from the root *ardo*, “to water” or “to nourish.”<sup>125</sup> Another suggestion has been that Artemis’ name is derived from *ari-Themis*, meaning “very like Themis.”<sup>126</sup> Themis, a consort of Zeus and a goddess of order, is said by Aeschylus to have been both the daughter of Gaea, the prototypical earth-goddess, and one of the possessors of the oracle at Delphi prior to Apollo.<sup>127</sup> Themis is the embodiment of the social and natural order established by Zeus; it is through her that he produces “the Seasons, Lawfulness and Justice and blooming peace, who watch over the works of mortal men”<sup>128</sup> – a clear example of the interrelatedness of natural order and social order. In works of art, she is depicted holding a pair of scales (symbolic of the justice

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<sup>124</sup> Harris and Platzner, p. 117.

<sup>125</sup> Room, p. 65.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, lines 1-4. trans. by George Thompson in Harris and Platzner, p. 539.

<sup>128</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*. Lines 692-4. trans. by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, in Harris and Platzner, p. 75.

she embodies) and a cornucopia, “the symbol of the blessings of order.”<sup>129</sup>

Significantly, in the *Hymn to Apollo*, it is Themis who pours the divine drink of nectar for Apollo after his birth,<sup>130</sup> calling to mind Sri-Lakshmi and the Irish Sovereignty.

Once again, however, fertility or agricultural abundance may also be represented by cattle rather than by a woman. Apollo is involved in a cattle raid that is in some ways a mirror image of Indra’s; this time, it is Apollo from whom the goods are stolen. *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, dating from around the fifth century BCE,<sup>131</sup> finds Hermes making off with his brother Apollo’s cattle.

While it may seem contradictory to my thesis that it is Apollo who loses the cattle rather than wins them, there are two reasons why this is not necessarily harmful to my argument. First, involutions on a structural level – the reversal of relationships – are common occurrences in myths.<sup>132</sup> This is an example of plasticity, one of the four primary characteristics of myth that I identified in the introduction. The association of Apollo with a relationship involving cattle theft is more important than his actual position within the relationship in a given narrative. Secondly, Apollo and Hermes were closely associated with each other in Greek mythic thought. Both are youthful gods, and Hermes is sometimes depicted driving Apollo’s chariot.<sup>133</sup> Their closeness is emphasized in the *Hymn to Hermes* in a number of ways: they are ordered by Zeus to seek out Apollo’s missing cattle together, and their love and affection for each other are described a number of times:

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<sup>129</sup> Oskar Seyffert, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*. revised and edited by Henry Nettleship and J.E. Sandys (Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1961 [orig pub. 1894]). p. 628.

<sup>130</sup> Line 124. Apostolos, N. Athanassakis. trans. *The Homeric Hymns* (Baltimore and London: University of Johns Hopkins Press, 1976). p. 19.

<sup>131</sup> G.S. Kirk, “The Homeric Hymns,” in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Vol. 1: Greek Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). p. 115.

<sup>132</sup> For example, a number of recent retellings of the *Ramayana* have depicted Ravana as the hero and Rama as the villain. See Paula Richman, “E.V. Ramasami’s reading of the *Ramayana*,” in Paula Richman, ed., *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991). pp. 175-201.

<sup>133</sup> T. H. Carpenter, “The Terrible Twins,” in Solomon, ed. p. 63.

He [Zeus] ordered them both to come to an accord and search for the cattle, and Hermes to guide and lead the way...<sup>134</sup> Then both of them turned the cows together toward the divine meadow... and thus wise Zeus rejoiced and brought them together in friendship...<sup>135</sup> Then Apollon, the son of Leto, for the love of Hermes' friendship, vowed that no one else among the immortals to him would be dearer.<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, rather than a battle, the hymn ends with an exchange of gifts. Apollo gives Hermes dominion over his cattle and all herds,<sup>137</sup> further blurring the line between owner and thief. Each god also presents the other with the object that would become his primary iconographic attribute: each is responsible for a significant portion of the other's personality. Hermes gives Apollo his newly-invented lyre, and Apollo returns the favor by providing Hermes with the *kerykeion*, the herald's staff with which Hermes is usually identified. This staff is described in the text as "a beautiful staff of wealth and prosperity."<sup>138</sup> In this narrative, then, we again have a conflict over a herd of cattle which results in the transfer of goods representing "wealth and prosperity."

Let us turn now to Apollo's associations with kingship, another sphere of influence with which he is not normally associated. In the Greek pantheon, kingship clearly belonged to Zeus, and potential usurpers, such as Typhon, were quickly annihilated. Therefore, as Olympian "theology" (if it can be called that) solidified, Apollo could not be explicitly associated with kingship. But careful readings and use of the comparative evidence already gathered can help shed light on this usually unrecognized aspect of the god.

The first explicit rendering of Apollo as a kingly figure occurred when Augustus

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<sup>134</sup> Lines 391-2. trans. by Athanassakis, p. 41.

<sup>135</sup> Lines 503-507. *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>136</sup> Lines 523-5. *Ibid*.

<sup>137</sup> Lines 567-71. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>138</sup> Line 529. *Ibid*. Such a staff may have been a symbol of kingship among early Indo-Europeans. Myles Dillon has claimed that the words for "king" in Irish (*ri*), Latin (*rex*), and Sanskrit (*raja*), all Indo-European languages, all "belong to the root \**reg-* 'to stretch,' [and seem] to mean the tribal king, who stretched out the white rod of kingship to rule his people, and who seems to have his origin in the Indo-European period." Myles Dillon, "The Consecration of Irish Kings." *Studia Celtica* X (1973), p. 2.

decreed himself to be the embodiment of Apollo following his accession to the Roman emperor's throne. Virgil's paean to Augustus, his Fourth Eclogue, written a decade prior to Octavian's accession to the throne, makes clear the symbolic importance of allowing Caesar's heir to rule:

The final age has come foretold in Cumae's song...  
...now your Apollo reigns...  
And with ancestral virtues will rule a world at peace.  
For you, child, will earth untilled, as her first modest gifts,  
pour forth wandering ivy with cyclamen everywhere  
And Egyptian lilies mingled with smiling acanthus.  
She-goats will themselves bring home udders swollen  
With Milk, and cattle will not fear the lion's might.  
Your cradle will itself pour forth flowers to caress you.  
The serpent will perish...<sup>139</sup>

Here, Virgil draws on imagery of Apollo as a fertility figure that had been established for centuries, as we have already seen in our discussion of Apollo as Pythios. This quotation also illustrates again the close connection between fertility and social order that we have seen demonstrated in both the Indian and Celtic materials, as well as in Themis' role as goddess of both fertility and social order. In his depiction of the battle of Actium in the *Aeneid* (8.912-87), Virgil portrays Apollo, and by extension, Augustus, as "the supreme figure in the scene, one who intervenes to restore order to a fractured world"<sup>140</sup> – in short, he depicts Apollo performing just as Zeus had in his own battles, first with his own father and then with Typhon, the monster that threatened to destroy his reign before it had even begun. Virgil and Augustus were making explicit in Augustus' own person what had perhaps always been implicit in the figure of Apollo: that Apollo was the heir apparent to his father's throne.

We have seen that from the earliest written materials, Apollo is described as having power over fertility; likewise, from the beginnings of Greek literature, Apollo and Zeus have been described in similar terms. As Joseph Fontenrose has exhaustively

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<sup>139</sup> Lines 4-24. A.J. Boyle, trans. *The Eclogues of Virgil*, (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1976). p. 57.

<sup>140</sup> John F. Miller, "Virgil, Apollo, and Augustus." in Solomon, ed. p. 101.

documented,<sup>141</sup> for example, the combats between Apollo and Python and Zeus and Typhon are linked by no less than twenty-eight different thematic elements. The first scene of the *Hymn to Apollo* is quite useful in the examination of the relationship between Zeus and Apollo. In that scene, according to Jenny Strauss Clay,

Delos, as well as the rest of the world, is terror-stricken that Apollo 'will greatly lord it over' the gods as well as mankind. Occurring here for the first time in Greek, [the particular words used by the poet carry] a suggestion of despotic rule. Yet Zeus alone rules over gods and men. The nations fear that the new-born Apollo will depose the Olympians and succeed to the kingship in heaven. Furthermore, they fear that his reign, unlike the regime of Zeus, will be both violent and lawless. The full significance of the poem's first scene now emerges. The awesome god who interrupts the peaceful banquet of the Olympians and strikes terror in the hearts of the divine assembly appears as the potential violator of the Olympian order and usurper of Zeus' dominion. Only Zeus' welcoming gesture of acknowledgement restores tranquility. It indicates unmistakably that his son, far from being an enemy to be feared, is a friend and ally of the established order.<sup>142</sup>

Clay then goes on to discuss the "atmosphere of crisis" in which Apollo has appeared, in which Typhon has yet to be destroyed and the titanic powers, though defeated, still remain powerful.<sup>143</sup> Apollo, then, has appeared to help Zeus maintain the rightful order that Zeus has established, an order that is threatened by an evil foe. This is analagous with the appearance of Lug at the court of the Tuatha de Danaan in their time of crisis or with the incarnation of Vishnu as Rama in a similar situation, as well as with the ascension of Octavian after a long civil war. The restoration or maintenance of order is the duty of the new king.

That kingship was indeed a factor in the cult of Apollo is pointed out by the fact that in the *Septerion* ritual at Delphi, described by Plutarch, a temporary structure was set on fire and burnt to the ground. This dwelling was supposed to represent the home of the Python, but it was decorated to look like a king's dwelling rather than a dragon's

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<sup>141</sup> Fontenrose, pp. 77-93.

<sup>142</sup> Clay, p. 27.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

cave,<sup>144</sup> as though the Python itself were a king. This ritual seems to represent the destruction of the Python's old order and Apollo's construction of a new order, just as Zeus' destruction of Typhon represented the destruction of the Titanic order. Thus, it seems possible that the results of the myth of Apollo Pythios led not only to earthly fertility, as we saw earlier, but also to the establishment of a new social order.

Apollo, like Lug, was also associated with an annual tribal gathering. Walter Burkert, following Jane Harrison, has shown that Apollo's pre-Homeric name ("Apellon") is very likely derived from the institution known as the *apellai*, an annual tribal assembly attested in Delphi and Laconia, and which "from the month name Apellaios, can be inferred for the entire Dorian-northwest Greek area."<sup>145</sup> While nothing I have been able to find indicates that this was an assembly concerned primarily with kingship, the *appelai* was concerned with an equally important civic ritual: the reception of youths into the body of full-grown men.<sup>146</sup> Apollo, with his unshorn hair and eternal youth, has long been recognized as the patron of young men. According to Darice Birge,

It is in this function that he oversees the stage of life during which youths acquire citizenship and adult status and become full-fledged members of the adult social system... In his jurisdiction over societal order, then, Apollo's power is clearly recognized at the point where order is not fully established... Apollo is recognized as the god of order, but in addition to functioning squarely within the realm of order, he operated in a boundary zone where the process of incorporation into a state of order took place...<sup>147</sup>

This is precisely where Rama/Indra and Lug function: both within (maintaining) and on the outskirts of (creating or restoring) a state of order; in Apollo's case, however, the societal order being constructed may or may not have dealt with the institution of kingship. Certainly, however, it did involve maintenance of political and social order.

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<sup>144</sup> Fontenrose, p. 454.

<sup>145</sup> Burkert, (1985), p. 144.

<sup>146</sup> Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1969 [orig. published 1912]). p. 441.

<sup>147</sup> "Sacred Groves and the Nature of Apollo," in Solomon, ed. pp. 13-18.

As Burkert writes, in the *appelai* “Initiationsfest und politische Beschlußfassung schließen sich zusammen.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, given the fact that Themis (who appears to be the closest thing the Greeks had to a sovereignty goddess, whose name means “law” or “right,” and whom we have already seen linked to Apollo through her gift to him of divine nectar in the *Hymn* and possibly through Artemis as well) was particularly associated with assemblies,<sup>149</sup> it seems possible that the issue of kingship was at one point a significant part of the *apellai*. Certainly, kingship seems a fitting issue for a festival which lent its name to a god of flocks and herds, and who seems to be “god of the fold... of human sheep,”<sup>150</sup> for it is a nearly universal analogy that a king is to his people as a shepherd is to his flock.

To recap, the narratives surrounding Apollo reveal that he was closely associated with both earthly abundance and the establishment and maintenance of social order. The story of Hermes’ cattle theft, Apollo’s connections with a goddess of both fertility and sovereignty such as Themis, his association with a tribal gathering, and particularly his role as Apollo Pythios all support a Greek conception of interdependency between sovereignty or social order and earthly fertility similar to that which we observed in the Indian and Celtic materials.

### III. CONCLUSION

This paper started out with two primary objectives: 1) to examine the interdependent relationship between social order and earthly abundance and fertility in the narratives surrounding Rama, Lug, and Apollo; and to in the process, 2) demonstrate the effectiveness of the comparative method (when it is properly contextualized) in allowing us to unearth a layer of meaning in a narrative that might otherwise remain hidden. Both of these have been accomplished. In regard to the first

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<sup>148</sup> Walter Burkert, “Appellai und Apollon.” *Rheinisches Museum* 118 (1975), p. 11. “the initiation festival and political decision-making are joined together.”

<sup>149</sup> Room, p. 291 and Harrison, p. 482.

<sup>150</sup> Harrison, p. 440.

objective, we have seen that the stories of our three gods contain a number of similarities: each participated in a legendary combat, the spoils of which were identified as agricultural prosperity, a herd of cattle, or a woman (all of which we have seen to be functionally equivalent in the narratives); the (re)claiming of these spoils results in the restoration of the social order and allows the victor to claim his place as the rightful king (or, in the case of Apollo, as heir apparent). In regard to the second objective stated above, this paper has demonstrated the value of the comparative method in the realm of mythology. By taking the pattern that emerged from the examination of Indian and Celtic evidence and comparing it to narratives concerning Apollo, we have been able to gain a deeper understanding of an extremely complex mythic figure, in that aspects of his character which are not immediately recognizable are made more evident through the use of such evidence.

Finally, let me say a bit about the conclusions that I have drawn from examining the similarities we have seen. The unity of themes surrounding these characters may imply descent from a common proto-Indo-European “ancestor,” though this is not necessarily the case. The combat myth, for example, is universal, and the cattle-raiding myth appears in nearly all societies that keep cattle.<sup>151</sup> Further investigation of specific common details, such as the connection of kingship with a sacred drink,<sup>152</sup> or the association of both Lug and Apollo with assemblies, would be needed to ascertain a common origin with any degree of certainty. As I stated in the introduction, reconstruction is not my goal. However, if the evidence points to the possibility of a common origin, as it may with the figures of Lug, Apollo, and Rama, an investigation into the similarities of these mythic personages is important, not just in and of itself, but in laying groundwork for other investigations into the historical processes which shaped their respective cultures. Some of the most important results of this inquiry are

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<sup>151</sup> Lincoln (1976), p. 44.

<sup>152</sup> Dumézil, at the beginning of his career, postulated the existence of a proto-Indo-European figure who represented divine drink. He later distanced himself from these claims, though for reasons which remain unclear. See Littleton, pp. 43-46.

the questions that it raises, which must unfortunately be left for another time: if the similarity of these themes does in fact descend from proto-Indo-European thought, what events (historical, political, social, or religious) account for the differences? If they do not spring from a common source, what are the other possible explanations for the similarities? These questions transform the comparative exercise from static (“simple” reconstruction) to dynamic (exploring the effects of myth on society and vice versa over time).

A Dumézilian analysis of the narratives we have looked at would most likely extend the following assessment of the role of Lug made by Alwyn and Brinley Rees to Rama and Apollo as well: “At the center is the kingship which synthesizes all the functions and upon which the destinies of the realm depend.”<sup>153</sup> “[E]very unit,” they continue, “however small, tends to have a structure which mirrors that of the whole.”<sup>154</sup> Lug, they claim, embodies the entirety of early Celtic society, for he encompasses each of the three Dumézilian functions: sovereignty (in his role as king), war (in his role as slayer of enemies), and agriculture/production (in his relation to the goddess/cows/waters who provide prosperity and abundance). Such an analysis is easily extended to the other two figures examined here, as they both contain those three functions as well.

This analysis leaves something to be desired, however. The supposed reflection in myths of Indo-European social functions is used in such an analysis only to demonstrate the existence of the functions – it does not really discuss the relationships between those functions or how such relationships are maintained. This is where Bruce Lincoln has broken from Dumézil. In his book, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*,<sup>155</sup> Lincoln conducts a comparative study of the ways in which discourse (such as myth, ritual, and classification) are used to construct, maintain, destroy, and reconstruct

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<sup>153</sup> Rees and Rees, p. 143.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>155</sup> (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

social boundaries, hierarchies, and institutions. In the “Unconcluding Postscripts”<sup>156</sup> to the book, Lincoln states a number of views that will prove useful to my final analysis:

Within any society there exist... a large number of varied subgroups, the members of which feel ambivalent mixes of affinity for, and estrangement from, one another. This situation may be described through the metaphors of cleavage and segmentation... The integration of any society depends on the peaceful management of cleavages such that sentiments of affinity predominate over those of estrangement... The constituent subgroups of any society are encompassed within hierarchic orders and enjoy differential rank and privileges, including (most importantly) differential access to, and control over, scarce resources of a material and nonmaterial nature... Such hierarchies and the inequities they engender... are defended, above all, through those discourses that legitimate or mystify their structures, premises and workings.<sup>157</sup>

Lincoln’s views are borne out nicely in the myths examined above. In the cases of the myths which we have been studying, the subgroups which concern us are those at either end of the social hierarchy: the nobility and the commoners/producers upon whom the nobility depend to support them. The narratives themselves are the discourse which serves to maintain this hierarchy, by “mystify[ing the hierarchy’s] structures, premises and workings.” Rather than depicting the hierarchy as it actually exists, in which the king is dependent upon the producers for his livelihood, the narratives which we have examined stand this relationship on its head, declaring that the producers are in fact dependent upon the rightfully chosen king (as agent of the divine powers-that-be) for their food and what little material wealth they may possess. Particularly in the case of a new king assuming the throne (such as Augustus), such discourse is an invaluable method of legitimizing and gaining popular consent for one’s rule.

This outlook, regarding myth as a form of discourse that constructs and maintains social structures, is useful in examining gender hierarchies in these myths as well. In her article, “The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland,” Máire Herbert explores the

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-4.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

transition undergone by female sovereignty figures in Celtic myth from subject (the mythic figure who chooses the king) to object (a political symbol used to justify kingship) – as for instance, in the eleventh-century text *Báile in Scáile*, discussed above, in which Lug’s consort (following Lug’s orders) dispenses the drink of sovereignty:

It is his action, therefore, which ultimately designates the ruler. The locus of power has shifted from female to male. In its gender asymmetry the mythic image reveals itself in dialogue with the Irish historical era, when royal rule had become a matter of achievement by male sovereign rather than of assignation by female sovereignty.<sup>158</sup>

Such a transition is also visible in the Rama materials, in Sita’s transformation from fertility goddess to ideal (read: obedient) Hindu wife, while in the classical Greek materials we find that the idea of a king’s dependence on a female figure for sovereignty has almost entirely disappeared. I am not suggesting that somewhere in the past of each of these cultures there existed some “Golden Age” of matriarchy which can be found just beneath the surface of later narratives, but rather that within the mythic discourse of each of these cultures we can see the solidification of gender hierarchies as these hierarchies became more prominent, or at least more clearly articulated. The reasons for the growth in prominence of these hierarchies is likely different for each of these cultures – in Ireland, for example, it seems likely that Christian influences were in large part responsible for this growth, though obviously not in the other cases – and the question of the origins of such hierarchies again raises valuable questions about the specific historical and cultural contexts in which the narratives were created. It is in cases like this where a constructive dialogue between the comparative and purely contextual enterprises may, like the churning of the ocean of milk, yield great riches.

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<sup>158</sup> Herbert, p. 269.

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