Explorations in the ideological infrastructure of Indo-European studies.

Modèles linguistiques et Idéologie: "Indo-Européen" ed. by Sylvie Vanséveren. Bruxelles:

Éditions Ousia, 2000. (186 pp.)

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Before beginning this review, I searched for the word "Indo-European" on the Internet. 700 milliseconds later, the search engine Google reported no few than 152,000 attestations in cyberspace, ten times more than for "Uralic", but less than a tenth of the number of hits garnered by "Tolkien" or "Star Trek". Of the first hundred or so sites listed, the vast majority appear to be devoted to linguistics or lexicography, but among them were the Web page of the Church of Indo-European Wicca, instructions for performing a Proto-Indo-European Solitary Ritual ("Face east and say: *Deiwons aisyém.* [I wish to honor the gods]"), and the illustrated text of "The March of the Titans: A History of the White Race". Scarcely a generation after Bopp, Grimm and Pott began working out the implications of the discovery that the classical languages of India and Iran manifested a special kinship with most European tongues, Joseph Artur de Gobineau (1983 [1853-1855]) made the Indo-European hypothesis the cornerstone of his grand narrative of the special role played by the "Aryan race" in the creation of the world's civilizations. A century and a half later, transmitted through a succession of historical fantasies created by the likes of H. S. Chamberlain, Hans F. K. Günther, and Roger Pearson, the reconstituted people called "Indo-Europeans" appear on our computer screens, as fetishes of racial pride or latter-day pagan imaginings.

Nonetheless, one can point to ample evidence that, at least in professional circles, the lessons of the Aryan cult of Hitler's Germany and its aftermath have sensitized many to the problematic relation among linguistic affiliation, culture and phenotypic markers. Since World War II, and even earlier, some specialists have experimented with alternative models of Indo-European origins, which emphasize hybridity and inter-ethnic contact at the expense of "racial" purity and endogamy (e.g. Trubetzkoy 1987 [1937], Zimmer 1990, Demoule 1991); and Jean Haudry's (1981) projection of Nordic attributes onto the ancient Indo-European-speaking populations has

come under attack (Sergent 1982, 1995: 434-441). Critics have pointed to Orientalist bias, in Said's sense, informing much of the publicity surrounding the discovery of Bronze-Age European-like mummies in Xinjiang province, the quickness to link them to Indo-European-speakers (Tocharians in particular), and to interpret them as evidence of Western influence on early Chinese civilization (Zimmer 1998; Light 1999). But can Indo-European studies be completely rehabilitated? Has the troubled, and troubling, history of the Aryan concept since Gobineau's time revealed not just the susceptibility of certain types of discourses about the past to appropriation by racists and ethnonationalists, but, more fundamentally, the flaws inherent in ANY attempt to do prehistoric ethnology that ventures too far beyond the linguistic reconstructions sanctioned by the standard historical-comparative method, and a cautious, restrictive reading of the archaeological data?

The collection *Modèles linguistiques et Idéologie: "Indo-Européen"* originated in a 1998 symposium of the same title, held at the Belgian Institut des Hautes Études. It comprises two brief introductory sections and nine chapters. All of the contributors, save two, are affiliated with either the Université Libre de Bruxelles or the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique, which provided financial support for the organization of the symposium and the publication of the book under review. In her brief "présentation" (pp. 9-10), volume editor Sylvie Vanséveren reminds her readers of the historical and ideological situatedness of all attempts to reconstruct the past. In the following sections Guy Haarscher ("Avant-propos", 11-12) and Baudouin Decharneux ("Introduction philosophique: Les Indo-Européens : de l'Étude aux fantasmes", 13-20) hold up the French *Nouvelle Droite*, and Jean Haudry in particular, as a case in point, to illustrate the susceptibility of Indo-European Studies to "récupération idéologique … par les politiques en quête de légitimité" (17). Fair enough, but I cannot help wondering if Haudry has become too easy a target, a poster-child for contemporary neo-reactionary nostalgia for the imagined "Indo-European" roots of Western civilization. As I mentioned above, his pamphlet on the Indo-Europeans in the highly-regarded "Que sais-je?" series was sharply criticized by Sergent, Demoule and others. The Institute for Indo-European Studies, which Haudry founded at his home university in Lyon, was disbanded shortly after his retirement in the face of student

protests at the presence of an "ideological laboratory for the *Front National*" (the extreme-right political party headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, with which Haudry had been involved) on their campus. The focus on Haudry has, in my view, deflected attention from other troubling instances of cozy collaboration between Indo-European research and the far right, such as the one mentioned at the end of this review. It has also made it easier to overlook the implications of the truism, repeated by Vanséveren, that research in linguistics, or any other discipline for that matter, "is never completely exempt from ideology, understood here in the broad sense of a system of ideas" (10).

The following three chapters shift the focus from the ideological context of Indo-European studies to the reconstruction of the social ideology of the ancient Indo-Europeans themselves. As one would expect — all the more so in a French-language collection — all three authors refer to Georges Dumézil and his celebrated hypothesis that the early Indo-European-speaking peoples imagined society as composed of three complementary "functions", which can be roughly labelled religion, war and food-production. Daniel Dubuisson has devoted a considerable part of his professional career to the analysis and exegesis of Dumézil's work, most notably in his book comparing the mythological projects of Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss and Eliade (Dubuisson 1993). In his chapter ("Théorie, histoire et limites du comparatisme dumézilien", 21-42), Dubuisson recounts the history of Dumézil's tripartite system from its original formulation in 1938 through successive reworkings across a half-century of scholarly activity and dozens of monographs. Dubuisson's objective is to uncover the presuppositions underlying the Dumézilian enterprise of inferring characteristics of the social thought of a hypothesized early Bronze-Age speech community from the myths, rituals, epics and legends of the various Indo-European-speaking peoples. As Dubuisson notes, Dumézil's reconstruction reposes upon the assumption that proto-Indo-European culture was homogenous and uniform, and on a notion of ideology as "diffuse, dominant and unique" within a given culture (36-37; he also reproaches Dumézil for the near-absence of references to social theorists in his vast oeuvre). That being said, what is the value of Dumézil's fifty-odd books and hundreds of papers to the readers of today? Can the results of a lifetime's scholarship be waved away as amounting to no more than a "closed and rather cozy

mythological world … rooted neither in time nor in space" (Renfrew 1987: 286)? Dubuisson appears to have come far closer to Renfrew's assessment that one might have expected, but holds back from a blanket dismissal. He points to the value of Dumézil's finely philological textual analyses, in dozens of languages and traditions as a stimulus to further inquiry, whether or not they led their author to credible historical reconstructions: "They were made to help us think a bit better, and not to compel us to believe" (40). On the way to this curious conclusion, Dubuisson points to the tendency in Dumézil's work to assume that ancient Indian literature provides a particularly close vantage-point on proto-Indo-European culture, a methodological prejudice also criticized in the following two papers. The founders of Indo-European comparative linguistics, as is well known, regarded Vedic Sanskrit as a living fossil, little changed from the speech of the ancestral community. The subsequent history of the discipline is marked by successive moves away from this assumption — the Law of Palatals, the centum-satem isogloss, and the laryngeal hypothesis, to say nothing of the more radical reconstructions proposed by Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (1984), Lehmann (1993) and others. In Sylvie Vanséveren's view ("Hector ou la recherche du guerrier indo-européen", 43-59), Indic data continues to be accorded undue weight in both linguistic and mythological reconstruction. It has long been the consensus of etymologists that the Greek proper name *Hektōr* is ultimately derived from the Indo-European root **segʽh-*. The Indo-Iranian and Germanic reflexes of this root (e.g. "Sieg") have associations with force and conquest not evident in the numerous Greek lexemes descended from **segʽh-*, such as *ekh-ein* "have, possess". Vanséveren casts doubt on the hypothesis, reflected in the etymological dictionaries of Pokorny (1959: 888) and Mayrhofer (1991: 717-718) — neither of which, for some mysterious reason, is mentioned in the text — that Indo-Iranian more faithfully continues the older meaning (44-46). (That may be so, but just as many etymologists — Chantraine (1990: 392-4), Gamkrelidze & Ivanov (1984: 289), among others — gloss **segʽh-* as "hold" or its equivalents, so this Indo-Iranian bias does not seem to be as generalized as Vanséveren makes it out to be). Looking beyond linguistics to the arguments from textual analysis and comparative mythology, she points out the flaws in the assertion that the Homeric figure of Hector, whose name would have originally meant "warrior, conqueror", is in part

derived from an early Indo-European prototype representing Dumézil's second function. A similar cautionary tale is proffered by Francine Mawet, this time in the domain of comparative religion ("Inde: réponses ou questions?", 61-84). After presenting a brief overview of German Romantic Sanskritophilia, and pointing to the evidence for non-Indo-European substratal (or adstratal) elements in the language of the Vedas (65), she looks at the much-discussed comparison of the Vedic *puruṣa* to other representations of the primordial man in Indo-European creation myths (71-76). Much of Mawet's criticism is directed toward an early work by Lincoln (1981), done within a framework of mythological reconstruction which its own author has recently called into question (see below). Mawet wonders whether comparative mythology has sufficient methodological constraints against weakly-supported hypotheses, the simplification of data and the overlooking of complicating divergences among the corpora being compared. Does this discipline have a "garde-fou" (78), constraining the range of acceptable explanations, that can approach the role of sound laws in historical linguistics? Mawet appears to think not, and ends her chapter with the suggestion that it might be wiser in the future to treat early Indian texts as the product of a long tradition and considerable literary reworking, rather than as a "reservoir of archaic traditions" (80).

If Mawet has brought up the important question of constraints on hypothesis formation, the author of the following chapter, Christian Peeters ("Parenté génétique, reconstruction et identité diachronique", 85-96), shows how one ought not to answer it. Peeters preaches an uncommonly puritanical brand of Neogrammarian fundamentalism, according to which proto-languages are to be reconstructed only on the basis of "diachronic identities" (92), these being attested cognates linked in all respects through exceptionless sound laws. All other etymologies — for example, those which depend on the reconstruction of un-*lautgesetzlich* phenomena such as metathesis, analogically-motivated change, etc. — are "more or less probable, but are in the domain of unverifiable hypotheses" (96). And so indeed they are, but what Peeters fails to grasp is the simple fact that the "lois phonétiques", at whose altar he worships, are no less unverifiable. Granted, some of the more robust sound correspondences are supported by hundreds of cognate sets, but, as any undergrad majoring in philosophy can tell you, one cannot PROVE that they are

due to a specific sound change that operated at some time in the past, any more than one can prove that the universe is more than five minutes old (to paraphrase Bertrand Russell). In any case, while some linguists have invoked the special status of sound laws in etymological argumentation (e. g. in the debate over the origins of French "trouver" and its cognates, summarized by Tappolet 1977 [1905]), practicing linguists are well aware of the difficulty of ascertaining whether less robust correspondences count as "sound laws" (to the extent that that matters), and that, even in the cases of the best-supported sound changes, "exceptionlessness" is a matter of degree. (With regard to this and the two preceding chapters, I feel it necessary to call attention to the clumsy phonetic transcriptions imposed by the editor. The retroflex consonants of Sanskrit are indicated by italics (or by normal style if the rest of word in italics!), and in Peeter's paper one finds, for example, "schiessen" rendered phonetically as [Si:s∂n] (92). This limitation of transcriptions to what is available in standard character sets might have been an acceptable shortcut thirty years ago, but it is simply no longer excusable, in view of the easy availability of phonetic fonts).

Romana Aerts ("L'Histoire des Perses de A. de Gobineau dans le cadre de la mythologie de l'impérialisme indo-européen", 97-108) looks at a less celebrated work by one of the founding fathers of "scientific racism". Much has been written about the influence of Gobineau's essay on racial inequality on Wagner, Houston S. Chamberlain, Alfred Rosenberg, and ultimately on Hitler (Young 1968), but his other writings have drawn less attention. Gobineau lived in Iran, during his career as a diplomat, had a good knowledge of the Persian language, and took an active interest in Persian history, especially that of the most ancient periods. In his view, the rise of the Sasanid dynasty, followed by the adoption of Islam, were accompanied by a heavy influx of "Semitic" features into what had hitherto been a largely "Aryan" culture. Therefore, Gobineau believed that the study of the earliest Iranian texts would shed light on the past of not only the Iranians, but of the Indo-Europeans (and even of the white race as a whole, of which the Indo-Europeans were the most advanced representatives). Aerts looks at Gobineau's racialized reading of early Iranian literature, especially the *Vendidâd*, in which he believed he found the history of the earliest migrations of the Iranians from the "cradle of the Aryans" in the Central Asian

highlands. She points out the racial distinctions Gobineau imposed on what is more likely to have been the religious or cultural differences signaled by the oppositions in these early texts between Iranians and non-Iranians.

The following chapter (Lambros Couloubaritsis, "Le statut idéologique des schèmes archaïques", 109-126), begins with a characterization of "la culture archaïque", as if there were only one, and how its discursive practices differ from those of "l'homme moderne" (as if there were only one!). Papers that begin with generalizations of this kind, especially when they are unsupported by data from any culture other than ancient Greece, most often turn out to be vacuous, and Couloubaritsis' meditation on myth, as the preferred discursive mode of "archaic man" to describe visible and invisible reality (115), is no exception. Perhaps I would have found it less vacuous if I had undergone analysis by a Jungian therapist, but I rather doubt it. Be that as it may, this piece really has no place in this volume.

The reader that has made it this far will be pleased to discover that the last two chapters in the volume are quite good, arguably the best of the lot. Michèle Broze & Lucie Paulissen ("Le grec des non-Grecs dans les textes chrétiens : idéologie et critique littéraire", 127-142) examine the remarkably subjective manner in which philologists emit judgments of the stylistic features of different authors writing in Greek. It was once commonly thought, for example, that a high frequency of particles was linked to oral, conversational style, and that they would thus be especially abundant in the speech of women, and in the writing of "naive", less-skilled authors such as Xenophon. When the Belgian Hellenist Yves Duhoux (1997) did a statistical study, few of the expected tendencies emerged: particles are no more frequent in discursive passages than in narrative ones, and Aristotle employed them every bit as often as Xenophon. The subjective component of stylistic judgments becomes particularly apparent in specialist assessments of the quality of the Greek in the non-canonical infancy narratives of Jesus. These paleo-Christian texts, such as the Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas discussed by Broze & Paulissen, present a radically different image of the Christ-child than the familiar one found in the canonical New Testament: this is a petulant, easily-offended and occasionally lethal Jesus, who does not refrain from the use of his divine powers to blind or even kill playmates who bump into him or break his toys.

Philologists, especially those most scandalized by the content of the infancy narratives, have routinely described them as written in low-quality, defective Greek, as stylistically barbarous and poorly constructed (138). Broze & Paulissen take pains to point out that the Greek of the Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas seems in no way remarkably different from that of the Septuagint or the New Testament, and that its author seems to have been familiar with the intricacies of the grammatico-philosophical terminology of the time (139-140).

The final chapter (Paul-Louis van Berg, Marc Vander Linden & Nicolas Cauwe, "Les Indo-Européens dans l'Espace. Le cas de la Grèce à l'âge du Bronze", 143-186) is the only contribution written by archaeologists. The authors attempt to fix the time of the arrival of the first Indo-European speakers in Bronze-Age Greece through an analysis of archaeological evidence of spatial organization. This paper appears to be have been spun off from a larger-scale research project entitled *Espaces et Sociétés — Approches comparatives*, the progress of which interested readers can follow at the web site <www.espasoc.org>. The authors begin by problematizing the approaches to Indo-European prehistory developed by Gimbutas and Renfrew, and cite with favor Demoule's (1998) complaint that the most widely-accepted forms of the Indo-European hypothesis are not so much conclusions militated by the facts, as the products of circular reasoning and biased interpretation (148-149). At this point, van Berg et al. shift gears, and lay out their method for getting beyond the impasse just described. I lack the specialist knowledge of Aegean history and archaeology needed to evaluate the empirical basis on which their conclusions rest, but the structure of their argument strikes me as well-founded. In brief, they sift the Bronze-Age data from Crete and Greece for what it reveals of the dominant principles of spatial organization of successive cultural phases. The authors define "space" in an especially broad sense, as an ideologically-loaded field manifested not only in architecture, burials and settlement layout, and also in the small-scale phenomena of ceramic decorations, figurative art, and the like. Their investigation points to a sharp demarcation in spatial organization toward the end of Old Helladic II (c. 2200 BCE), the strongest regional similarities to which are found in the Balkans rather than the Mediterranean area. They interpret this change as a token of the arrival of the first Hellenic speakers in Greece (175-6).

So how do the diverse and uneven contributions to the Vanséveren collection address the theme announced in the title: the interplay of linguistic models and ideology in the representing of the Indo-Europeans? There is great deal of criticism and debunking in these papers, especially where comparative mythology is concerned; few authors propose improvements to the methods that they criticize (other than urging caution). The Broze & Paulissen chapter reminds us that even classical philologists, for all of their aura of deep and precise textual knowledge, are no less susceptible to the distorting effects of prejudice than their colleagues who study prehistory. Rather than motivate a unitary answer to the questions I asked at the outset of this review, the chapters in this volume, taken together, represent Indo-European studies as a mansion of many rooms, through which Ideology strolls in a variety of guises. I counted five points where ideology can be said to intervene in the construction of Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans; there may well be others (cf. Koerner 2002): (1) the assumptions directing comparative-historical linguistics, and the postulation and reconstruction of unattested ancestral languages; (2) the projection of a proto-speech community that spoke the proto-language; (3) imagining this speech community as a society, with a homeland, political organization, economy, dominant phenotype, etc.; (4) the attribution of a culture to the proto-society; (5) the reconstruction of elements of the proto-culture (religion, mythology, social ideology, etc.). As is well known, many linguists refuse to go further than (1) — or perhaps (2), in the case of those who seek to reconstruct phonetically-realistic proto-languages. It is at point (3), of course, that Haudry's image of blue-eyed warriors, impelled by "an unquenchable will to conquer, and to surpass themselves and others", clashes with Zimmer's counter-scenario of the Indo-Europeans as a so-called *colluvies gentium,* "a heterogeneous group of people: displaced folk of all kinds, adventurers, outlaws … at the fringes of established, i.e. sedentary agrarian societies" (1990: 146). At (4), those archaeologists who, like Renfrew, reconstruct Indo-European prehistory primarily on the basis of demographic and economic models (the spread of early agriculturists), and who are skeptical of most proposals concerning the nature of Proto-Indo-European culture, part company with those who believe they can detect cultural markers in the archaeological record (cf. Gimbutas' polarizing characterizations of Indo-European and "Old European" ideological complexes).

Dumézil's trifunctional schema, but also van Berg et al.'s principles of spatial organization, are the products of an ideology of ideological reconstruction, if you will, at point (5).

A year before the Vanséveren collection appeared, the historian of religions Bruce Lincoln published a surprisingly confessional study on a similar theme. Two decades ago, Lincoln produced some important work on early Indo-European myth, although he was more interested in narrative structures than Dumézil (cf. the cattle-raiding cycle reconstructed in Lincoln 1981), and the type of ideology he sought beneath the texts he studied was more akin to Woolard's (1998) "id-eology" (with a focus on power and false consciousness, "the id lurking under thin cover" (Woolard 1998: 8)), than to the broader domain of "idea-ology", encompassing all that is "ideational and representational", of interest to Dumézil. In this new book, Lincoln explains why he has turned his back on the reconstruction of ancient myth. Much of the text is given over, in fact, to the analysis of ancient myth, but to the declared goal is critical rather than historical: Lincoln seeks to reveal the "contingent system of discrimination", that mythic packaging "naturalizes and legitimates" (Lincoln 1999: 147). This is ideology, as he now defines it. Furthermore, in his view, the dominant ideology of a society, or that motivating a particular author (or ideologue, one might say), is most commonly reflected in some kind of taxonomy, or relative ranking of peoples, social groups, genders, classes, and the like. Contingent systems of discrimination are not the exclusive property of the ancient Greeks or their remote Indo-European ancestors; Lincoln finds them in all discursive fields, including that of his own profession. "If myth is ideology in narrative form", he concludes, "then scholarship is myth with footnotes" (Lincoln 1999: 209). To drive this point home, Lincoln sheds his flashlight on selected skeletons in the closet of Indo-European studies. Some of these we have seen before (Haudry, yet again (Lincoln 1999: 121-122)), and Lincoln even attempts to bring closure to a long-standing and unpleasant quarrel with the Dumézilians, in which he, the former student of Eliade (!), accused Dumézil of right-wing bias (see, e.g., the *Times Literary Supplement* 1986: 1107-8 (Oct. 3), 1375 (Dec. 5), 1425 (Dec. 19)). He now acknowledges that Eliade's involvement in pre-war Romanian fascistoid circles was far more grievous than anything that has been successfully pinned on Dumézil (Lincoln 1999: 146; cf. Dubuisson 1993). Other shadowy

figures have hitherto drawn less notice, at least in US academia. Although Duranton-Crabol (1988: 148), almost fifteen years ago, pointed with alarm to his involvement, Lincoln appears to be the first US-based Indo-European specialist to openly comment on the worrisome background of Roger Pearson, the publisher of the prestigious *Journal of Indo-European Studies* since its founding in 1973. Anyone with a computer and an Internet account can readily access some very disturbing information about this gentleman's activities on the fringes of the American extreme right, his links to the *Mankind Quarterly* and the Pioneer Fund, and his publications on the "racial" history of Europe (Pearson 1966), eugenics and similar topics (Lincoln 1999: 122-123). Lincoln's point, it must be emphasized, is not that the Pearsons, Haudrys, Gobineaux and their ilk have been led astray by ideology, whereas we right-thinking scholars have resisted its seductive song. No: myth is ideology, scholarship — ALL scholarship — is myth … with footnotes. In Lincoln's view, footnotes "serve as a visible reminder that scholarly texts result from a dialectic encounter between an interested inquirer, a body of evidence, and a community of other competent and interested researchers, … their engagements being mediated by shared principles of theory and method" (Lincoln 1999: 208). The fundamental flaw of the above-named authors is ignorance, willful or not, of the complexity of the evidence, and failure to appreciate the weaknesses of their hypotheses in comparison to ideologically less convenient alternatives. Hence the value of the careful sifting through data exemplified by some of the authors in the Vanséveren collection, even if it seems to be directed at little more than the dislodging of a brick underpinning someone else's grand synthesis. Dubuisson (39) makes the strange assertion that the magnificence of Dumézil's oeuvre somehow rendered "philological hypercriticism" obsolete. I disagree both with the factual basis of this remark, and the desirability of such a state of affairs. It is the agonistic, and occasionally acrimonious, back-and-forth between grand synthesizers and hypercritics (and Dumézil — the Dumézil of the footnotes — was a superb hypercritic!) that assures that Indo-European studies, wherever one situates its frontiers, remains a venue of exciting, rewarding scholarly activity.

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