

Indo-European Mythology

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

Iranian/Avestan - The primary resource for the mythology of the ancient Iranian people is the Avesta. In particular the Gathas, the oldest section of the Avesta, are a rich source of information on the mythology and religious practices of the ancient Iranians. *Gathic* (Old Avestan, or Gathic Avestan) is the oldest of languages used in the Avesta and is closely related to Sanskrit, the language of the Vedic people. It is believed that the Avesta was compiled sometime between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E. but that it may have been part of an earlier tradition. The Avesta is the primary religious text of modern Zoroastrianism. The principal problem with researching this particular culture is not a lack of written records, the Avesta is a lengthy text and is widely available, but a lack of pre-Zoroastrian records. While many of the traditions and beliefs of the Zoroastrians may stem from earlier times, it is difficult to separate many of the Zoroastrian influences from the original beliefs.

Vedic - The primary resources for the mythology of the Vedic culture are the Vedas. They are the oldest sacred texts of modern Hinduism. The four Vedic *Samhitas* are the primary texts of this period. They are believed to have been composed around 1500 B.C.E. and codified about 600 B.C.E. but may have been part of an even earlier oral tradition. The main problem with interpreting these sources is that these texts were revised a number of times throughout history and older versions of the manuscripts are rare as the materials used to record the text were fragile and not easily preserved.

Norse/Germanic - The primary source for early Norse culture and mythology are the *Eddas* and the *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson. Norse mythology is the best-preserved of Germanic paganism. However since most of the existing records on Norse mythology date from the 12th to 18th century, the main problem with these texts is that they were recorded centuries after the events they described. They are records of histories, myths, and traditions that were handed down orally for generations and may be subject to a number of inaccuracies. They were also influenced to some degree by Christianity, which played a part in their preservation.

Question 2: Summarize, then compare and contrast the myths of at least two Indo-European cultures with respect to the following topics (you need not use the same two cultures as a basis of comparison for each topic): (minimum 300 words for each) tales of creation, tales of divine war, tales which describe the fate of the dead.

Tales of creation:

Iranian/Avestan – According to Mary Boyce the world was created in seven stages. The gods made the world of stone, like a round shell. The sky was the top of this sphere and they filled the bottom with water. Then they created the earth, which rested on the water like a flat dish. In the center of the earth they created a single plant, a single animal (bull), and a single man. Last they created fire. The sun, which was part of the creation of fire stood motionless overhead as if it were always noon. Then the gods crushed the plant and slew the bull and man, making a triple sacrifice. The cycle of life began and death from that point on followed life. The sun began to move across the sky and seasons were regulated by its movement in accordance with *asha* (cosmic order).¹

Vedic – The best reconstruction of the Vedic creation myth I have seen yet says that in the beginning there were the waters which were restrained within a shell. The shell was known as the withholding demon *Vrtra*. The natural force of expansion existed, personified by the god *Varuna*. However, the power of expansion was overwhelmed by the powers of contraction (*Vrtra*). Meanwhile, there existed also a fashioner god, *Tvastr*, who had created Heaven and Earth to be his home. Of Heaven and Earth (some stories name different deities) was born *Indra*. *Indra* drank the soma and he expanded, separating Heaven and Earth forever. He then battled *Vrtra* and liberated the waters so that they came forth and gave birth to the Sun. The waters then flowed into the cosmic ocean. By liberating the waters *Indra* separated the *Sat* (existent) from the *Asat* (non-existent). *Varuna* then took over and organized things, setting laws by which the cosmos would operate.²

Tales of divine war:

Iranian/Avestan – In Iranian mythology there is a constant struggle between good and evil. The *Ahuras* (good) and the *Daevas* (evil) are the primary characters in this war. In modern Zoroastrianism there is also a battle between *Angra Mainyu* and *Ahura Mazda*, though *Angra Mainyu* is not original to the Iranian religion and is a later invention by Zoroaster. The balance of natural forces seems to be typified in this battle between the god of order, *Ahura Mazda*, and the forces of chaos, *Angra Mainyu* and his *devas*.

The root of the dualistic concepts in Zoroaster's teachings may actually be found in Babylonian and culture. The Akkadian poem "The Seven Evil Spirits" and the Babylonian narrative "The War of the Seven Evil Spirits against Heaven" share similar elements with Zoroaster's sevenfold hierarchy of the good and evil powers: *Ahura Mazda* (the good deity) and his six *Amesha Spentas* opposed by *Angra Mainyu* (the evil entity) with his six attendant evil spirits.³

Vedic – The Vedics had similar conflicts between the *Asuras* (often evil) and the *Devas* (good). There are two types of *Asuras*, *Danavas* and *Adityas*. The *Adityas* were often considered benevolent in nature. The god *Varuna* is the leader; of the *Adityas*. The arch-demon *Vrtra* was

¹ Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 11.

² Brown, W. Norman. "The Creation Myth of the Rig Veda." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 62. 2 (1942): 97-98.

³ Smith, Henry Goodwin. "Persian Dualism." *The American Journal of Theology*. 8. 3 (1904): 492.

the leader of the *Danavas*, decedents of Danu.⁴ These two are in opposition, as are the *Asuras* and the *Danavas*. It seems that some of the *Asuras*, including *Varuna*, later became *Devas*. In the oldest texts a distinction was made between *devdv dsurd*, “*Asuras* who have become *Devas*,” and *dsurd adevdh*, “*Asuras* who are not *Devas*.”⁵

It seems that the Vedic people were very warlike⁶ and two of the greatest Hindu epics, the *Rdmayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are filled with the warlike deeds of Vedic heroes. The *Rdmayana* tells the tails of Rama, particularly of his wars against *Ravana*, the demon-king of *Lafika*.⁷ The *Mahabharata* is primarily an epic about the wars of the five *Pandava* brothers.⁸

Tales which describe the fate of the dead:

Iranian/Avestan – The Iranians believed that when a person died his soul, the ‘*urvan*’, would go to the *Chinvato Peretu* (*Činvat* Bridge), the “bridge of judgment” where he would be judged by *Sraosha*, *Rashnu*, and *Mithra*.⁹ If he was worthy the bridge would be wide and he would cross the bridge easily. If he was not, the bridge would be as narrow as the blade of a sword and he would fall into the realm of the dead. There he would live a shadowy existence relying on his relatives to feed and clothe him (this implies that they were both hungry and cold). Those that crossed the bridge would live in Paradise with no need for sustenance or other offerings from their families.¹⁰

There seem to be several references to how a righteous man would enter heaven and an evil man would enter hell. The word *asha-* (*arta-*), “order,” denotes the suitability of things that are in harmony with Divine Order (*Asha*) also referred to as “Righteousness” in the Avesta. This concept occurs hundreds of times in the Avesta. To live “in accordance with Righteousness” is the means of spiritual grace which is attested in the Avesta as the medium for advancing to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Norse – In regard to the dead there are a lot of parallels between the Norse and the Iranian cultures. In the Norse culture the *Aesirs*’ kingdom (*Asgard*), was separated from the Earth by the *BiFrost* Bridge. *Asgard* is where those who died in battle would go. The rest of the dead went to

⁴ Ibid. 88.

⁵ P. von Bradke, Dyduš “Asura. Ahura Mazdd und die Asuras” qtd. in Kuiper, F. B. J. “The Basic Concept of Vedic Religion.” *History of Religions*. 15. 2 (1975): 118.

⁶ Bonnerjea, Biren. “Peace and War in Hindu Culture.” *Primitive Man*. 7. 3 (1934): 33-45.

⁷ Vālmiki. *The Ramayana*. Manmatha Nath Dutt (Ed.). Calcutta: Elysiem Press. 1894.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=qAMMcZ-z2kwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Ramayana&as_brr=1#PPA1554,M1>.

⁸ *Maha-Bharata: The Epic of Ancient India*. Romesh Dutt (Ed.). London: J.M. Dent & Co. 1899. <<http://books.google.com/books?id=6za9s2Ekh0gC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Mahabharata&asbrr=1#PPP13,M1>>.

⁹ Jackson, Abraham Valentine Williams. *Zoroastrian Studies*. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003. 146.

¹⁰ Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 14.

the underworld known as Hel.¹¹ There they had a dreary existence filled with constant hunger, and cold until the end of the world; *Ragnarok*, when all would be destroyed and a new world would surface.

The popular idea that Valhalla was the Norseman's heaven is incorrect. Valhalla was the abode where Odin received the *einherjar*, champions that at *Ragnarok*, the day of doom, would battle with the gods against the powers of evil. This was not the only place made for them, when *Freyja* rode to the battlefield, she chose half the slain for her hall *Folkvang*.¹²

Question 3: Explain how each of the following elements of ADF ritual does or does not resonate with elements of two different Indo-European cultures (you need not use the same two cultures as a basis of comparison for each element): (minimum 100 words each)

Earth Mother:

Iranian/Avestan - The best candidate for Earth Mother in Avestan cosmology is *Spenta Armaiti*. Her name essentially means "increasing or growing serenity". The *Gathas*, the oldest texts in Avesta, are filled with references to *Armaiti* as an independent being, an abstract concept, an adjective to describe human virtue, and a personification of the earth itself.¹³ She is the daughter and consort of *Ahura Mazda* and associated with the earth. Because of this association she is viewed as the goddess of fertility and the dead.¹⁴

Vedic - At places, the Veda alludes to the female power, *Mahimata* (literally Mother Earth), as *Viraj*. It also refers to the universal mother, as *Aditi*, the mother of gods, and as *Ambhrini*, the one born of the Primeval Ocean. While the entity, *Durga*, represents the protective aspect of motherhood. In Sanskrit there is even the term *Yaganmatri* for Mother of the Universe.¹⁵ Which of these would be best called the Earth Mother is hard to say. I think it depends on which aspect of the Earth Mother is being called upon. Since the earth can be destructive, protective, or nurturing this makes a great deal of sense.

Deities of the Land:

Vedic - *Sarasvati* is a Vedic river goddess who is known for both knowledge and fertility. *Agni*, the deity of fire, is the principal earthly god of the Vedics.

Iranian/Avestan - In ancient Iranian mythology, *Ardivi-sura Anahita* is a goddess of fertility and the primary river goddess, she and *Sarasvati* of the Vedics are cognates. There is no direct

¹¹ Nordic Notes JSSN 1442-5165. Norse mythology: legends of gods and heroes. 1997. 04 August 2008. <<http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/scanlink/nornotes/vol1/reviews/munch.html>>.

¹² Lindow, John. Norse Mythology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 118.

¹³ Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. "Ahur Mazda and Armaiti, Heaven and Earth, in the Old Avesta." Journal of the American Oriental Society. 122.2 (2002): 399-410.

¹⁴ Shapero, Hannah. Spenta Armaiti: Spirit of Serenity. 1996. 23 April 2008. <<http://www.accessnewage.com/articles/mystic/armait.htm>>.

¹⁵ Jain, P.C. Conception and Evolution of The Mother Goddess in India. 2004. 07 August 2008. <<http://www.exoticindia.com/article/mother/>>.

equivalent to Agni in the Avestan mythology, though the word *Atar* is believed to mean both fire and the deity of fire himself.¹⁶

Deities of the Sea:

Iranian/Avestan – *Apām Napāt* may be considered a deity of the sea. Mary Boyce contests that *Apām Napāt* is another designation for *Varuna*. The Vedics once worshipped *Asura *Medhā*, a cognate for the Iranian *Ahura Mazdā*. This left *Varuna* isolated, with no counterpart in Iran. She goes on to say that *Varuna* was worshipped in Iran in the form of *Apām Napāt*. As evidence she quotes verses from the Rig Veda where *Apām Napāt* could be seen as a substitute for *Varuna* (RV.I.22.6. & RV.X.149.2).¹⁷ Mary Boyce also suggests that **varuna* may be another name for the *Vouruskasha*. The *Vouruskasha* is the world ocean in Zoroastrian cosmology; which may also be a sea deity. The *Vouruskasha* is the cosmic sea whose waters supply the world with water and in the middle of which grows the Tree of All Seeds (the tree of life).

Vedic – *Varuna* and *Mithra* both lived in the “sea of heaven” (*Vouruskasha?*). This is where the rain descended from. Eventually *Mitra* and *Varuna* merged and *Varuna* became the god of the ocean after the Vedics reached the sea.¹⁸ He seems to be a god of the rain as well as a god of the sea.

Deities of the Sky:

Iranian/Avestan - *Tishtrya (Tištrya)* is the Avestan name of a benevolent god associated with healing rainfall and fertility. While he is a cognate with *Taranus* (Gaulish god of storms) or Thor (Norse god of storms), he is gentle and brings healing rains to the pastures of his people. He is seen as serene and benevolent. In Iran the deity of the sun was known as *Vivanhvant* he would also, obviously be a sky god.

Vedic – The Vedas name the deity, *Indra*, as the deity of storms. He is primarily a thunder god and he leads the other deities against the demons, especially drought and darkness. He is associated with the light and waters of the world and is a god of battles. He carries a club (thunderbolt) or a projectile weapon (sometimes a bow and arrow) to use in defense against the demons. Another sky deity is *Vivasvat*, the deity of the sun (he is latter known as *Surya*).

Outsiders and Deities:

Iranian/Avestan - In the Avesta, *Daevas* are beings of chaos and disorder and fit the ADF concept of Outwellers well. In the Gathas, the oldest texts of the *Avesta*, the *Daevas* are identified as “false gods” that should be rejected and the *Ahuras* are the beings that are worthy of

¹⁶ Bharucha, Sheriarji. A brief sketch of the Zoroastrian religion and customs: An Essay Written for the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha of Bombay. Bombay: D.B.Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1928. 15.

¹⁷ Mary Boyce qtd. in Findly, Ellison Banks. “‘Child of the Waters’: A Revaluation of Vedic *Apām Napāt*.” *Numen* 26.2 (1979): 164-184.

¹⁸ Mackenzie, Donald A. Indian Myth and Legend. London: The Gresham Publishing Company Limited, 1913. 31.

worship. Originally the *Daevas* were probably deities but through the influence of Zoroaster they were demoted to negative beings.

Vedic - In the Vedas, *Devas* (a cognate for the Avestan, *Daevas*) are beings worthy of worship and the *Asuras* (a cognate with the Avestan *Ahuras*) are the beings that have the negative traits associated with the *Daevas* in the Avesta. The Vedas also mention the *dasyu*, demons that battle *Indra* and the other deities. These would also be considered outsiders.

Nature Spirits:

Iranian/Avestan - It is clear that the Avestans honored a number of elemental beings associated with nature. *Asman* was the spirit of the sky while *Zam* was the spirit of the earth. The sun, *Hvar*, and the moon, *Mah*, were also venerated. There were also two wind deities, *Vata*, the god that brings the rain-clouds and the god of the blowing winds, *Vanyu*.¹⁹ The god *Tishtrya*, the dog star, protected the clouds that brought rain. *Harahvati Aredvi Sura* was the goddess of the water, and embodied the sacred river that poured from the great sea, called the *Vourukasha*.²⁰

Vedic – In the Vedas, *Yaksha* (Sanskrit, *Yakṣa*), is the name for a class of nature-spirits, they were often benevolent but could also be destructive. They were the caretakers of the natural treasures. Some scholars believe that the *Yakṣas* were originally the gods of forests, and were later viewed as the guardian deities of the earth. In Indian art, male *Yakṣas* are often represented as terrifying warriors or as dwarf-like (many carvings of Buddha in India were actually carvings of *Yaksas* at one time). Female *Yakṣas* (*Yakṣiṇīs*), are depicted as attractive young women with large breasts and full hips. They are known to ask riddles, the wrong answers for which could get you in to trouble.²¹

Ancestors:

Iranian/Avestan – In the Avestan culture the ancestors consist of the honored dead, the heroes and the *fravaši*. The *fravaši* were a sort of guardian spirit of the living and the dead. Mary Boyce suggests that the veneration of the *fravaši* may actually be the remnant of an earlier hero-cult in the “Iranian Heroic Age” (c. 1500 BCE onwards), when ancestor-worship was still common.²²

Vedic – According to Dakshinaranjan Shastri in the Vedic period the worship of the *pitr* through the rites known as *pitr-yajnas* was the root of current ancestor worship in India. It was believed that after the body was cremated the spirit of the deceased became a *pitr*, “honored father”.²³

¹⁹ Boyce, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism*. Vol. 1. Brill: Leiden, 1975. 79.

²⁰ Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. “Ahur Mazda and Armaiti, Heaven and Earth, in the Old Avesta.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 122.2 (2002): 399-410.

²¹ Dowson, John. *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*. London: TKubner & Co., 1879. 373.

²² Boyce, Mary. *Fravaši*. 1 May 2008. 07 August 2008. <<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/v10f2/v10f226.html>>.

²³ Shastri, Dakshinaranjan. *Origin and development of the rituals of ancestor worship in India*. Calcutta: Bookland, 1963. ii-iii.

Question 4: Discuss how the following seven elements of ADF's cosmology are (or are not) reflected in the myths of two different Indo-European cultures. For this question, please use the same two cultures as a basis of comparison for the entire question. (minimum 100 words each) *Upperworld, Middleworld, Divisions Of Middleworld (e.g., 4 Quarters, 3 Triads, 8 Sections), Nether/Underworld, Fire, Well, Tree.*

Upperworld:

Iranian/Avestan - Ahura Mazda, who created *Harā Bərəzaitī*, built palaces on it for *Mithra*, *Rashnu*, *Sraosha*, *Arđvi-sura Anahita*, and *Hoama*. Humans were not able to live on the mountain but many of the heroes were able to make sacrifices there.²⁴ As mentioned previously, the celestial bodies were thought to revolve around *Harā Bərəzaitī* the “bright mountain around which the many (stars) revolve, where come neither night nor darkness, no cold wind and no hot wind, no deathful sickness, no uncleanness made by the *Daevas*, and the clouds cannot reach up unto.”²⁹

Vedic – There are three parts to the heavens in Vedic mythology. The highest of these is where the gods reside.²⁵ The texts are rather vague about how a human spirit earns entrance into heaven, if it is possible at all. There are a few verses in the *Rig-Veda* that suggest how one might enter the realm of heaven.

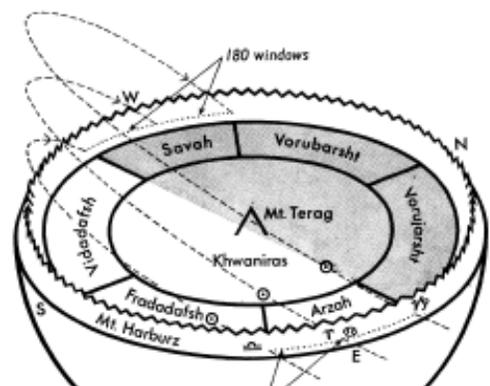
On the high ridge of heaven he stands exalted, yea, to the Gods he goes, the liberal giver.

The streams, the waters flow for him with fatness: to him this guerdon ever yields abundance. (RV. 1.125.5)

This seems to imply that the liberal giver will go to the gods (i.e. heaven). It could also be interpreted to mean that the liberal giver goes to “the high ridge of heaven” to make his sacrifices. It seems that the former would be the more likely of the two interpretations.

Middleworld:

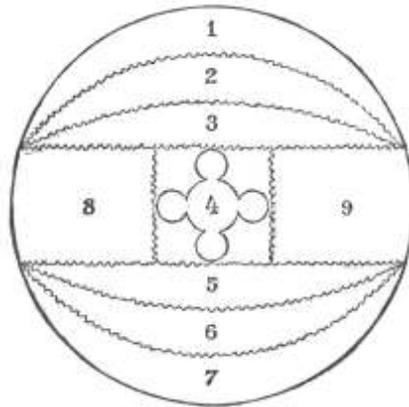
Iranian/Avestan – In the ancient Iranian religion the world is surrounded by a sphere of stone. In the bottom half there is water and the earth is a flat round disk of soil which floats upon the water. The middleworld is where humans, animals, and plant life exist.



Vedic – The middleworld in the Vedic culture would still be the earth. Some members of ADF contend that the clouds between the earth and the heavens would be a better choice but as I explain in my description of the netherworld below, there is in fact, an underworld. The

²⁴ Nabarz, Payam. *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief That Shaped the Christian World*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2005. 174.

²⁵ Kuiper, F. B. J. “The Basic Concept of Vedic Religion.” *History of Religions* 15 .2 (1975): 118.



The Earth of the Hindus, viewed from above.
 1. Uttarakuuru. 5. Harivarsha.
 2. Hiranmaha. 6. Kimpurusha.
 3. Ranyāka. 7. Bharata (India).
 8. Ketumatī. 9. Bhadrāra.
 4. Spandan in Ilavita.

middleworld, earth, is where humans, animals, vegetation, and some of the *Yaksha* exist.

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

Iranian/Avestan – In the center of the earth stands the *Harā Bərəzaitī* (the Axis Mundi) around which the heavens revolve. There were seven lands in the world.

Figure 1

The middle continent was *Khvanuras* (*Ganiratha*, *Hvaniratha*), and it “equaled in size all the rest combined and surpassed them in prosperity and fortune.”²⁶ This is where the *Harā Bərəzaitī* could be found. Each of these other lands was bordered and separated

by great forests and mountains.²⁷ The other lands were called *Vidadafsh*, *Savah*, *Vorubarsh*, *Vorujarsht*, *Arzah*, and *Fradadafsh* (see Figure 1²⁸).

Vedic – In the center of the world stands the mountain of the gods, “Beautiful *Meru*.” This is at the Pole and all the constellations of heaven revolve around it. Around *Meru* are all of the nine lands, called *varshas* (see figure 2).^{29, 30} Most of these are like paradise. Of the nine lands *Bharat-varsha* is the only that has sadness, weariness, and hunger. The people of other *varshas* are free from from distress and pain. *Bharata* is the land where men perform various actions, winning either a place in heaven or hell, according to their merit. *Bharata* is actually the best *varsha*; because the lack of suffering in the other *varshas* precludes the inhabitants of those lands from striving to better themselves.³¹

Figure 2

Nether/Underworld:

Iranian/Avestan – In Avestan culture there was also a belief in a life after death. According to tradition the spirit lingered in the head of the deceased for three days before he went to the *Činvat* bridge where he would be judged and cross over to the subterranean kingdom of the dead. The kingdom of the dead is ruled by *Yima*, the “first king to rule on earth and the first man to die.”³² In this world the dead depend on their descendants on earth to satisfy their hunger and

²⁶ Shahbazi, A. Haft Keshvar: Seven Regions. 07 August 2008. <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Geography/haft_keshvar.htm>.

²⁷ MacKenzie, Donald. “Zoroastrian Astrology in the ‘BundahiĀn’.” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. 27. 3 (1964): 511-529.

²⁸ Ibid. 519.

²⁹ Warren, William F. Paradise Found: The Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885. 148.

³⁰ Ibid. 152.

³¹ Ibid. 464.

³² Boyce, Mary. Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. New York: Routledge, 2001. 11.

clothe them. In modern Zoroastrianism the first born son is expected to make offerings to his parents for 30 years after their death.³³

Vedic – There seems to be some evidence for an underworld in the Vedas.³⁴ Certainly there are numerous references to demons and wrongdoers being cast “down,” presumably under the earth. For example, in RV 7.104.1.,³⁵ *Indra* and *Soma* are requested to ‘send down’ evil powers who are *tamovrdhah* and in stanza 5³⁶ the two gods are instructed to throw down demons called *Atrins* into the ‘abyss,’ which seems to refer to hell.³⁷ There are also references to various types of sinners, including those who do not make appropriate sacrifice being cast down. In AV 12.4.3. a sinner, who gave a lame calf in sacrifice to *Brahmin*, falls down into a pit.³⁸ It seems that this underworld was cold.³⁹ The best name for this underworld may be *Asat*, the non-existent.⁴⁰

Fire:

Iranian/Avestan – In the Avesta, “*Atar* meant both fire and the deity presiding over it.”⁴¹ In Zoroastrian cosmology, fire was created by *Asha Vahishta* (the best Asha) with the help of *Atar* (the fire elemental or deity). Therefore, *Atar* is the most important element of *Asha* (cosmic order).⁴² Fire acted as the primary intermediary for the gods and was the primary mode for sacrifice

Vedic – *Agni* is fire in Vedic mythology. More specifically he is the sacrificial fire that transmutes and delivers sacrifices to the gods. Fire is used to cremate the flesh from the bones of the deceased and set their spirit free so that they may become *pitr*.

Well:

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bodewitz, H. W. “The Dark and Deep Underworld in the Veda.” Journal of the American Oriental Society 122.2 (2002): 213-223.

³⁵ Rig-Veda, 7.104.1. 06 August 2008. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv07104.htm>>.

³⁶ Rig-Veda, 7.104.5. 06 August 2008. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv07104.htm>>.

³⁷ Bodewitz, H. W. “Yonder World in the Atharvaveda.” Indo- Iranian Journal. 42 (1999): 107-120.

³⁸ Atharva-Veda-Samhita, 12.4.3. 06 August 2008. <http://books.google.com/books?id=44iAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA1&dq=atharvaveda+saMhitA&as_brr=1&client=firefox-a>.

³⁹ Brown, W. Norman. “The Rigvedic Equivalent for Hell.” Journal of the American Oriental Society 61.2 (1941): 78.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 80.

⁴¹ Bharucha, Sheriarji. A brief sketch of the Zoroastrian religion and customs: An Essay Written for the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha of Bombay. Bombay: D.B.Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1928. 15.

⁴² Basirov, Oric. Iranian Religions: Zoroastrianism, Evolution of the Zoroastrian Iconography. 25 1 2001. 11 4 2008 <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/Oric.Basirov/zoroastrian_iconography.htm>.

Iranian/Avestan – The importance of water in Avestan religion is also made apparent by numerous references to and prayers to the waters in the Avesta. The most sacred and important of rituals in the Avesta is the *Hoama* ritual. During the recital of the ritual a portion of the mixture of milk, ephedra, and spring water, called *parahôm*, is returned to the water while the priest invokes *Arədvî Sûrâ Anâhitâ*.⁴³ The water itself is the elemental deity *Apas* and regular offerings (of plant or animal material) were made to her at the nearest pool or spring.⁴⁴

Vedic – It seems that in the Rig-Veda there are no references to sacred wells or springs. After searching for the words well, spring, and water in the Rig-Veda and was unable to come up with any results. There are sacred rivers, like Saraswati, goddess of fertility, inspiration, knowledge, music, and arts but there are no references to offerings made at well or springs in the Vedas nor could I find any archaeological references to ancient offerings found in these places.

Tree:

Iranian/Avestan - In Avestan cosmology there is a tree known as the *Saena*. It is the “Tree of All Seeds” and is the tree from which all plants on earth come. In the *Bundahisn*, the “book of creation”, it says, “he produced the Tree; first it grew up in the middle of this earth, several feet high, - without branches, without bark, without thorn, fresh and sweet; it had in its germ (seed) all kind of force of the trees; He produced the Water and Fire for the help of the Tree;.....it grew for ever with their strength (*Bundahisn* 1a.11).”⁴⁵ Essentially, this passage really is describing a pillar and not a tree at all. Despite the existence of the tree it seems that the first mountain created on earth, *Harā Bərəzaitī* or High Hara might be a more appropriate Axis Mundi. It is the center of the world in Avestan cosmology “around which the stars, the moon, and the sun revolve.”⁴⁶

Vedic – Many members of ADF maintain that the Vedics did not have a tree of life that served as an Axis Mundi. While I agree that this is partially true, there is no sacred tree that acts as an axis mundi, there is a world pillar which supports the sky. In the *Rig-Veda*, *Soma* himself is described as the “far-extended pillar that supports the sky” (RV 9.74.2).⁴⁷ Earlier in the *Rig-Veda* the wheel of heaven is described as rolling “round the heaven this wheel of during Order” (RV 1.164.11).⁴⁸ It seems that the pillar is the point about which the heavens turn. This appears to be marked by the Pole Star, uniquely stationary, like the axle of a wheel.

⁴³ Boyce, Mary. *Iranian Religions: Zoroastrianism, Haoma Ritual*. 25 Jan 2001. 11 April 2008. <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/haoma_ritual.htm>.

⁴⁴ Price, Massoume. *Pre-Zoroastrian Religions of Iran*. 2 May 2008. <http://www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/pre_zoroastrian_religions.php>.

⁴⁵ *Bundahisn* 1a.11. 08 August 2008. <<http://www.avesta.org/pahlavi/grb1.htm>>.

⁴⁶ *Yasht*, 12.25. 07 August 2008. <<http://www.avesta.org/ka/yt12sbe.htm>>.

⁴⁷ *Rig-Veda*, 9.74.2. 07 August 2008. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv09074.htm>>.

⁴⁸ Griffith, Ralph Thomas Hotchkin & Jagdish Lal Shastri. *The Hymns of the Rgveda*. Jawahar Nagar: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999. 110.

⁴⁹ *Rig-Veda* 1.164.11. 08 August 2008. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01164.htm>>.

Mount *Meru* could be also considered an Axis Mundi for the Vedics. It is often described as existing at the center of the world.⁵⁰ The clockwise circumambulation of the sun around *Meru*⁵¹ is similar to the rotation of the heavens around *Harā Bərəzaitī* of the Avestan people.

Question 5: To what extent do you think we can offer conjectures about Indo-European myths in general? Are the common themes strong enough that the myths seem like variations? Or are the differences so powerful that the themes are less important than the cultural variations? (minimum 300 words)

When comparing IE myths there are a number of similarities between the stories. Some of these are too alike to ignore while others are variations on a theme that is seen in a number of unrelated cultures. When comparing the mythology of different cultures it is important that we do not allow ourselves to draw conclusions before we have adequate evidence.

Frequently the myths and legends of a given culture share features with the myths of multiple other cultures. Often the myths of cultures that are completely unrelated share features in common. Jumping to hasty conclusions based on superficial similarities is reckless and can, at best, result in bad scholarship.

We certainly can compare the myths of different cultures to see where the similarities lie and we can even offer conjecture on their origins but we have to be cautious in doing so. Just because a myth from one culture shares some features with the myth from another does not mean they both evolved from the same culture.

There are stories of a great flood in a number of cultures, many unrelated, including Hebrew, Babylonian, Aztec, and Hindu mythology. While it is possible, though unlikely, that these myths all describe the same flood, it is more likely that they describe different, but similar, events.

There are also a number of cultures that appear to have a place that exists at the center of the world and acts as a point of contact between the earth and the sky. This can be found in most Indo-European cultures in the form of a mountain, tree or pillar. It also occurs in Chinese (Mount *Kun-Lun*), Hebrew (Mount *Zion*), and Sioux mythology (the Black Hills).

Comparing mythology of cultures already recognized as related may be safer than the examples given in the preceding paragraphs but it also has its pitfalls. Despite some similarities it is important to remember that these related cultures have been separated for hundreds or even thousands of years and are also separated by numerous experiences and contacts with other cultures which have affected their own beliefs in many different ways. While there are many similarities in these cultures, for example the Norse and Iranian, they are certainly different people affected by different experiences; such as, war, cultural contacts, climates, and local flora and fauna. These experiences will obviously affect their beliefs and also their mythology.

⁵⁰ Mabbett, I. W. "The Symbolism of Mount Meru." *History of Religions*. 23. 1. (1983): 72.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 67.

Comparative mythology may be useful to scholars who use the shared themes between myths of different cultures to trace the development of religions and beliefs in those cultures and to suggest common origins for myths from different cultures. However, it should be used with caution by those with less understanding.