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The Origins of Greek Poetic Language: Review of M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*

Gregory Nagy

[This online 2010 edition is a revised, expanded version of a review first published in *Classical Review* 60 (2010) 333–338. The original page-numbers of the printed version are embedded within brackets in this electronic version: for example, {333|334} marks where p. 333 stops and p. 334 begins.]

West's book is most useful for researchers in the Classics and in the newer academic discipline of Indo-European studies. I have produced two different and mutually complementary reviews of it, one for Classicists and one for Indo-Europeanists, with the collegial permission of the book-review editors of *Classical Review* and *Indo-European Studies Bulletin*. In the review for *IESB* (published in 2008, vol. 13 no. 1, pp. 60–65), I concentrate on the usefulness of West's book for those who are already well-versed in Indo-European studies. In the present review for *CR*, I concentrate on its usefulness for Classicists.

The greatest accomplishment of this book is to make readily available for Classicists a wealth of insights that have up to now been unrecognized or at best only barely recognized in the field of Classics. These insights, gleaned from the field of Indo-European linguistics, now need to be integrated into the ongoing work of Classicists. In the interest of promoting such integration, this review highlights page by page some salient points made by West, which I will summarize, with comments, in the style of an inventory. West's pages will be cited with a prefixed "W"; occasionally, I will refer to relevant points to be found in some of my own works, abbreviated here as BA, GM, PH, and HTL.¹

¹ BA = Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore 1979; 2nd ed. 1999); GM = *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca 1990); PH = *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore 1990); HTL = *Homer's Text and Language* (Urbana 2004).

W 34. It is shown here that the noun Μοῦσα derives from the Indo-European root **men-*, the basic meaning of which is ‘put in mind’ in verb formations with transitive function and ‘have in mind’ in those with intransitive function (cf. BA 17 n.). This etymology is reflected in the mythological relationship of the divine Muses with μνημοσύνη in the sense of ‘poetic recall’, personified as their divine mother, Mnemosyne. Relevant is the translation of Homeric Μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε by Livius Andronicus (fr. 21 Blänsdorf) as *Diua Monetas filia docuit*.

W 37 (in combination with W 31, 34). Three different possibilities are considered for the Indo-European origins of the noun ὕμνος.

W 38–39. In the light of the fact that the root of Latin *texō*, with reference to (1) the weaving of fabrics and (2) the building of ships and of other forms of woodwork, is cognate with the root of Greek τέκτων in the sense of ‘carpenter’ and of τέχνη in the sense of ‘craftsmanship’, it is argued here that the prototypical Indo-European root of all these forms was applied as a metaphor for the craft of making song and poetry. This metaphor is still reflected in a phrase of Pindar, *Pythian* 3.113|114: ἐπέων κελαδενῶν, τέκτονες οἷα σοφοὶ | ἄρμωσαν ‘resounding verses such as skilled carpenters have joined together’ (cf. BA 300).

W 43. In the proem of Parmenides fr. 1.1–25 DK, the speaker pictures himself as flying off in a chariot drawn by mares that take him as far as his desire reaches, and this image of transcendence is found to be cognate with a comparable image in Indic poetry, where ascetes are described as having the power to take off in chariots that fly wherever they desire. With reference to the Indo-European poetic theme of flying chariots as the equivalent of “flying carpets,” I draw attention to a forthcoming book that analyzes two relevant passages: (1) the mystical transformation, in *Iliad* 24, of the mule-cart of Priam into a “dream chariot” that traverses the hostile space standing in the way between Troy and the tent of Achilles; and (2)

{333|334} the chariot-ride, in *Odyssey* 3, of Telemakhos and Peisistratos from Pylos to Sparta, somehow traversing the Taygetos mountain range that stands in the way.²

W 60. The semantics of Latin *uersus* are found to be cognate with the semantics of Greek στροφή. This finding looms large for experts in comparative metrics.

W 61–62. An Indo-European prototype is found here for the literary form known as prosimetrum, where higher-register poetry or song is embedded within lower-register prose. I add that there are traces of prosimetrum style in Greek narrative traditions, such as the life of Archilochus narrative recorded on the Mnesiepes inscription found at Paros (PH 363).³

W 67. The expression κλέα ἀνδρῶν ‘glories of men’, as applied for example to Achilles when he sings to himself the glorious songs of heroes in *Iliad* 9.189, is shown to be cognate with corresponding expressions in Indic poetry. I add that the genitive in such Indo-European constructions can be subjective as well as objective in function, reflecting a presumed state of reciprocity between the *laudator* who glorifies the *laudandus* and is in turn glorified by the glory of the *laudandus*: thus the κλέα ‘glories’ are sung not only of glorified men but also by the men thus glorified for giving glory (PH 200–202, 204–206). Such reciprocity is expressed explicitly in a song of Ibycus (*PMG* S151.47–48), where the κλέος ἄφθιτον ‘imperishable glory’ (47) of the *laudandus*, here the tyrant Polycrates of Samos, is said to depend on the κλέος ‘glory, glorification’ of the *laudator*, here the poet Ibycus (PH 187–188; the relevant wording is actually quoted by W 403–304).

² This forthcoming book, by Madeleine Goh, is based on her earlier work, *The poetics of chariot driving and rites of passage in ancient Greece* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University 2004).

³ See also Nagy 2008.

W 69. Shown here is the Indo-European background of a genre featuring erotic dialogues in song between men and women, boys and girls. The striking example of Sappho fr. 137 is mentioned.⁴

W 85. A brief survey is given here of concepts of eternity as reflected in Indo-European languages. To be added is the fact that the Greek adverb αἰεὶ ‘for eternity’ is etymologically the old locative case of the noun αἰών ‘life-cycle’ (Benveniste 1937).

W 86. In Indo-European languages, the world can be pictured as everything that is seen by the all-seeing sun. That is why, it is shown here, the Lithuanian and the Latvian words for ‘world’, *pasaulis* and *pasaule*, mean literally ‘under the sun’. I add that this traditional visualization is relevant to the Greek compound noun *pan-Hellēnes* ‘all Greeks’ (GM 37), which is attested in the Hesiodic *Works and Days* (528 πανελλήνεσσι) in the sense of referring to ‘all Greeks under the sun’ (526–528 ἥελιος ... πανελλήνεσσι φαίνει).

W 88. The Greek noun μένος, conventionally understood as ‘fighting spirit’ in Homeric contexts, is shown to be cognate with Indic and Iranian nouns indicating forces animated by a divine mentality as conveyed by the root **men-* (cf. GM 113–115). This root, as we noted earlier, means ‘have in mind’ in intransitive formations or ‘put in mind’ in transitive ones. I add that the same root is to be found in Indic *Manu*, name of the prototypical man in Indic myth, and even in English *man* (GM 70, 111; cf. W 376 n. 3).

W 116–117. The celebrated “priamel” that starts with ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ ‘water is the best thing’ in Pindar *Olympian* 1.1 is closely matched by a cognate expression attested in the Indic *Rig-Veda* (1.161.9).

⁴ There is also relevant iconographic evidence: see Nagy 2007:233–34.

W 122. The traditional grouping of twelve Olympian gods seems to have an analogue in surviving Hittite evidence, though the numerical analogy may be a matter of cultural cross-influence rather than common inheritance.

W 125. The noun ἄνθρωπος is said to be “of obscure etymology.” An argument has been made, however, for an etymological connection of ἄνθρωπος with ἄνθραξ, meaning ‘glowing coal’ (GM 151–152 n. 30). Relevant is the mythological connection of ἄνθρωποι with ἄνθρακες ‘glowing coals’ in what appears to be a local anthropogonic myth about the notionally autochthonous population of the Athenian deme of Akharnai. This myth is famously ridiculed in the comedy by Aristophanes named the *Acharnians*. In terms of this Acharnian anthropogonic myth, the local human population was created from ἄνθρακες ‘glowing coals’ contained in a sacrificial brazier. Correspondingly, in terms of linguistics, the noun ἄνθρωπος ‘human’ can be explained as a compound formation meaning basically ‘having the looks of glowing coals’. There are a number of semantic parallels attested in Indic myths about the creation of humans from the glowing coals of sacrificial fire (again, GM 151–152 n. 30).

W 145. We see here a valuable collection of plural names of places corresponding to singular names of goddesses or nymphs: Athenai, Plataiai, Potniai—also Mykenai, Kleonai, Thebai, Thespiiai, Eleutherai. Such forms can be explained in terms of a grammatical principle known as the elliptic plural (HTL 159–163). In an elliptic plural, the singular of a noun is pluralized not by multiplying whatever it is that the noun means but by encompassing everything that has to do with whatever that noun means. So for example Ἀθήνη in the singular is the name of the goddess Athene but the elliptic plural Ἀθῆναι is the name of Athens, the city of the goddess, which notionally encompasses the whole population and everything else that has to do with the goddess.

W 146. The name of Apollo is mentioned here, and the complexity of the god is analyzed. I add that the etymology of the name Ἄπολλων is relevant to the analysis. Two related forms need to be considered: (1) the Doric variant Ἀπέλλων {334|335} and (2) a cognate noun ἀπέλλαι, which refers to a seasonally-recurring festival of Dorian kinship groups (HTL 138–143). The book does occasionally consider the Indo-European etymologies of Greek divine names, even beyond such transparent examples as Zeus (W 168) and Hestia (W 144–145). Examples of less transparent etymologies include Poseidon (W 138), Demeter (W 176), Hades (W 394), Thetis (W 354), Semele (W 175), and the Muses (again, W 34).

W 150. On the basis of comparative Indo-European evidence, it is shown that the epithet of Artemis, ἰοχέαιρα, may have originally meant ‘having arrows in the hand’, though such an older meaning would have been eventually rethought as ‘pouring out arrows’ even in the earliest attested phases of Greek poetic diction.

W 181. According to Pausanias (9.3.1), the city of *Plataiai* (Πλαταιαί) in Boeotia was named after a local nymph *Plataia*, a consort of Zeus. The name of this nymph, *Plataia*, is cognate with the Indic name for the goddess Earth, *Ṙṥthivī*, which corresponds to the actual Indic word for ‘earth’. This goddess *Ṙṥthivī* is the consort of the god Sky, *Dyaus* (as in *Rig-Veda* 6.51.5). And the name *Zeus* is cognate with the Indic name *Dyaus*, which corresponds to the actual Indic word for ‘sky’. I add that the elliptic plural of the name *Plataiai* as the city of the goddess *Plataia* is parallel to the elliptic plural of the name of *Athēnai* or ‘Athens’ as the city of the goddess *Athēnē* (HTL 159–163). Another example is the case of *Kleōnai*, city of the Asopid nymph *Kleōnē* (W 403).

W 185. Here, in the larger context of a chapter entitled “Sky and Earth” (W 166–193), the Greek goddess Hera is mentioned only in passing as “Zeus’ regular consort.” There are passing mentions elsewhere (W 24, 192; missing from the index are the further mentions at W 221 n. 90, 428). More needs to be said about Hera. Her name Ἥρα can be etymologically connected

with the nouns ὥρα ‘season, seasonality’ and ἥρωσ ‘hero’; and the name is even connected with the name of the hero Herakles, Ἡρακλῆς, which can be etymologically interpreted as ‘he who has the glory [κλέος] of Hera’ (Nagy 2005:87). The problem of the short α in the middle of the form Ἡρακλῆς can best be addressed by comparing the short α in the middle of the form Ἄλκᾶθος, the name of a hero of Megara (cf. Theognis 774) who is closely related thematically to Herakles.⁵

The book seldom considers the Indo-European etymologies of Greek heroic names, beyond such transparent examples as Eteokles (W 400) and Hektor (W 399). Examples of less transparent etymologies include a brief mention of the name of the hero Meleagros (W 251), on which there is more to be said later.

An additional note is needed here about enhanced methods for establishing the etymologies of heroic names in particular and of words in general. When the name of a hero or in fact any word is attested in Homeric poetry, linguists who study the given form are given the advantage of having access not only to the internal evidence of the phonology, morphology, and syntax of that form but also to the external evidence of the formulaic system within which that form is embedded. The advantage of having such additional access is this: whatever individual form happens to be embedded in the formulaic system of Homeric and other such poetry can reveal meanings that are likewise embedded in that system, not only meanings inherent in the individual form. More than that, since the meanings of forms embedded in the formulaic system can be expected to evolve over time along with the forms themselves, linguists can trace diachronically the etymologies of such forms.⁶ Examples of such

⁵ I owe this solution to Alexander Nikolaev.

⁶ This point was made for the first time in Householder and Nagy 1972:48–58. Those parts of that 1972 book that were authored by me have been republished on line as an open-source second edition: Nagy, *Greek: An update of a survey of recent work* (Cambridge MA and Washington DC 2008), with the original pagination indicated, available gratis at chs.harvard.edu.

forms are πόντος ‘sea’ (as a crossing) and θέλω ‘enchant’ (by looking) in {335|336} the case of words in general and Ἡρα in the case of names in particular (Householder and Nagy 1972:48–52). Two further examples, as studied in two separate books, are εὔχομαι in the sense of ‘say juridically’ as well as ‘boast, pray’ and μῆνις in the sense of ‘cosmic anger’ (Muellner 1976; 1996).

Elsewhere (HTL 131–137), I offer a theoretical as well as practical analysis of methods used in establishing the etymologies of heroic names attested in Homeric poetry, with special reference to the name of Achilles, Ἀχιλλεύς.

W 187. Mentioned here in passing, and with reservations, is an etymology for *nāsatyau*, epithet of the *Aśvinau* ‘masters of chariots drawn by horses’, who are the Divine Twins in Indic poetry: in terms of this etymology, the epithet would mean ‘saviors’, corresponding to the well-attested salvific function of the Divine Twins in Greek poetry. Supporting this etymology, which centers on the Indo-European root **nes-*, is the evidence of Greek formations derived from this root. I cite in particular the Greek noun νόστος in the sense of a safe return from a sea voyage.

The evidence of Greek derivatives of the root **nes-* has been studied in detail by Douglas Frame (1978), who shows that the epic contexts of the heroic name Νέστωρ combined with the epithet ἵππότης ‘horseman’ in Greek poetry are relevant to the hymnic contexts of the epithet *nāsatyau* combined with the name *Aśvinau* in Indic poetry.⁷

W 193. In view of the fact that Greek δῖα stems from the Indo-European root **dyeu-*, which refers to ‘the bright sky of day’ (W 238) and which is personified as the god Zeus in Greek poetry (as also the god Dyaus in Indic poetry), it is suggested here “that the formulae δῖα

⁷ See now also Frame 2009.

θεάων and δῖα γυναικῶν, in extant epic applied freely to any goddess, nymph, or respectable woman, originally designated consorts of Zeus.”

W 221. We find here (at n. 90) a link to an earlier discussion (W 186) about the epithet Διὸς + θυγάτηρ (the words can appear in either order), cognate with an Indic epithet *divás + duhitár-* (again, in either order) that applies to *Uṣas* the goddess of the dawn. I add that this Greek epithet has been re-assigned in the formulaic system of Homeric diction from Eos the goddess of the dawn (Greek Ἡώς is cognate of Indic *Uṣas*) to other goddesses, especially to Aphrodite (details in GM 247–249).

W 206. Mentioned here (and again at W 223) are the names given in *Odyssey* 23.246 to two solar horses that draw the chariot of Eos the goddess of the dawn: they are Φαέθων and Λάμπος, both meaning ‘radiant’ or ‘lucent’. What also needs to be mentioned here is the relevant fact that the daughters of Helios the god of the sun are named Φαέθουσα and Λαμπετή in *Odyssey* 12.132 (details in GM 249). The names of the solar horses Φαέθων and Λάμπος need to be correlated directly with the names Φαέθουσα and Λαμπετή when these solar daughters are finally mentioned (at W 224; they come up again at W 230, where their ‘lucent’ names are duly noted).

W 232. Highlighted here is the meaning of the name *Leukippides*, which refers to the two divine consorts of the Divine Twins and which conveys the idea of ‘radiant horses’. This name, along with the individual names of the Leukippides, *Phoibē* and *Hilaeira*, lead to this conclusion: ‘All these names look distinctly solar’.

W 234. In some Indo-European traditions, the Divine Twins seem to be identified with the Morning Star and the Evening Star. Such an identification is resisted here on the grounds that, from the perspective of ancient stargazers who were still thinking of the planet Venus as the alternating Morning Star and Evening Star, these two stars “can never appear at the same time

or on the same day, or even in the same month.” But it can be argued that the mutual exclusiveness of these stars whenever one of the two is visible in the sky is a principle that alternates, in mythological terms, with the complementary principle of their mutual inclusiveness whenever they are invisible, at which time they can be notionally reunited. Such a mythological alternation seems to be attested in Greek traditions about the Divine Twins (GM 258–259).

W 235. We learn more here about the *Leukippides*, consorts of the Greek Divine Twins or *Dioskouroi*. In Laconia, as we read in Pausanias (3.16.1), girl votaries assume the name *Leukippides* in performing rituals connected with a cult of Helen in her sacred function as local goddess of the dawn (GM 256; PH 346–347).⁸ Relevant are the words spoken by “the original girl chorus” in *Idyll* 18 of Theocritus, as analyzed here most acutely by W, especially with reference to the annual return, in an eternal cycle, of the dawn’s early light when Helen and Menelaos re-awaken as newlyweds (verses 55–57). These quoted words of the chorus refer to the fact that {336|337} Helen as consort of the hero Menelaos was worshipped as the local goddess of the dawn in Laconia, the home territory of Sparta (PH 346 n. 42). Relevant to the status of Helen as Spartan goddess of the dawn is the Homeric context of the epithet Διὸς θυγάτηρ as it applies to her in the *Odyssey* (4.227). This epithet, as I have already noted, was re-assigned in Homeric diction from Eos the goddess of the dawn to other goddesses like Aphrodite. As we see now in the *Odyssey*, Helen was one of those goddesses. And the epithet Διὸς θυγάτηρ applies to her at a very special epic moment in the *Odyssey* (again, 4.227): at this moment, we can see that she has finally left behind her temporary human existence at Troy and has returned to her permanent divine existence at Sparta.

⁸ It is not made clear by Pausanias (3.16.1) whether the girl votaries called *Leukippides* are two in number, matching the two goddesses called *Leukippides*.

W 237. In the conclusion to the chapter entitled “Sun and Daughter,” we read this important formulation: “there was such a thing as solar mythology in Indo-European tradition.”

W 239–247. It is argued that both Zeus and Jupiter, as sky-gods, appropriated the distinct identities of storm-gods, most visible in such epithets as *Keraunos* for Zeus and *Fulgur* for Jupiter, both meaning ‘thunderbolt’. W gives a thorough and engaging survey of diverse names and diverse functions of storm-gods in the diverse Indo-European traditions, and this survey reveals a variety of important semantic connections. For example, the epithet *τερπικέραυνος* of Zeus as thunder-god can be connected etymologically to the Latin word *quercus* ‘oak’. Both forms have to do with the defining sacred moment when a thunderbolt strikes an oak tree (for this and other examples see also GM 181–201).

W 247. The name of the Hittite storm-god *Tarhunna / Tarhunta* is analyzed here as an example of a noun derived from a verb referring to the violent action of the thunderbolt. In this case, the Hittite verb is *tarh-*, meaning ‘overcome, vanquish’. I must add that such a verb can convey not only the violent sense of ‘destroy’ but also the energizing sense of ‘revivify’—in contexts where the object of destruction is death itself (GM 139). Such a context survives in an ancient Greek borrowing of a Lycian verb that is cognate with the Hittite verb *tarh-*. The borrowing is attested as a third person plural future verb *ταρχύσουσι*: this form occurs only three times in Homeric poetry—two times with reference to the funeral of the Lycian hero Sarpedon (*Iliad* 16.456 = 674) and one time, secondarily, with reference to the funeral of an unnamed hero as imagined in a speech spoken by the Trojan hero Hector (*Iliad* 7.85). In all three occurrences, it can be argued that *ταρχύσουσι* refers to a ritual preparing of the dead body for a mystical revivification after death (GM 139–142).

W 253. What I just said in the previous paragraph is relevant to what is being said here, that the thunderbolt of the Indo-European storm-god has the power to revivify as well as to destroy. The clearest examples come from the Germanic tradition, where we see that the hammer of the storm-god Thor has the power to bring the dead back to life (cf. also GM 197). I should add that it also has the power to hallow the laps of brides (GM 197). I should also add that there are parallel themes involving the Indic noun *vajra-*, which refers to the stylized thunderbolt of the Indic god Indra: we find Indic narratives that show how the *vajra-* of Indra, like the hammer of Thor, has energizing as well as destructive powers (again, GM 197). The root *vaj-* of *vajra-* can be explained as the cognate of the root *ueg-* of the Latin verb *uegeō* in the sense of ‘quicken, arouse’ (GM 197). According to an alternative explanation (W 251), Indic *vajra-* is cognate with Greek *-αγρος* as found in the name of the hero Meleagros, *Μελέαγρος*.

Other etymological solutions, however, are possible for *Μελέαγρος*. I prefer the solution presented in a report by David Marwede for a seminar held at the Johns Hopkins University in the fall of 1973. (This work is now available online at chs.harvard.edu.) He argued that the *-αγρος* of *Μελέαγρος* is a morphological and syntactical neutralization of a semantic opposition between (1) *ἄγρα* as a ‘hunt’ in the world of nature and (2) *ἀγρός* as a tilled ‘field’ in the world of culture, that is, of agriculture in this case. In these terms, the name *Μελέαγρος* contains a built-in mythical opposition between ‘he who has hunting on his mind’ and ‘he who has cultivating on his mind’. Homeric poetry shows a contextual reinforcement of this etymology. The myth of Meleagros as retold in *Iliad* 9.529–599 shows a parallel opposition between hunting and cultivating. In this myth, the opposition is signaled by two primal events that take place in the realm of Calydon, homeland of Meleagros: (1) a wild boar ravages the cultivated land of Oineus, agriculturist of vineyards, who is the father of Meleagros, and (2) the

Calydonian Boar is then hunted down by the cultivators and their epic allies in the greatest of all epic hunts.

W 267. The circular shape of the sacred building in Rome known as the *aedes* of Vesta, who is the goddess of the fire burning in the domestic hearth, is compared here to the circular space set aside for sacrifices to the Indic fire-god Agni in his domestic aspect. It should be added that the corresponding quadrilateral shape of Roman sacred buildings known as *templa* can be compared to the quadrilateral space set aside for sacrifices to Agni in his celestial aspect as opposed to his earthly aspect, which is his domestic aspect (GM 146–150, with further details about the sacral relationship between the celestial quadrangle and the earthbound circle).

W 268. There is further elaboration here on the Indo-European theme of the fire burning in the hearth: this fire has the power to beget prototypical sacrificers and kings, as we see in the myth about the conception of the Roman king Servius Tullus (there is an analysis of such myths in GM 172–174).

W 276. Indo-European river-gods can be theriomorphic, as in the case of the Greek river-god *Akhelōos*, who is compared in a simile to a bellowing bull at a climactic moment in his primal battle with the hero Achilles in the *Iliad* (21.237).⁹

W 316. In the *Herakles* of Euripides (354–356), there is a reference to the singing of hymns (355 ὑμνῆσαι) in praise of Herakles, and such hymning is compared with instances of hymnic praises for heroes in Iranian traditions (W 315). Another important Greek example needs to be compared in this same context: it is the *Homeric Hymn* (15) to *Herakles* (GM 13–14).

W 357. Explored here is a Roman myth about the prototypical king Romulus: how he was killed and dismembered by the senators, each of whom took away a member of the royal body (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities* 2.56, Livy 1.16.4, Plutarch *Romulus* 27). Such a myth

⁹ The theriomorphism implicit in the simile is analyzed in Nagy 1996:146.

about the notional past, I add, could have functioned as an aetiology for the convening of the senate in the notional present of the Roman myth, when the members of this august body come together and thus figuratively reintegrate the disintegrated body of the prototypical king. In this sense, the body politic of the present is a reintegration of the royal body of the archetypal past.

W 408. The Greek poetic expression κλέος ἄφθιτον ‘imperishable glory’, attested both in lyric (as in a song of Ibycus, PMG S151.47–48, already mentioned) and in epic (as in *Iliad* 9.413), is analyzed here in comparative terms, along with the cognate Indic expression *śrávas...ákṣitam*, attested in a hymn (*Rig-Veda* 1.9.7), which has a cognate meaning (see also GM 122–127, PH 244–245 n. 126). On the basis of the Indic comparative evidence, the meaning of ἄφθιτον/*ákṣitam* can be more accurately translated as ‘unfailing’, since other attestations in Indic traditions evoke the metaphor {337|338} of unfailing springs (PH 147, 278 n. 21). What is most remarkable about these two cognate expressions, it must be added, is that each one of the two is embedded in metrical contexts that are also cognate. The cumulative evidence to be gleaned from these cognate metrical contexts and from others like it can be used to demonstrate that Greek and Indic meters themselves are cognate, stemming from Indo-European prototypes. I offered such a demonstration, on the basis of phraseological and metrical evidence combined, in a book on Greek and Indic meters (Nagy 1974). It should be added that a similar demonstration can be made on the basis of metrical evidence alone (W 45–50).¹⁰

In the same book I just mentioned, I also demonstrated, again on the basis of phraseological and metrical evidence combined, that the dactylic hexameter of Greek epic is

¹⁰ See also West 1973a.

actually derived from the meters of Greek lyric.¹¹ It has been said about this demonstration: “If this or something like it is correct, the consequences are stunning for the study of Greek poetry (it greatly complicates the relationship between epic and lyric, two verse-forms that have synchronically rather different characters) and strikingly alter how we might understand the Indo-European context of epic” (Katz 2005:25).

W. 498. I focus on the observations here about the practice of cremation. Although there is archaeological evidence indicating that inhumation was the earlier practice for populations who spoke Indo-European languages, maybe even as far back as the fourth millennium BCE (W 180, 388), the practice of cremation became a most significant alternative, especially around the thirteenth century BCE, as we see from the Greek and the Hittite evidence; also relevant is the corresponding Indic evidence. Whether or not such evidence can be traced further back in time (GM 85–86), the fact remains that references to cremation are very much part of the heritage of Indo-European poetry and myth.

I bring to a close this inventory by recording my admiration for all the contributions made in this learned and engaging book. I strongly recommend it to all interested Classicists.

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¹¹ Besides Nagy 1974, mentioned in a previous note, I cite also an updated version of my demonstration in PH 459–464.

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