

Georges Dumézil

Mitra-Varuna

An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty

Critical Edition with New Introduction by
Stuart Elden

Afterword by
Veena Das

Translated by **Derek Coltman**



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Mitra-Varuna



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An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty

Georges Dumézil

Translated from the French, *Mitra-Varuna. Essai sur deux représentations indo-européennes de la souveraineté* by Derek Coltman

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Contents

Stuart Elden, <i>Mitra-Varuna: A Re-Introduction to Georges Dumézil</i>	vii
Editorial Note	xxvii
Preface to the Second Edition	xxxiii
Preface to the First Edition	xxxix
CHAPTER I	
Luperci and Flamines	1
CHAPTER II	
<i>Celeritas</i> and <i>Gravitas</i>	13
CHAPTER III	
Romulus and Numa	25
CHAPTER IV	
Jupiter and Fides	41
CHAPTER V	
Ahura and Mithra	57
CHAPTER VI	
<i>Nexum</i> and <i>Mutuuum</i>	67

Contents

CHAPTER VII	
*Wôdhanaz and *Tîwaz	83
CHAPTER VIII	
“Communiter” and “Discreta Cuique”	93
CHAPTER IX	
The One-Eyed God and the One-Handed God	105
CHAPTER X	
Saviṭṛ and Bhaga	123
Conclusion	135
APPENDIX I	
“Nuada and Balar,” seventh section of Chapter IX, first edition	141
APPENDIX II	
Variant passage from Conclusion, first edition	147
Veena Das, Afterword	151
Editor’s Notes	163

Mitra-Varuna: A Re-Introduction to Georges Dumézil

Stuart Elden

This Introduction does three main things. First it provides a background to understand where Georges Dumézil was in his career when the first edition of *Mitra-Varuna* was published in 1940. It then discusses the years between the first and the second edition in 1948, including some political questions about his work.¹ Finally it says something about Dumézil's writing on these topics after 1948, concluding with some brief thoughts about why *Mitra-Varuna* is a particularly apposite book to reintroduce Anglophone readers to Dumézil's work. The enduring importance of Dumézil's ideas is further explored in the Afterword by Veena Das.

Georges Dumézil was born on March 4, 1898, and began his linguistic studies with Latin, Greek, and German at an early age. He studied in Paris, meeting Michel Bréal, who was the grandfather of a classmate, and Antoine Meillet. Bréal had been a professor at the Collège de France, both a philologist and mythologist, and, among other things, a translator of Franz Bopp's *Comparative Grammar*.² Meillet ranged across the Indo-European languages, working particularly on Slavonic languages and Armenian, and was the co-compiler of a dictionary of Latin etymology.³ Dumézil's notes to the present work attest to his importance. Dumézil entered the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in 1916, where he studied Arabic and Sanskrit. Breaking his studies because of

the First World War, when he served as an artillery officer, he passed the *agrégation* in letters in 1919.⁴ With this teaching qualification in hand, he taught at a *lycée* just north of Paris for six months before being advised his future career lay outside of France.

Dumézil's first overseas post was for six months at the University of Warsaw as a lecturer in French literature; there he also studied both Polish and Russian.⁵ He then received a bursary to undertake the research for his theses, published as *Le Festin d'immortalité* (The Feast of Immortality) and *Le Crime des Lemniennes* (The Lemnian Crime), for which he received his doctorate in 1924.⁶ In 1925 he moved to the University of Istanbul to teach history of religion, though he transferred to literature after a year. He travelled extensively in Turkey, Russia, and the Caucasus, learning Turkish and several other languages, including Ossetian, Armenian, and Abkhazian. He would describe these as "happy years," crucial to his life-long love of the region.⁷ Between 1931 and 1933 he taught French at the University of Uppsala, where he also worked on Scandinavian languages, including Old Norse. Finally in 1933 he returned to France as *chargé de conférences* in comparative religion at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, fifth section. With the exception of some visiting posts, his future career was all in France; he was elected to the *Collège de France* in 1949 to the chair in Indo-European civilisations, after having been defeated for a chair in the history of religions in 1933 by Jean Baruzi.⁸ The linguist Émile Benveniste was crucial in his successful election, writing the reports both for the creation of the chair and Dumézil's election to it.⁹ Dumézil retired in 1968 and spent parts of the next three years in visiting posts at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, the University of Chicago's Divinity School, and the University of California, Los Angeles. Elected to one of the forty chairs at the *Académie Française* on October 26, 1978, he was inducted as one of the "Immortals" by Claude Lévi-Strauss.¹⁰ Ill health limited his travel in his final years, though not his prodigious work-rate. He died on October 11, 1986 at the age of 88.

Dumézil's Work Pre-1940

As Dumézil indicates in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of *Mitra-Varuna*, his earliest works had been in comparative Indo-European mythology, and he particularly notes his principal doctoral thesis, which was published as *Le Festin d'immortalité*, and his third book, *Le Problème des*

Centaures (The Centaur Problem), in 1929.¹¹ In each study he looked at examples from three cultures—in the first, magic drinks which gave the gift of immortality in Indian, Roman, and Norse mythology; in the second, Indian Gandharva, Greek centaurs, and Roman Luperci. Looking back, he suggests that some of these early works lacked “sufficient philological preparation.”¹² Yet the focus on the Indo-European tradition, the approach of comparison, and the pairing of mythology with philology indicated in these works laid the foundation for subsequent studies.

In 1934 Dumézil published *Ouranós-Vāruṇa*, a short book comparing the Greek and Vedic gods, closely followed by *Flamen-Brahman*, which compared the priesthoods of India and Rome.¹³ These are the most obvious forerunners to the present study. In the analysis of the sovereign gods of two mythic traditions, and the etymological and structural relation of the priestly class, he was already beginning to sketch out some key themes of his later work. Seen from the perspective of his later career though, there are certainly limitations. Apparently the sociologist and sinologist Marcel Granet told Dumézil in 1935: “Until now you have only talked nonsense [*bêtises*], but it is intelligent nonsense.”¹⁴ Granet encouraged the development of Dumézil’s work, and Dumézil attended Granet’s lectures on Chinese thought and culture. Lévi-Strauss says when Dumézil first had the courage to knock on his door, Granet said “Come in, I’ve been waiting for you for ten years.”¹⁵ Granet’s approach was important to Dumézil, who pays tribute both in the present work and in a preface to a re-edition of Granet’s *La Religion des Chinois*.¹⁶

The fundamental breakthrough, however, came in Dumézil’s 1938 article entitled “La Préhistoire des flamines majeurs.”¹⁷ In this article he presented his twofold claim that there was a relation between the Vedic, Latin, and Celtic names for a king—*rāj-*, *rēg-*, *rīg*—and the Vedic and Latin names for a priest, *brahman* and *flāmen*. He makes the point that these are not two distinct claims, but two parts of a whole: “In both India and Rome, the two names designated two connecting bodies [*organes solidaires*], more precisely the two inseparable halves of a single body [*organe unique*], the body of *Sovereignty*.”¹⁸

This leads Dumézil to outline what would become his most important and influential idea, that mythological traditions and social divisions in quite different contexts are structured around a divide between priests, warriors, and producers. This is his tripartite, or trifunctional, hypothesis. In India, the king and brahmin were set apart from the warrior class, *kshatriya* or sometimes *rājanya*, and a third class of the farmers and producers of the *vaishya* group. The three *varna*, or castes, have parallels in

several different traditions, notably Roman legends, with the *flamen*, the military, and the farmers, or the division between gods in Vedic, Roman, or Norse mythology. In Rome this social divide maps onto the gods Jupiter-Mars-Quirinus; for the Norse gods it is Odhinn-Thor-Freya; in Vedic mythology Varuna-Indra-Nasatya. Dumézil draws some parallels with other traditions, especially ancient Iran, but recognises that Greece is not as clearly divided as Rome, and that Welsh and Slavic traditions are often too fragmented to be thematised in the same way. Broadly speaking the first function is sovereign; the second, martial; the third, productive. Daniel Dubuisson suggests that this 1938 piece shows that “the conceptual and theoretical mechanism upon which the initial hypothesis and first broad analyses of Dumézil’s work were built is itself based on fragile notions and daring generalizations.”¹⁹ But as a foundation it is important, since it gives the spur to so much that follows in his work.

His first book-length study to explore the trifunctional hypothesis was *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, published in 1939.²⁰ Dumézil later indicated that it was largely written in 1936, but reformulated in 1938 in the light of his insights into trifunctionalism.²¹ The structure of the book is indeed threefold. After an introductory chapter, Dumézil devotes three sections to Myths of Sovereignty, Myths of Warriors, and Myths of Vitality, each with three chapters. This is a study which I will return to later in this Introduction.

In the 1938–39 academic year, Dumézil gave two courses at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In the course records, these were described in the following way:

In one of the two courses, the collection of ritual myths attached to the name of Vritrahan in India were studied, homologous facts were noted and analysed in the religions of other peoples speaking Indo-European languages, notably among Germanic people.

The second course was devoted to examining the two complementary representations of sovereignty in several Indo-European mythologies (Varuṇa and Mitra, Romulus and Numa, Odhinn and Ullr, etc.).²²

These courses are preserved in the Georges Dumézil archive, held at the Collège de France.²³ As Dumézil notes in the Preface to the Second Edition to *Mitra-Varuna*, the second course “provided the material for this book.” The first, on the warrior function, and especially Indra, who bore the name Vritrahan as the killer of the serpent Vritra, was developed

in later lectures in the early 1950s, which became *Aspects de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens* in 1956.²⁴ The course manuscript is the best source we have for the development of the present text, as unfortunately, unlike many of his books, the archive does not contain a draft manuscript for *Mitra-Varuna*.²⁵

The course which became *Mitra-Varuna* was delivered between November 15, 1938 and June 8, 1939, with breaks for Christmas and Easter, but also a break of five weeks in February and March 1939, where instead Roger Caillois presented his views on the idea of the sacred.²⁶ This was a theme Caillois treated in his book *L'Homme et le sacré* (Man and the Sacred), published in 1939, in the series in which Dumézil had published *Mythes et dieux des Germains*.²⁷ Its original preface is dated to March 1939, just as he gave the final lecture to Dumézil's class. In that text, Caillois said that it was "impossible for me to indicate my debt to Mr Georges Dumézil precisely. So great is my appreciation of him that, if I tried to specify it, I would wrong the mentor who, in the history of religions, has directed me from my very first steps, and, still more, I would wrong the friend whose suggestions and guidance have contributed so much to this little volume."²⁸

While *Mitra-Varuna* is a study of the first function of sovereignty, this is not to say it is a simple analysis of a unified god across different traditions. Importantly Dumézil also recognises that the divide does not cut simply three ways, but the first function, concerning sovereignty, is itself split. Thus in analysing the role of Varuna, Mitra also needs to be considered; if Jupiter is examined, then *Dius Fidius*, the god of oaths, must also be questioned, as Dumézil indicates in the Preface to the First Edition.²⁹ Sovereignty is, in this analysis, divided between a more legal, contractual, reasoning side and a terrible, magical, and warlike basis. As Dumézil says at one point in the book, "Mitra is the sovereign under his reasoning aspect, luminous, ordered, calm, benevolent, priestly; Varuna is the sovereign under his attacking aspect, dark, inspired, violent, terrible, warlike."³⁰ How this split in the first function might operate, with similarities and differences between traditions, is the focus of the present book.

As the table of contents indicates, each chapter looks at a contrasting pair of gods, mythical figures, or concepts. Sovereignty therefore has both a worldly, juridical form and a magical, supernatural form. The king-priest relation is therefore important to understand political power. Dumézil ranges widely in the book, from Rome to India and Iran, from the Norse myths to the Greeks and Celts. He provides, in particular,

discussions of the early kings of Rome, noting that while Romulus founded the city, Numa founded its institutions. For Dumézil, in a way which would be controversial with more conventional Latinists, early Roman history was effectively mythology.

From 1940 to 1948

France had declared war on Germany in September 1939, after the invasion of Poland. Initially there was a period of uneasy and limited conflict, known as the “phoney war,” until May 1940, when France was invaded. Dumézil dates the first edition preface of *Mitra-Varuna* to June 1939, and Gallimard indicates it was published in a limited run in May 1940,³¹ which helps to explain why copies are so hard to find today. Paris was occupied in mid-June, and Marshal Philippe Pétain became leader with the formal French surrender on June 24. The Vichy regime was established in July. At the time, Dumézil was in Turkey, where he had been posted as part of the French military mission in the initial mobilisation.³²

Dumézil lost his teaching post in November 1941 because he had been a Freemason in the 1930s. He regained the authorization to teach in January 1943.³³ Nevertheless he continued publishing through the war and after the Liberation, with three volumes of the *Jupiter; Mars, Quirinus* series and three of *Les Mythes romains* published between 1941 and 1947.³⁴ As the footnotes to the second edition of *Mitra-Varuna* show, in those works he developed several themes of the present book and corrected some of its claims. He would continue to revisit, revise, and develop his work throughout his career.

After the war Dumézil returned to *Mitra-Varuna*, producing the second edition—its preface is dated to January 1947—in part because the first edition was inaccessible and in part because it really was the foundation of so much of the work he was doing. The second edition was published on March 11, 1948.³⁵ The changes are relatively minor for the most part, with the most substantial alterations made to Chapter IX and the Conclusion. Shorter passages from the first edition which were replaced in the second are included and translated in endnotes below, while the two longer passages appear as Appendices I and II. A reader of this book therefore has all the material Dumézil published between the two editions. Given the inaccessibility of the 1940 edition, the French text of the variants is also included. A Francophone reader with the more

readily available 1948 text and this edition would thus be able to reconstruct the 1940 version.

The year 1948 also saw a fourth volume of *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* and a book on the Norse god, Loki.³⁶ Lévi-Strauss would describe *Loki* as Dumézil's *Discourse on Method*, indicating the rules of his approach.³⁷ One further book from this period is worth noting, *L'Héritage indo-européen à Rome*, conceived as an introduction to both the *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* and *Les Mythes romains* series.³⁸ This book was initially planned with Harvill Press for an Anglo-Saxon audience, but it was not translated and was instead published in French.³⁹

Alongside these works on history and mythology, Dumézil was running an almost parallel career producing a series of works in linguistics. Dating back to his time in Turkey in the 1920s, he had published books on northern Caucasian languages in 1932 and 1933.⁴⁰ Part of the reason for the early work on this subject was his distance from Paris and its libraries, which made research on mythology more difficult.⁴¹ His work in the area of linguistics was controversial, leading to a furious exchange with the Russian linguist, Prince Nikolai Sergejevich Trubetzkoy. Trubetzkoy wrote a critical review of Dumézil's books in 1934.⁴² Trubetzkoy confessed to his friend, Roman Jakobson, that the reason he was so harsh on Dumézil was that Dumézil was dismissive of Russian scholars working on the topic, but that he felt Dumézil could not "hold a candle" to them.⁴³ Dumézil's angry response was published as a rather peculiar, limited print-run text, using a cursive script (not Dumézil's own handwriting).⁴⁴ The debate continued for a few years until Trubetzkoy's death in Austria in 1938.⁴⁵

Dumézil did especially important work on Ubykh, a language of the northwest Caucasian family. In 1931 he produced a study with a grammar and translations of texts.⁴⁶ This early work was done in the belief that there were few native speakers alive, and that after the war there were none left. But in 1953 Dumézil learned that a few did still survive, now living in Turkey.⁴⁷ As a result, Dumézil worked closely with the last native speaker, Tevfik Esenç. This led to further studies in the 1950s through to a major work in 1975.⁴⁸ Dumézil was joined in this work by his student and colleague, Georges Charachidzé, and there were plans for a French-Ubykh dictionary between Dumézil, Charachidzé, and Esenç. In 1963 the Norwegian linguist, Hans Vogt, published a dictionary dedicated to Esenç and Dumézil. Dumézil had asked Vogt to work with him on such a project, but Vogt went ahead on his own and

produced a volume which, while extensive, contained many errors.⁴⁹ Dumézil provided extensive corrections in a section of one of his own later studies.⁵⁰

In his interviews with Didier Eribon late in life, Dumézil indicated that his subsequent work would be on Caucasian linguistics. This was partly because illness prevented him leaving home to conduct library work on mythology, but he could do much linguistic labour with his existing notes. Dumézil was said to have made thousands of index cards in preparation for the dictionary. But he died before he could bring this work to completion. Esenç died in 1992, and as a result, Ubykh is now considered extinct. Nor was the project's planned continuation by Charachidzé ever completed.⁵¹ Although some of Dumézil's work in this register has been criticised, it has equally been suggested that "it is certain that knowledge of Ubykh would be extremely impoverished were it not for Dumézil."⁵² This comment comes in the introduction to a recent grammar of the language in English, using a lot of Charachidzé and Dumézil's work, as well as an extensive archive of recordings of Esenç.⁵³

Politics

Dumézil described himself as a "man of the right," and there is no question that his views were always conservative rather than liberal. But shortly before his death, and by some accounts helping to precipitate it, he was accused of darker political sympathies.

The initial charge was made in a single comment by the historian, Arnaldo Momigliano, in 1983, suggesting that the 1939 book, *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, "reveals clear traces of sympathy for Nazi culture," even though he recognises that Dumézil "almost always kept his politics separate from his scholarly activity."⁵⁴ Momigliano also recognises the importance of Sylvain Lévi and Émile Benveniste, both Jewish, to Dumézil's work.⁵⁵ Marcel Mauss was another significant mentor in Dumézil's earlier career, and his later friendship with Lévi-Strauss is well known. In making this charge, Momigliano conveniently obscured his own politics. Despite being from an assimilated Jewish family, Momigliano had joined the Italian National Fascist Party, swore an oath to Benito Mussolini, and unsuccessfully used this to try to avoid racial exclusion.⁵⁶ Dumézil responded to Momigliano's criticisms in 1984, forcefully denying any affinity with Nazism.⁵⁷

The accusations were developed in a 1984 piece by the Italian historian, Carlo Ginzburg, which also focused on *Mythes et dieux des Germains*.⁵⁸ Ginzburg indicates some of the connections Dumézil draws between German mythology and the contemporary situation in Germany. He gives two examples of passages in which Dumézil's analysis connects to the contemporary moment. One concerns the connection between mythology and political power:

Wagnerian names and Wagnerian mysticism animated German combatants in 1914–1918 in hours of sacrifice and failure even more than in hours of triumph. The Third Reich has not been obliged to create its basic myths; on the contrary, it is German mythology, revived in the nineteenth century, which gave its form, its spirit, its institutions to a Germany rendered miraculously malleable by unprecedented misfortunes; perhaps it is because he had first suffered in trenches haunted by the spirit of Siegfried that Adolf Hitler could conceive, forge, and practice a sovereignty that no German overlord has known since the fabulous reign of Odhinn.⁵⁹

The other concerns the interrelation of police and military violence:

The preceding considerations may explain some of the more recent German social phenomena: the development and success of the paramilitary brigades, the *dura virtus*, and the privileges of the Assault Units, the particular kinds of policing that uniformed youth have sometimes been tempted to practice.⁶⁰

Dumézil's "particular kinds of policing" is rightly described by Ginzburg as "highly euphemistic."⁶¹ Ginzburg also highlights a passage about the book in C. Scott Littleton's study of Dumézil: "It was perhaps ironic that it was in 1939, the year Hitler's legions began their grisly march, that Dumézil first focused his attention upon the Germanic branch of the I.E. speaking world."⁶² This is a passage which Ginzburg describes as "scandalously shallow."⁶³

However even Ginzburg recognises that Dumézil's wording is ambivalent: "There are no words of criticism or of condemnation, but praise or enthusiasm are equally lacking. At first glance, the tone seems consciously sober and neutral."⁶⁴ Ginzburg also recognises that *Mythes et dieux* had been reviewed by the *Annales* historian, Marc Bloch, in 1940,⁶⁵ who in Ginzburg's view saw it rather as "an enlightening and

critical contribution on Hitler's Germany."⁶⁶ Lucien Febvre had also included *Mythes et dieux* in his survey of recently published books in *Annales* in 1941.⁶⁷ Dumézil had published in *Annales* in 1938, and his links to that historical movement remain to be fully explored.⁶⁸

As Dumézil himself said of the accusations: "It's not a misunderstanding, it's a load of rubbish [*C'est n'est pas un malentendu, c'est une saloperie*]."⁶⁹ But instead of ignoring the attacks, he forcefully defended himself from Ginzburg's accusations in an article in *Annales* in 1985.⁷⁰ There he confines himself to four remarks, though he indicates he will provide a more detailed response.⁷¹ In brief, he says he barely knew Marc Bloch, and that his links with the *Annales* school were more with the unrelated Jules Bloch and, through him, to Lucien Febvre. He was grateful Marc Bloch had reviewed his work, but no more.⁷² Second he says that *Mythes et dieux* was the first book of his post-1938 period, and that the reader should not lose sight of the fact it was a preliminary sketch which was developed over the next half-century. In 1938 he felt he had the right key, but that it still required a lot of further work.⁷³ Third he draws a distinction between analysis of a society and support for it, between the descriptive and the normative.⁷⁴ Finally he rejects any real links to the Collège de Sociologie, though notes that Georges Bataille attended some of his seminars and that Caillois was "the most brilliant of my students," who became a trusted friend. He rightly dismisses the idea that Caillois had any sympathy for Nazism. However he insists that his friendships were because of people's characters, not their opinions. By way of political contrast, he mentions Pierre Gaxotte and Michel Foucault.⁷⁵ It does seem Dumézil indeed planned to do more by way of response, but ill health and his death in 1986 prevented this.

After Dumézil's death, Ginzburg's claims were supported by other historians, including Cristiano Grottanelli and Bruce Lincoln.⁷⁶ These accusations were disputed by Eribon in *Faut-il brûler Dumézil?* and to an extent by Dean Miller.⁷⁷ Eribon challenges any idea of Nazism and claims Dumézil was opposed to anti-Semitism. There is also a thorough analysis in the book by García Quintela.⁷⁸ Ginzburg's reading is described by Dumézil's bibliographer, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, as an "inane article."⁷⁹ There are other complexities to explore.

Like *Mitra-Varuna*, *Mythes et dieux des Germains* had exhausted its initial printing, and Dumézil returned to it later in his career. But with *Mythes et dieux*, he did not simply produce a lightly edited new edition. Rather the 1959 book, *Les Dieux des Germains: Essai sur la formation de la religion scandinave*, used some of the earlier book's ideas and

developed its claims. This was a common practice for Dumézil, who continually amended and updated his books. But here, he also removed the more problematic political issues.⁸⁰ It was this later book which was translated into English as *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, again developed with some additional essays and some revisions by Dumézil.⁸¹ This practice of revision, while the norm for Dumézil's work, and showing his continual wish to update and correct his analyses, has led to accusations of a coverup. Ginzburg suggests that it is a challenge to find the 1939 *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, even in good libraries, seemingly insinuating that it has been hidden.⁸² Coutau-Bégarie rightly dismisses this, as a search of libraries proves.⁸³

Dumézil wrote and published articles under the pen-name of Georges Marcenay in the journal *Le Jour*.⁸⁴ *Le Jour* was a newspaper of the right, opposed to the Front Populaire in the years immediately preceding World War Two. García Quintela indicates that part of Dumézil's reason for writing these pieces was to supplement his limited salary as a junior and temporary lecturer.⁸⁵ Eribon did important work in unearthing these pieces, but there is a debate about whether they should be seen as part of Dumézil's overall literary corpus. Coutau-Bégarie, for example, chooses not to list these pseudonymous pieces in his otherwise comprehensive bibliography. His approach is to only include pieces signed in Dumézil's own name.⁸⁶ But these articles are significant in understanding Dumézil's views. What emerges from these pieces is a royalist who is critical of parliamentary democracy, a French nationalist, who is pro-Mussolini but anti-German.⁸⁷ As Eribon most prominently has argued, the defence against charges of Nazi sympathies is that he was a nationalist, perhaps even a fascist. But the lines quickly become blurred after France's defeat. As noted above, Dumézil was suspended from teaching by the Vichy regime because he had been a Freemason, but he was allowed again to teach before the end of the war. This led him to be suspected of collusion with the regime, but he was exonerated after the Liberation.

Dumézil also had links to Action Française until 1925. He had dedicated *Le Festin d'immortalité* in 1924 to Pierre Gaxotte, the historian of the French Revolution, who was also a journalist close to the movement. Gaxotte in turn dedicated *La Révolution française* to Dumézil in 1928.⁸⁸ Through Gaxotte, Dumézil met the author and politician Charles Maurras in the mid-1920s.⁸⁹ Maurras was a key figure in Action Française, and Gaxotte had served as his secretary since 1917.⁹⁰ Maurras's biographer, Stéphane Giocanti, indicates that Dumézil also briefly served as a

secretary to Maurras and the journal, working in shifts with Gaxotte.⁹¹ This was in early 1925, before Dumézil moved to Turkey. Giocanti cites two letters from Dumézil to Maurras, one from May 1925 telling him of his engagement and a wish to resign and the other in September thanking him for copies of his books.⁹²

Mitra-Varuna, in either its 1940 or 1948 versions, does not contain explicit references to the contemporary political situation in Europe. But this is not to say that the political is entirely absent from this book about sovereignty. Bruce Lincoln has suggested that lines about enemies, treaties, and ambushes, ostensibly applying to classical Rome and the ancient Germans, have a contemporary resonance with the Munich agreement of September 1938.⁹³ However, the course which was developed into the book did not begin until November; the related material was not discussed until May–June 1939, after the invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia; and the book did not appear until May 1940, after the war had broken out.

Dumézil's references appear simply scholarly, drawing on work in several languages. As well as a wide range of classical references, it includes work by some leading figures in French sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, including Lévi, Granet, and Mauss. Some of his sources, however, deserve further attention. For one, his work on *Männerbund*, male societies or bands, owes much to the Swedish philologist and Indo-Iranian scholar, Stig Wikander, but also to the Austrian philologist, Otto Höfler.⁹⁴ Höfler was affiliated with and later a leader of the *Ahnenerbe* historical institute, associated with the SS and set up by Heinrich Himmler to promote racial doctrines. Höfler's ideas, though grounded on historical research, had a contemporary resonance.⁹⁵ He was dismissed from the University of Munich in 1945 and initially banned from teaching as part of the denazification process. But as Courtney Marie Burrell notes, he was “declared only a *Mitläufer* (follower) of National Socialism,” which allowed him to return to teaching, leading to his re-appointment in 1954 to Munich and then a chair in Vienna from 1957 until his retirement.⁹⁶

Ginzburg criticises the way Dumézil uses Höfler's book in *Mythes et dieux des Germains* “without expressing the slightest critical detachment from it.”⁹⁷ Dumézil's use in *Mitra-Varuna* is similar. Wikander's work was influenced by Höfler, and Dumézil had got to know Wikander, and through him Höfler, while based in Uppsala in the early 1930s. Mircea Eliade also uses Höfler's work in his analysis of shamanism.⁹⁸ Burrell indicates that it is Dumézil and Eliade's use which has led to the

enduring importance of Höfler.⁹⁹ Equally Dumézil references the work of the Dutch scholar, Jan de Vries, who, as well as being an eminent Germanist, was a collaborator with the Nazi occupiers. He was imprisoned at the end of the war and lost his academic positions and accolades.

Dumézil also references Eliade in *Mitra-Varuna*. While they had been reading each other's work before the war, their correspondence began in 1940, and they met in November 1943 and again in September 1945, and became friends.¹⁰⁰ In the 1930s Eliade had supported the Romanian fascist organisation, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later known as the Iron Guard, and had expressed admiration for Mussolini. His own nationalist views, and potential support for Nazism and anti-Semitism, are much debated.¹⁰¹ Eliade worked for the Romanian cultural legation in London from April 1940, but in February 1941 was posted to Portugal for the rest of the war.¹⁰² From 1945, unable to return to Romania with its new communist government, he lived in France. He taught at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and then at the Sorbonne, in positions partly arranged with Dumézil's support, before moving to the University of Chicago in 1956. Dumézil's friendship and support during Eliade's decade in Paris is well attested, from teaching opportunities, introductions to publishers, help with translation, reference letters and support in funding applications. Dubuisson, who is very positive about Dumézil and sees his politics as nothing more than those of a conservative nationalist, recognising a separation of his politics and academic work, is strongly critical of Eliade's politics and the ways this influences his academic research.¹⁰³ As Robert A. Segal puts it, "Dubuisson sees Eliade's theory of myth and of religion as a whole as a cover-up—a cover-up for a fascistic, racist, and anti-Semitic political ideology."¹⁰⁴

Dumézil does not, with the revision of *Mitra-Varuna*, remove references to these sources. The 1948 text, even with what was then known about the SS and Höfler's work with the *Ahnenerbe*, de Vries's collaboration, and Eliade's connection to Romanian fascism, retains all these references. The links continued: Dumézil supported Eliade's career in France for some time, wrote prefaces to his books, and was invited to Chicago by Eliade after his retirement from the Collège de France.¹⁰⁵ Dumézil and de Vries kept up an extensive and friendly correspondence.¹⁰⁶ Dumézil's *Loki* book, in its revised 1959 German publication, has a preface by Höfler.¹⁰⁷ Dumézil also thanks both Höfler and de Vries for helping to bring this book into German.¹⁰⁸ Seventeen years later, both he and Eliade contributed to a *Festgabe* for Höfler's 75th birthday.¹⁰⁹ If

the references alone might be seen as part of an academic exchange of ideas, their correspondence expresses a long-term friendship.

Some of the criticisms of Dumézil were based on the people who used his ideas, including Alain de Benoist, Jean Haudry, Michel Poniatowski, and Roger Pearson. While the uses made of his work by others is largely outside of his control, he did allow his name to be associated with these extreme-right figures. A particular moment of controversy came when *Nouvelle École*, Alain de Benoist's journal linked to the *Nouvelle Droite*, devoted a double issue to Dumézil in 1972–1973.¹¹⁰ Dumézil had previously been interviewed by the journal in 1969.¹¹¹ The Dumézil issue was reprinted in part in 1979, without Benoist's preface but with some additional material.¹¹² As Stefan Arvidsson has noted, this issue, in such a prominent right-wing outlet, led to French press speculation about Dumézil's sympathies. As a consequence, Dumézil withdrew his support for the journal. But this controversy was a prelude to the examination of his earlier work for its politics.¹¹³

Yet even his strongest accusers recognise that there are distinctions to be drawn, often distinguishing his academic work on ideologies from support for those positions in the present. For Ginzburg: "To be sure, the recent endeavour by the *nouvelle droite* to coopt the work of Dumézil, interpreting it (especially the tripartite Indo-European ideology) as an exemplary archetype, has frequently been repudiated in no indefinite terms by Dumézil himself."¹¹⁴ In one of the sources Ginzburg indicates, Dumézil is indeed explicit: "I take responsibility only for what I write or expressly approve."¹¹⁵ Equally Dumézil wanted to stress that the object of his study was distinct from his wish for a different society. "What is the 'Indo-European mind'? I can only tell you that everything I have discovered of the Indo-European world would have horrified me. I would not have liked to live in a society which had a *Männerbund*... or druids."¹¹⁶ Indeed he indicated the parallels between the diagnosis and the structure of contemporary dictatorships.¹¹⁷

After 1948

The second edition was far from the end of Dumézil's work on the questions explored in this book. His election to the Collège de France in 1949 marks a break in some ways, but his courses and publications continue to develop, deepen, and sometimes correct his earlier work. His inaugural lecture was in part a summary of where he was at the time, and

less a programme of future work than an indication of possible lines of inquiry.¹¹⁸ Then in 1952, based on lectures first given in London in May 1951, he published a short introduction to key themes in his work *Les Dieux des Indo-Européens*.¹¹⁹ Around this time he also began to distance his work from the claim that the three functions appeared in direct social forms but rather often constituted a deeper ideological understanding in societies.¹²⁰ These developing views required revision of some of his earlier claims. Although he never published another formal revision of *Mitra-Varuna* after the 1948 text, his 1977 book, *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*, might be seen as a third edition, with the first chapter of the first part having “Mitra-Varuna” as its title, while much of the remaining chapters explore related themes in different mythologies.¹²¹

Before that book, however, he had produced his masterwork, *Mythe et épopée*. Published in three large volumes in 1968, 1971, and 1973, this was designed as a kind of summation of his research career. Volume I was entitled *L’Idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (The Ideology of the Three Functions in the Epics of the Indo-European Peoples) and was planned for English translation under the title of *Earth Unburdened: Mythic Infrastructure in the Mahabharata*, edited by Jaan Puhvel, though this never appeared.¹²² Volume II was titled *Types épiques indo-européens: un héros, un sorcier, un roi* (Indo-European Epic Types: Hero, Sorcerer, King), and was published in English as three separate books—*The Stakes of the Warrior*, *The Plight of the Sorcerer*, and *The Destiny of a King*.¹²³ As the title of the sections of the French and the English translations show, Dumézil here focuses on two parts of the trifunctional analysis, the sovereign and the martial, treating the first in the two aspects he discusses in *Mitra-Varuna*. The third volume of *Mythe et épopée* was *Histoires romaines*, of which one part and two appendices are included in the English collection *Camillus: A Study of Indo-European Religion as Roman History*.¹²⁴

Dumézil initially intended the *Mythe et épopée* series to be his crowning glory. Published in the years immediately after his retirement from the Collège de France, it was largely written while Dumézil was in visiting posts in the USA. In another 1969 work, he described this as a process of consolidation:

This unitary publication of revised studies constitutes part of the general updating in which I have been engaged for the past five years, in an effort to prepare for the inevitable autopsy as proper a cadaver as possible, that is, to deliver to the critic of the near future, in an

organized and improved form, the results of the endeavors, of varying success, carried out over the past thirty years. The book thus takes its place in what will be my last series of publications, neither program nor *Vorarbeiten* but a balancing of accounts [*bilan*]...¹²⁵

This *bilan* period was multi-faceted. Broadly it can be seen as beginning with *Archaic Roman Religion* in 1966 and moving to an outline or general overview in the first volume of *Mythe et épopée*, with discussions of the magical and juridical aspects of sovereignty and the warrior function in the second volume. As Udo Strutynski indicates, there is no equivalent study for the producer group, treating the question of agriculture or labour. Dumézil did apparently plan to complete a volume of studies on this theme, making use of previously published papers, and Strutynski describes this as “a yet-to-be-assembled collection of previously written articles, properly revised and commented on, for the third prong, which is diffused throughout the spectrum of concepts relating to welfare.”¹²⁶ Dumézil himself indicated in April 1973 that a fourth volume of *Mythe et épopée* was planned but late in life confessed to Eribon that it was “broken down or abandoned [*en panne*]” rather than still in progress.¹²⁷

Strutynski suggests that Dumézil’s planned work on literature was “complete,” and to *Mythe et épopée* should “be added the volume *From Myth to Fiction*.”¹²⁸ Dumézil’s late work was also concerned with a consolidated set of studies of the traditions of the different Indo-European peoples. For Rome this can be found in the third volume of *Mythe et épopée*, in *Archaic Roman Religion*, along with *Idées romaines*, *Fêtes romaines d’été et d’automne*, and its concluding “Dix questions romaines,” and the appendix to *Mariages indo-européens*, entitled “Quinze questions romaines.”¹²⁹ This long list already shows that the treatment is more extensive for Rome than for other societies. For the Caucasus, there is the book *Romans de Scythie et d’alentour*, to which can be added the posthumous collection of source materials in *Contes et légendes des peuples du Caucase*, which includes articles and parts of earlier books.¹³⁰ For the Indo-Iranian people, the definitive study is *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*, although Strutynski adds that “a collection of essays is foreseen to complete that dossier,” which never appeared.¹³¹ For the Germanic people, there was *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, which extends the French edition, the essays in *From Myth to Fiction*, posthumously supplemented by the collection edited by François-Xavier Dillmann, *Mythes et dieux de la Scandinavie ancienne*.¹³² In that book, Dillmann suggests that he was to edit a further volume, bringing together

the 1939 and 1959 books *Les Dieux des Germains* and *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, but this was never published.¹³³ Strutynski notes that “in Dumézil’s view, the panorama in Celtic and Greek tradition—and presumably in Baltic and Slavic as well—is too mutilated to repay the effort of a separate study for each of them.”¹³⁴

Despite the many books he did publish, Dumézil also abandoned several ideas. As well as the Ubykh dictionary, in 1969 he had also promised “a definitive *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* and a *Théologie de la souveraineté*,” but neither appeared in quite that form.¹³⁵ The latter is, however, a good description of what was published as *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*. Indeed in 1970 Dumézil describes the *Théologie* as a book where “my early essays on Mitra-Varuna, Aryaman, and the ‘minor sovereigns’ will be revised and partially changed.”¹³⁶ *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* also covers some of the ground intended by a revised *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus*, being both an overview of the three functions and a detailed analysis of the first.¹³⁷ There were plans for a posthumous collection of his prefaces and introductions, but this never appeared either.¹³⁸ Perhaps the most significant absence from Dumézil’s many planned projects is the consolidated study of the third function. Despite the absences, this was nevertheless a hugely impressive programme of consolidation, updating, and extension for a writer who was seventy when he retired in 1968.

Yet this was not the end. *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* was published on Dumézil’s seventy-ninth birthday,¹³⁹ he was elected to the Académie Française two years later in 1979, and he continued publishing for several more years. Right at the end of his life, he produced *Esquisses de mythologie* (Sketches of Mythology), four volumes of twenty-five short papers each on topics or questions intended in part to spur work by others. The last of these volumes was published posthumously, edited by Joël Grisward. As noted above, some other collections of texts were also published posthumously, while the separate volumes of *Mythe et épopée* and *Esquisses de mythologie* were collected as integrated texts in Gallimard’s Quarto series. Dumézil’s interviews with Didier Eribon appeared in 1987, and are as close as he ever came to a memoir.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately the majority of his books are out of print in France, as are almost all of the English translations.

Such was the breadth of his short works that it took another book by Coutau-Bégarie to catalogue them.¹⁴¹ When his books were republished, Dumézil often added new prefaces, afterwords, or notes incorporating new research by himself or others. These further show his

wish never to stand still and his approach of publishing interim reports rather than waiting for the whole to become clear. But not all these changes are immediately obvious to readers, particularly if they only have access to the later edition of a text. To understand the development of his ideas often requires the comparison of editions, as was done in the preparation of this critical edition of *Mitra-Varuna*. Dumézil also used the opportunity of translation to update works, with these changes often being incorporated into later French editions. *Loki*, for example, was updated in 1959 for the German text, before appearing in a new edition in French in 1986, shortly before Dumézil's death.¹⁴² The 1970 English translation *Archaic Roman Religion* updated the French *La Religion romaine archaïque* from 1966, which was itself republished in 1974, incorporating these and other changes.¹⁴³ The Spanish *Los Dioses de los Indoeuropeos* included additional notes updating *Les Dieux des Indo-Européens*.¹⁴⁴ Given the challenge of locating some of his works, especially in first editions, readers can find it difficult to see the development of his ideas. The text presented here helps to show how one of his works changed, as well as bringing an important work back into circulation.

Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens deserves more attention. One of the reviews of the original English edition of *Mitra-Varuna* bemoaned the lack of a translation of *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* and suggested many readers would await it rather than turn to this book. According to various reports, a translation was considered, but it never appeared. Littleton reports that the anthropologist, Rodney Needham, planned to translate it for Oxford University Press, but that the press abandoned the idea.¹⁴⁵ Other reports, including from Dumézil himself, say it was considered by University of Chicago Press.¹⁴⁶ Over forty years since its publication, no translation has been made. Indeed there have been no new translations of his work since the atypical *The Riddle of Nostradamus: A Critical Dialogue*, in 1999.¹⁴⁷ This followed the Johns Hopkins University Press paperback edition of *Archaic Roman Religion*, in 1996, first translated for the University of Chicago Press in 1970. Until now the only English edition still in print is *The Destiny of a King*. Making available again works which *are* in translation is perhaps a first step towards getting more of his work into English.

In another review, N.J. Allen characterised *Mitra-Varuna* as “a period piece, in some parts superseded by Dumézil's own later formulation.”¹⁴⁸ He elaborates:

In what respects is the 1948 book superseded? Some themes (e.g. *nexum* and *mutuum* in Roman law) simply lose salience or vanish, but usually Dumézil's changes of mind are explicit. Thus, the Irish gods Lug and Nuadu cease to be homologised with the Norse Odin and Tyr (DSIE [*Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*] 199), and the full complement of first-function Indo-European deities comes to consist of four sovereigns not two (which largely explains the change of title from *MV* [*Mitra-Varuna*] to *DSIE*). Because the Mitra-Varuna opposition is encompassed within a triadic structure, the comparison with the Chinese *yang* v. *yin* needed qualification (DSIE 78–80). More generally, Dumézil came to distrust the structuralists' emphasis on dualities, and his later criticism of Hegelian habits of mind tends to undermine his own 1948 formulation of the varna schema.

In sum, this book needs to be read in the light of the author's self-criticism. A propos of the Norse figure of Mitrothyn he remarked that "one of the joys of research [is] to correct a false solution or a half-solution". It is also a joy to watch a great mind boldly deploying massive erudition to envisage unexpected types of order, but doing so with humility before the evidence and with willingness to admit error.¹⁴⁹

Dumézil encountered strong criticism, often from specialists. But this was not simply because of the undoubted errors he made, which he often corrected in later works.¹⁵⁰ It was, in part, because he was a comparativist, trespassing on their land. He reserved some strong criticism for their defences, mocking the way that all manner of work was accepted as long as "traditional forms are respected," but research from outside was condemned if it neglected existing literature or made a minor translation error. "One can imagine under such conditions what sort of hearing a comparativist could hope for: obliged to work with a score of languages and to orient themselves in their philologies, how could they be, for each one, as complete, agile, and as informed of the most recent developments as the scholars who devote all their time to it alone?"¹⁵¹ As Dubuisson expands:

Although he was one of them—and among the most gifted—Dumézil opposed the "classical" philologists. Disagreements arose from all sides regarding their respective foundations; we must not forget that these thick-skinned adversaries represented a very powerful and rigid force—the very model and heart of the university institutions of the time. Its members, sure of their humanist mission and of the

superiority of their discipline and its traditional tools, never listened to the lessons of the comparativists.¹⁵²

The question of Dumézil's influence lies beyond the scope of this Introduction, but he was important to, among others, Lévi-Strauss, a range of classicists including Jean-Pierre Vernant, and a significant mentor to Michel Foucault, who read and discussed his work for thirty years.¹⁵³

Editing this text has been both a pleasure and a challenge. In following up Dumézil's references to check, complete, and sometimes correct them, I have begun to get a sense of how he worked. Consulting some of his papers at the Collège de France has opened a further window into his approach: continually working and reworking ideas, adding more and more references and examples, testing ideas in the classroom before publication. His lecture notes seem to have begun with text tightly written in a right-hand column, with additions in the left. With his tiny and difficult-to-decipher handwriting, and the number of additions and replacements, texts are often very hard to read. He often pastes slips of paper onto the side of these sheets with more material. He frequently used these lectures as the basis of his subsequent books, and, as the revision process of his publications indicates, these then provided the basis for further development, refinement, and revision.

In 1943 in *Servius et la fortune*, Dumézil suggests that he had come across the problem he addresses in that book at the intersection (*carrefour*) of four paths. These paths were his previous work on connected themes: on the conception and practice of royal power, particularly the contrast between terrible and benevolent power; on social order, and in particular the tripartite division; on the beginnings of Rome, especially its early kings, institutions, and religion; and on religious, juridical, and political vocabulary.¹⁵⁴ As Georges Canguilhem says in his 1967 review of Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*, *The Order of Things*, "by virtue of their meeting at the Dumézil intersection, these four paths have become roads."¹⁵⁵ It is not difficult to see how early steps along all these paths can be found in *Mitra-Varuna*. It is therefore an entirely appropriate book to re-introduce Dumézil's pioneering, influential, and important work addressing sovereignty to Anglophone audiences.

Editorial Note

The original English translation by Derek Coltman has been used as the basis of this edition. Coltman translates Dumézil's text accurately and with judicious choices. Reviews at the time ranged from the lukewarm—"the quality of the translation is acceptable"—to the more positive—"the translation is very good and the production is beautiful."¹ I have reviewed the entire text but made relatively few changes to the translation itself. In particular, we have tried to standardize the transliteration of words. The footnotes, on the other hand, generally follow the inconsistent French.

In almost all cases Coltman simply copied Dumézil's references, not checking their accuracy and only on odd occasions providing English equivalents. Dumézil's references are, however, neither complete nor entirely accurate. He uses abbreviations, especially for journals but also for monographs published in series, misses volumes or years, and sometimes makes simple mistakes. The editions of texts he used have sometimes been superseded. I have verified and completed Dumézil's references to secondary sources, and have been defeated only by a reference to a book which seems never to have been published and may instead be an article.

Dumézil does not generally provide details of editions he used of classical texts. I have neither tried to identify the editions or translations he used, nor provided a modern English equivalent in the notes. Given the standard referencing style for almost all these texts—with book, chapter, and section—correct references should allow readers to find cited passages in any good edition. But Dumézil's references,

though usually precise, are not always accurate. I have therefore verified all the references, and have amended those which are incorrect. With some texts, such as Pliny's *Natural History*, Dumézil's references do not match the editions with widest circulation in English. I have therefore amended the references but noted the ones he gives in endnotes. Some of Dumézil's Sanskrit references are taken from texts which are not translated in full in a Western European language, but these usually come from John Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, and there I have identified the source.

Simple typographical errors corrected in the second French edition are not noted. In the standard way, an asterisk before a word signifies a reconstructed form.

Dumézil's cross-references are often missing from Coltman's translation. They have been reintroduced here. References are to the French 1948 edition/current critical edition. The original translation removes the section numbers but they have also been reintroduced here.

Footnotes (Roman numerals) are Dumézil's own references added to the second edition, with some of his lengthier in-text references also moved to these notes. Any editorial interpolations, particularly to expand Dumézil's sometimes abbreviated references, are placed in brackets.

Endnotes (Arabic numerals) are the editor's, either providing textual comparison between the two French editions or giving additional references, including English translations when available. The original translator did not provide any notes or expand references, and on only a few occasions, notably the references to Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, did he provide an English equivalent. I have done much more, which I hope readers will find useful.

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revised text attempts to present the controversy about Dumézil's political positions in an objective way.*

* The Dumézil family makes the following points: 1) Georges Dumézil had long abandoned any form of active political engagement by the time he embarked on the trifunctional program toward the end of the 1930s; 2) there is absolutely no evidence that the friendship relations of Dumézil with Eliade, or the mutual academic homages between Höfler and Dumézil mentioned in the introduction by Stuart Elden contained elements of political nature, nor that the reasons for quoting some authors known for or suspected of authoritarian politics went beyond the needs of normal scientific debate.