

PENTTI AALTO

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FINNISH AND ARYAN MYTHOLOGY

It is generally supposed that the 'original home' of the Aryans, some time in the third millenium B.C., was in the southern Russian steppe area. They had thus lived there as neighbours of the Finno-Ugrians, who at that time probably inhabited the forest zone north of the steppes; e.g. the oldest-known name of the Volga, namely *Rha* in the Greek sources, has been connected with the mythical river name *Raiṅhā* in Avestan Iranian and *Rasā* in Ṛgvedic Sanskrit, and even today it seems to be represented in the Volga-Finnic languages as *Rav*, *Rava*. Further, the Finno-Ugric languages contain a number of words of clearly (proto-)Aryan origin. In many cases the Finnish language, in particular, has very faithfully preserved such old loans. Cf. the following samples:

Fi. *martas-* 'dead': Sanskr. *mṛta-* 'dead, mortal', Av. *marəta-* id.,

Fi. *vasara-* 'hammer': S. *vajra-* 'thunderbolt', Av. *vazra* 'mace',

Fi. *sata-* 'hundred': S. *śata-*, Av. *sata-* id.,

Fi. *aja-* 'drive': S. *aj-*, Av. *az-* id.,

Fi. *arvo-* 'value': S. *arḡha-*, Av. *arəja-* id.,

Fi. *viha-* 'hate, poison': S. *viṣa-* 'poison', Av. *viša-* id.,

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Fi. *sarajas-* 'sea': S. *jrayas-* 'surface', Av. *zrayah-*
'sea',

Fi. *sarve-* 'horn': Av. *srva-* id.,

Fi. *udar-* 'udder': S. *ūdhar-* id.

Since so many important words¹ were adopted by the ancestors of the Finns, and these loans have been so faithfully preserved, it appears possible to detect yet other proof of contacts between the two linguistic families. Such traces of ancient connections can be found, e.g. in Finnish and Aryan mythologies. The difficulties we meet with when we look for them are obviously great. Finnish mythology is known mainly through folklore written down on the basis of oral tradition during the two last centuries. There are just a couple of short notes, published in the sixteenth century by the Finnish Bishop Mikael Agricola (1510-57). On the other hand, the Indian and Iranian sources are much older, e.g. the *Ṛgveda* can be dated at c. 1500 B.C. and the oldest parts of the Avesta at at least c. 500 B.C. It is therefore *a priori* obvious that any common elements which can still be identified today must be scarce, fragmentary and scattered. However, in spite of these limitations, we seem to be able to recover certain pieces of evidence supporting our hypothesis.

¹ See further Björn Collinder, *Fenno-Ugric Vocabulary*, Uppsala 1955, pp. 128-41, and 'Indo-Uralisch—oder gar Nostratisch', *Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft*. 12, Innsbruck 1974, p. 365, as well as Aulis J. Joki, *Uralier und Indogermanen*, MSFOu 151, Helsinki 1973, pp. 247-350.

The German scholar H. H. Schaeder¹ tried to prove that in the earliest Aryan—perhaps even in the Indo-European—sacral poetry, a type of hymn occurs in which the substance of things is explained by describing their origin. While praising Indra, the singer in *RV* 2.12 tells how the god once created the world: 2. ‘Who made firm the quaking earth, who set at rest the agitated mountains, who measured out the air more widely, who supported heaven: he, O men, is Indra.’ In the *Atharvaveda* we find a couple of similar accounts in different contexts. So, e.g. hymn 1.32 was used in a ritual to prevent sterility in women and in a ceremony for prosperity. In 5-3 we find, ‘What the two quaking firmaments, and the earth, fashioned out, that at present is always wet, like the streams of the ocean.’ In the praise to the Earth, *AV* 12.1, e.g. 5-3: ‘On whom the ocean and the rivers, the waters, on whom food, plowings, came into being.’ *AV* 4.19 is a charm against enemies, with a plant, 5-4: ‘When yonder, in the beginning, the gods by thee

¹ ‘Ein indogermanischer Liedtypus in den Gathas’, *ZDMG* 94, 1940, pp. 399-408; cf. further e.g. Geo Widengren, ‘Stand und Aufgaben der iranischen Religionsgeschichte’, *Numen* 1, 1954, p. 19. H. Humbach, *IJ* 1, 1957, p. 307, interprets Av. Yasna 30.3 *dazdō* and 45.2 *mravaṭ* as presents and in consequence denies the cosmogonic character of the passages in question. J. Duchesne-Guillemin in *Pauly-Wissowa's Real-encyclopaedie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. IX, Stuttgart 1962, col. 1582, agrees with the opinion of Humbach and states that while the Gāthā-s are never expressly cosmogonies, they presume a cosmogony as their foundation.

removed the Asura-s, from thence, O herb, wast thou born, an off-wiper', etc. (*AV* trans. by Whitney—Lanman).

In Iran we meet with the same type in the Zarathustrian Gatha Yasna 30-3: 'These two spirits in the beginning of time as in a dream, proclaimed themselves as twins. They are in thought, word and deed the good one and the wicked one. . .', 4: 'And then when these two spirits came together, they first created both life and non-life, and (designed) that at the last there should be the worst existence for the wicked, but for the just man the best state of mind' (trans. following Kaj Barr). In the Gatha Yasna 44, the Prophet wants to know what will be the result of his vocation. He therefore puts a series of questions to the God, beginning again with the creation of the Cosmos: 5-3: 'This do I ask thee, tell me truly, O Ahura: Who in the beginning, in the creation, became the father of the Aša? Who established the path of the Sun and the Stars? Who is he through whom the Moon now waxes now wanes? Both these, O Mazda, and other things do I wish to know'. 5-4: 'Who fastened the Earth below and the Heaven above, so that they do not fall down? Who created water and plants? Who yoked the two coursiers to the wind and to the clouds?' The questions are, of course, purely rhetorical, the Prophet in fact means 'Thou, Ahura Mazda, didst. . .'

Through Herodotus we know that the presentation of the cosmogony was an integral part of worship in Persia. He says, namely in 1.132 that everyone

performing a sacrifice had to pray for the king and for all the Persians. When he had cut and boiled the victim a Magian came and chanted over the sacrifice 'the song of the birth of the gods as the Persian tradition relates it'. The purpose of the presentation of the cosmogony in worship is to confirm and to perpetuate the cosmic order.

In his illustrative study 'Myth and Story' (*Numen* 1, 1954, pp. 184-212), Theodor H. Gaster divides the evolution of the functional character of a mythical story into four stages (p. 200): (1) In the 'primitive stage' the story is the direct accompaniment of a ritual performed for purely pragmatic purposes. (2) In the 'dramatic stage' the performance is 'an actual pantomimic representation of the story'. (3) In the 'liturgical stage' the story is only recited 'to set forth the overall significance' of the ceremony. (4) In the 'literary stage' the myth has become a mere tale.

In the Finnish mythological materials noted down from oral tradition we meet with items which seem to represent various stages of the above division. The central part of the material in question is accessible in the *Kalevala* epic, published in print in 1835, and in an enlarged edition in 1848, by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84). The printed *Kalevala* is to a large extent a composition by Lönnrot, compiled from his own and other scholars' collections of folkloric material. The study *Elias Lönnrotin Kalevalan toinen painos* by V. Kaukonen (Helsinki 1956) shows the origin of every single line in the epic and is thus indispensable when we are using

the *Kalevala* as a source. The original materials have been published in print in the large corpus *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (33 vols. in fol., Helsinki 1908-48).

It appears quite natural that an epic begins with a cosmogony, cf. e.g. the *Mahābhārata* 1.1.27-36. In the *Kalevala* the cosmogony was only placed at the beginning of the epic by Lönnrot; in the original runes it stands in another and very problematic connection. An important episode of the *Kalevala* cosmogony corresponds to the World Egg myth which has been central in the Indian cosmogony since the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa*. According to H. Lommel¹ this myth is, however, implied by *garbha* in *RV*, e.g. 1.130; 10.45; 10.68.

The similarities between the Finnish and the Indian World Egg myth were established as early as 1849 when Herman Kellgren (1822-56) published a dissertation in Helsinki entitled *Mythus de ovo mundano Indorumque de eodem notio*. The same myth was also discussed by the first professor in Sanskrit at Helsinki University, Otto Donner (1835-1909), in his doctoral thesis in 1863. As late as 1954, W.B. Henning² proved that the World Egg myth is also to be found in the Avesta, namely in the Yašt 13.2.3. This in my opinion corroborates the supposition that the myth actually can be traced back to the proto-Aryan period. Furthermore, the Iranian and the Finnish myths seem to be the

¹ 'Die Welt-Ei-Mythos im *Rigveda*', *Mélanges de linguistique offerts à Charles Bally*, Geneva 1939, pp. 214-20.

² 'Ein unbeachtetes Wort im Avesta', *Asiatica*, Festschrift Friedrich Weller, Leipzig 1954, pp. 289 ff.

only ones in which the World Egg is connected with a bird.

When he composed the *Kalevala*, Könrot tried to take along as much material as possible, and so he entwined the main story with numerous charms, etc. According to the magical conception of the world, man is able to govern things if he knows their 'origin'. The charms in the *Kalevala* consequently describe the 'birth' of the phenomena concerned. Interestingly enough, a couple of these 'birth stories' begin with a cosmogony. In canto 8, Väinämöinen, the main hero of the epic, hits his knee with an axe and is unable to stop the blood. In order to get help he goes to another village. Here an old man states that he knows the charm in question except for the necessary 'Origin of Iron'. Väinämöinen, again, remembers this and sings it to the healer:¹

Ukko, mightiest of Creators
 He the God above in heaven
 35 From the Air the Water parted,
 And the continents from Water,
 When unborn was evil Iron,
 Uncreated, undeveloped.
 Ukko, God of realms supernal
 40 Rubbed his mighty hands together,

¹ The following samples are quoted from the English translation of the *Kalevala* by W. F. Kirby (1844-1912) published 1907. However, in canto 17, verse 545 has been slightly modified in order to render the original more faithfully.

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Both his hands he rubbed together,
On his left knee he pressed them,
And three maidens were created,
Three fair daughters of Creation,
45 Mothers of the East of Iron,
And of blue-mouthed steel the fosterers . . .

The four cosmogonic lines closely resemble those in canto 17. Here Väinämöinen is building a boat solely with the aid of charms but lacks the three decisive words. He goes to ask the dead Vipunen—an interesting and enigmatic person—and makes him reveal those three words. Vipunen thus

Opened then his mouth of wisdom,
Of his spells the casket opened,
Sang his mighty spells of magic,
Chanted forth of all the greatest,
535 Magic songs of the Creation,
From the very earliest ages,
Songs that all the children sing not,
Even heroes understand not,
In these dreary days of evil,
540 In the days that now are passing.
Words of origin he chanted,
All his spells he sang in order,
At the will of the Creator,
At behest of the Almighty,
545 How itself the air did fashion,
And from air the water parted,
And the earth was formed from water,

And from earth all herbage sprouted.

550 Then he sang the moon's creation,
Likewise how the sun was fashioned,
How the air was raised on pillars,
How the stars were placed in heaven.
etc.

Vipunen's cosmogony in fact closely resembles that met with in Iranian sources, e.g. the Pahlavi *Bundahišn* I.35 tells of Ohrmazd: 'Of material creation he created first the sky, second the water, third the earth, fourth the plants, fifth the cattle, sixth man.' Very similar accounts also occur in Indian sources, such as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1: 'From this very Self (referred to as Brahman), ether came to be, from ether air, from air fire, from fire water, from water the earth, from the earth herbs, from herbs food and from food the person.'

Among Lönnrot's folkloric sources there are, however, no notes concerning this cosmogonic passage. It can be traced back only to his manuscript additions to his interfoliated copy of the Old *Kalevala*. It thus seems questionable whether this passage is based on a genuine folkloric tradition or wrought by Lönnrot himself. According to oral information supplied by Prof. Kaukonen, the passage in question might in the latter case be based on the natural philosophy of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling (1775-1854). Lönnrot expressly refers to Schelling in his doctoral thesis on the magical medicine of the

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ancient Finns, published in 1832, (second edition 1842). Since Schelling, again, had been influenced by Indian philosophy, at least since 1802,¹ it seems possible that even the above cosmogonic descriptions of the *Kalevala*, if they do not reflect old connections with the Aryan mythology, indirectly go back to Indian ideas.

One of the *Kalevala*'s most interesting origin myths is the 'Birth of Fire' in canto 47. While Lönnrot moved the cosmogony to the beginning of the epic, the Birth of Fire occurs near the end and after the fire has been several times mentioned. The first time it occurs in close connection with the cosmogony, canto 2:

From the ocean rose up Tursas,
From the waves arose a hero,
And the heaps of hay he kindled,
70 And the flames arose in fury.
All was soon consumed to ashes,
Till the sparks were quite extinguished.

The fire thus seems to originate from the sea.

In order to start agriculture, Väinämöinen then clears a large area of woodland by cutting the trees and bushes and piling them up for drying. He does, however, leave a high tree for the eagle,² and

¹ See e.g. Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker*, Stuttgart 1960, pp. 33-8.

² Perhaps a parallel to the Avestan 'Tree of the Eagle' met with in *Yāst* 12.17.

Then the bird of air struck fire
And the flames rose up in brightness,
While the north wind fanned the forest,
And the north-east wind blew fiercely,
285 All the trees were burned to ashes.

This time, the fire originates in the air or in the heavens.

A detailed myth of the origin of fire is told in canto 47. Louhi, the Mistress of Pohjola, the opponent of the *Kalevala* people, stole the sun and the moon.

Then she stole away the brightness,
And from Väinölä the fires.
And she left the houses fireless,
40 And the rooms no flame illumined.
Therefore was the night unending,
And for long was utter darkness.

Even Ukko, the Supreme God, felt the darkness to be intolerable. Ukko might in fact originally have been only a variant name for Väinämöinen, and e.g. the variant 752.2 (*SKVR*, VII. 3) of this passage uses both names as synonyms.

In the air a light struck Ukko,
And a flame did Ukko kindle,
From his flaming sword he struck it,
70 Sparks he struck from off the sword-blade,
From his nails he struck the fire,
From his limbs he made it crackle,

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High above aloft in heaven,
On the starry plains of heaven.

Ukko then thrust the fire into his golden purse and gave it to the Maiden of the Air, but when she rocked the new-born in a golden cradle, the fire escaped, fell through the firmament, caused a lot of damage and crashed into lake Alue, where it was at last swallowed by a fish. Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen pursued the runaway. The 'Oldest of All Women' told them where the fire was hiding, and after many adversities they at last succeeded in catching the fish, and found the fire in its belly. However, it escaped again and did a lot of damage, but (canto 48)

Väinämöinen, old and steadfast,
Followed hard upon its traces,
260 And he hastened through the forest
Close behind the furious fire,
And at length he overtook it,
'Neath the roots of two great tree-stumps,
In the stumps of alder hidden,
In the rotten stumps he found it.

The mention of the alder as the hiding place is of special interest. The common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) contains sap which colours the wood red—a clear analogy to fire. Still more important is the fact that the wood of even a green common alder can easily be kindled, and it thus appears probable that specifically this tree was used in fire-making of old.

In the *Kalevala*, fire is thus said to originate in the sea, in the heavens, and in the waters. It is now interesting to see that according to *R̥gveda* 1.95.3 the seers in their spirit perceive the three birth-places of Agni: one is the sea (*samudre*), one is the heavens (*divi*), one the waters (*apsu*). The sea is elsewhere seldom mentioned, but e.g. according to the *Mahābhārata* 5.99.17-18 the fire is kept in a resplendent egg sunk in the ocean, the origin of which no one knows. The primeval waters as the 'cradle' of Agni are mentioned in the Indra hymn *RV* 10.121.7: *āpo ha yad bṛhatīr viśvam āyan garbham dadhānā janayantīr agnim.* 'When the vast waters came conceiving the universe as an embryo and giving birth to Agni. . . .'

Agni's *vāhana* was *Suparṇa*, the mythical bird, e.g. *RV* 1.79 but the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.3.2 shows that Agni was also identified with *Suparṇa*, as the eagle in the *Kalevala* might be. Canto 26 mentions a fiery eagle as the guardian of the access to *Pohjola*:

455 In his throat the fire was seething,
And his mouth with flame was glowing,
And his plumage fire was flashing,
And the sparks around were scattering.

According to *RV** 1.93.6 and 1.141.3, *Mātariśvan* brought the fire from Heaven. *Mātariśvan*, too, has been identified with Agni.

According to *RV* 3.9.1 Agni is the sweet child of the waters, in *RV* 1.145.5 he is a 'water animal'. *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 5.6.4.2-3 says that it was *Prajāpati*

who 'saw the nest of the waters, on it he piled the fire, that became this earth'. Therefore 'the fire is the nest of the waters, therefore waters draw the fire'.

In the *Kalevala*, the waters were not able to extinguish the fire which was swallowed by a fish. In *RV*, Agni in the waters was covered by *vapā* (6.1.3.) 'omentum', or *ulbam* (10.51.1) 'caul'. On the other hand, in both the Aryan and the Finnish myths, fire goes into the waters when fleeing from the gods. Iranian mythology, too, tells us that fire opposed the God who wished 'to create its body on earth; it complained saying "I will not go to the earth, for they will do me much harm"'. Then Ohrmazd victoriously established the Gušnasp fire in Atropatene. And he said: "Men have been commanded to worship the fire as the lord of the house. Since they were commanded to perform this sacrifice, they will bring fuel to the Varhrām fire and they will spare no effort for thee." Then it agreed to go to the earth'.¹ *RV* 1.67.3 describes the results of Agni's escape: 'Having taken in his hand all manly powers, he made the gods fear when sitting down in his hiding place.' In fact Agni seems to have run away twice, once from the gods and once from the hearth. Most details of the Agni myth refer to the first event. According to *TS* 2.6.6.1, Agni had three elder brothers who perished carrying the sacrifice

¹ The Pahlavī Rivāyat accompanying the *Dātastān i dēnik* 30 f., translated by R. C. Zaehner in his *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford 1955, p. 366.

to the gods. Agni became frightened, fled and hid in the waters. The gods sought him and a fish revealed his hiding place. Therefore Agni cursed the fish and in consequence men catch fish. *ŚB* 1.2.3.1 tells that the fire ran away and concealed himself in the waters. The gods discovered him and brought him back forcibly. Agni spat upon the waters and cursed them.

Some other persons are also in the *Ṛgveda* credited with having found and brought Agni back. According to *RV* 3.9.5 and 6.8.4 it was Mātariśvan, mentioned above, who brought Agni from the waters (cf. *RV* 1.60.1), while *RV* 10.46.2 again tells us that the wise Bhṛgu-s followed the track of Agni into his water-dwelling like the tracks of lost cattle and found him (further 1.58.6; 1.143.4; 2.4.2; 4.7.1; 10.122.5). Among the gods it is expressly Varuṇa who is credited with having found Agni: *RV* 10.51.1 'Thick and strong was the caul, veiled in which thou entered the waters. One god did recognize all thy manifestations, O Agni Jātavedas.' If there had once existed a common archetype of the Finnish and Aryan myths in question, Väinämöinen and Varuṇa would probably be closest to the original god finding the fire.

While the Agni hymns of the *Ṛgveda* represent the 'liturgical stage' in the above classification of Gaster, the *Kalevala* myth might be a representative of the 'primitive' or of the 'dramatic stage.' Verses 269-90 of canto 48 seem to refer to a ritual kindling of fire in a new house:

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Then the aged Väinämöinen
Spoke aloud the words which follow:
' Fire whom the God created,
270 Creature of the bright Creator,
Idly to the depths thou goest,
Aimlessly to distant regions.
It were better far to hide thee
In the hearth of stone constructed,
275 There thy sparks to bind together,
And within the coals enclose them,
That by day thou may'st be flickering
In the kitchen birchen faggots,
And at night thou may'st be hidden
280 Close within the golden fire-box.'
Then he thrust the spark of fire
In a little piece of tinder,
In the fungus hard of birch-tree,
.....
Now was fire within the dwellings,
290 In the rooms again 'twas shining.

The ancient Finns, of course, also used fire for sacrificial purposes but there does not seem to be any clear reference to that in the *Kalevala*. H. Lüders¹ pointed out that in India the manual work carried out in rubbing the fire sticks was not sufficient to cause the epiphany of the divine fire: hymns and *mantra-s* were

¹ 'Die magische Kraft der Wahrheit im Alten Indien' *ZDMG* 98, 1944, p. 9.

needed for that. Among the Finno-Ugrians the use of words was obviously necessary in the same way.

The difference in the development of religion in Iran and in India is also reflected in the fact that in Iran the word *agni* has been replaced by *ātar*, unknown in India. *Agni* occurs in the Avesta only once (Yašt 13.125) in the proper name *Dāstāgni*, 'he who ritually kindles and keeps up the fire'. According to Wikander¹ both Agni and the Angiras, who in *RV* 5.11.6 find the hidden Agni, represent a ritual order originally connected with the sacral leagues of young men. This institution and its terminology were rejected by Zoroastrianism.

In the *Kalevala*, the Origin of Fire is described in connection with the stealing of the sun, moon and fire by Louhi, Pohjola's Old Mistress. A similar myth seems to have been current among the Aryans. In the *Ṛgveda* it is referred to in 5.2, where e.g. 5.6 states: *vasāṃ rājānaṃ vasatiṃ janānām arātayo ni dadhur martyeṣu*, 'him, the king of homes, the dwelling of people, the ogresses have hidden away from men'. According to the *Bṛhaddevatā* 5.14 ff., this had happened in the realm of king Tryaruṇa. The king's domestic priest Vṛśa, perhaps a personification of Agni himself, found a Piśācī as the wife of the king. With a *mantra* he made the fire flame up and burn the queen.

The carrying off and hiding the heavenly lights and the fire in the *Kalevala* might be compared with the

¹ Stig Wikander, *Der arische Männerbund*, Lund 1938, pp. 77 ff.

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carrying off of the cows by Vala and their rescue by Indra (*RV* 2.19, etc.) or by Bṛhaspati (*RV* 1.62, etc.). In 10.68.9, the fire is expressly named among the beings set free by Bṛhaspati: 'He found the Uṣas, he the Sun, he the Fire, with a hymn he drove away the darknesses.' According to *RV* 10.124, Varuṇa, Agni and Soma had been brought within by Vṛtra, and later released together by Indra. A variant of this myth is also known from the oral tradition of the Prasuṇ Kafirs.¹ This myth must obviously be regarded as a world organization myth and thus treated in another connection.

As to the 'progressive attenuation' of the functional character of a myth described by Gaster in the above formula, we can in my opinion even find a representative of the 'literary stage' of the fire myth in Finnish folklore. There is, namely a tale titled 'Egg-Boy' or 'Alder-Log-Boy', in which the titular person is a tragic hero. In the *Kalevala* this theme is to be found in the Kullervo cycle. The main details of the tale are in my opinion still clearly analogous to features of the fire myth as reflected in the Vedic Agni hymns.

It appears that the Finnish and Aryan fire myths outlined above have many similar features. In themselves these hardly provide any convincing proof of possible contacts between the mythologies, contemporaneous with the proven linguistic ones. If, however,

¹ G. Buddruss, 'Zur Mythologie der Prasuṇ-Kafiren' *Paideuma* 7, 1959/61, p. 204.

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we take into account the similarities to be found in several other mythological ideas, e.g. in the cosmogonic ones, we may perhaps consider our evidence cumulative. As a working hypothesis it might in any case shed light on both the ancient cultures concerned.

