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Alderik H. Blom und Gordon Ó Riain

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The Irish myth of Balar's killing by Lug, the Norse myth of Baldr's killing by Loki, and the Indic myth of the Wounded Sun

Zusammenfassung

Die Erzählung von „Balars Tötung durch Lug“ war in irischen Volksmärchen aus dem 19. und 20. Jahrhundert immer noch präsent, ihre älteste Erwähnung findet sich aber im alt-irischen Epos Cath Maige Tuired (619–45). Diese traditionelle Erzählung wurde mit dem nordischen Mythos von „Baldrs Tötung durch Loki“ verglichen, der am ausführlichsten in Snorri Sturlusons Prosa-Edda (Gylfaginning 49) erzählt wird. Aufbauend auf früheren Arbeiten des Autors argumentiert der Artikel für eine Reihe sprachlicher und struktureller Parallelen (die auf einen gemeinsamen Ursprung hinweisen) zwischen den oben genannten Mythen und dem indischen Mythos der „Verwundeten Sonne“, einer traditionellen Erzählung, die bereits im Rigveda bezeugt ist und von Stephanie W. Jamison in einem einschlägigen Buch ausführlich analysiert wurde.

1. Introduction¹

The myth of “Balar’s killing by Lug” was still current in Irish folktales from the 19th and 20th century (see RADNER 1992), the most famous example probably being the “Tory Island version” of the tale of the killing of an evil king

¹ This study is part of the project “SunSHINE – The Sun-chariot’s Journey Towards the Nordic Sky: on the (Pre-)History of Ideas on Sky, Sun, and Sunlight in Northern Europe”, which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 890522. It is my great pleasure to thank the members of the Roots of Europe research group at the University of Copenhagen, where my project was based, for their support and especially my project’s academic supervisor, Birgit Olsen. I would also like to thank Elisa Roma and Chiara Zanchi as the organizers of the “3rd European Symposium in Celtic Studies” at the University of Pavia (7–9/9/2022), where I presented a previous version of this study, as well as the other participants for their helpful comments and critical remarks, especially Mark Darling, Stefan Dedio, and Aaron Griffith. Special thanks go to Kim McCone for his exceptional kindness and his insightful guidance in the world of Irish literature and myth. The usual disclaimers apply.

Translations are adapted from O'DUFFY 1888 (*Oidhe chloinne Tuireann*), FAULKES 1987 (Snorri), FRIIS-JENSEN & FISHER 2015 (Saxo), GRAY 1982 (*Cath Maige Tuired*), GWYNN 1924 (*Metrical Dindshenchas*), and JAMISON & BRERETON 2014 (*Rigveda*). Passages from Snorri’s *Edda* are quoted on the basis of FAULKES’s (2005) normalized edition.

called *Balor* (a variant of *Balar*)² by a hero called *Lui* (a more recent phonetic variant of *Lug*), recorded by Jeremiah CURTIN and published in 1894; as is well known, however, the most ancient attestation of this mythical episode is actually preserved by the encounter of Balar and Lug in battle within the (probably 9th-century CE) Old Irish epos *Cath Maige Tuired* (lines 619–45; *CMT*). The two summaries below present the elements of the folktale and epic versions that are most relevant to this study:

Folktale version (CURTIN 1894's "Balor on Tory Island")

Balor was once a monstrous king of Tory Island who had a single poisonous eye with which he was able to burn anything to ashes. He had a daughter whom he kept in a tower isolated from all men because a prophecy had foretold Balor's demise at the hands of his own grandson. One day, however, a young hero, who had come to Balor's castle to retrieve a stolen cow, managed to lie with Balor's daughter and impregnate her before fleeing. Balor's grandson, Lui, was thus conceived, who eventually managed to drive an incandescent piece of iron through Balor's poisonous eye and slay his grandfather.

Epic version (*CMT*)

During a battle between the *Túatha Dé* 'god-peoples' and their adversaries the Fomoiri, the gods' champion Lug and his grandfather Balar *Birug-derc* 'piercing-eye', one of the Fomoiri, met in battle. Balar had a destructive eye which would only be opened on the battlefield by four servants. With his eye, Balar was able to defeat any host who looked at it, no matter how numerous. The eye's destructive power originated from the fumes of a concoction made by some druids, which had settled in Balar's eye and made it poisonous. When Balar and Lug met in battle, as soon as the former's servants opened his eye, the latter cast a sling stone into it and killed Balar, who fell dead on top of his own men, killing several of them.

As argued by Kim McCONE (1989: 137–9; 1990: 158–9), this *CMT* passage seems to blend an older mythological layer with the Biblical story of David (identified with Lug) and Goliath (identified with Balor)³ – but how can we reconstruct this ancient pre-Christian layer?

Comparative mythology may help in this respect, as Balar's killing by Lug has long been noted (cf. e.g. ROTH 1961: 114–26) to share at least some of its

² Already attested in the *CMT*, where, however, according to McCONE (2022: 191–2), it may be analyzed as a secondary spelling variant in the 'orthographically extravagant Harley text' of the epos; see also GINEVRA 2020A:198–9 and n. 27. In what follows, I will generically refer to the character as *Balar* when the distinction between the two is irrelevant, but I will use the variant *Balor* in discussing details that are exclusively attested for the folktale character. The same holds for the epic/generic variant *Lug* and the folktale variant *Lui*.

³ On the likely identification in the *CMT* of the *Túatha Dé* with the Israelites and of the Fomoiri with the Philistines, cf. also McCONE 1990: 70–1.

elements with the Norse myth of Baldr's killing by Loki as attested in the section *Gylfaginning* 'Tricking of Gylfi' (*Gylf*.; chapter 49) of the so-called *Prose Edda*, an extremely informative handbook of Norse poetics and mythology (drawing most of its material from earlier poetic sources and oral traditions) written by Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241 CE). A variant of the same Norse myth also occurs in the form of a heroic legend within Saxo Grammaticus's (11th–12th century CE) historiographical work in Latin *Gesta Danorum* 'Deeds of the Danes', whose account of the death of *Balderus* (sections 3.1–4) exhibits both differences from and similarities with Snorri's version – as expected, given that they are texts of very different genres composed in very different contexts.⁴ Below are summaries of the main elements of these two versions that are taken into account in this study:

Snorri's version

The god Baldr, son of Odin and Frigg, is so bright that light shines from him. His wife is Nanna *Neps-dóttir* 'daughter of Neffr.' While playing a game with the other gods, Baldr is unintentionally killed with a mistletoe twig by the blind god Høðr, who is maneuvered by the mischievous god Loki. Confused and perplexed by Baldr's death, the gods send Hermóðr to search for Baldr. He finds him in the Realm of the Dead. In order to bring Baldr back to life, every creature of the world has to weep for his death. When this fails, Baldr is forced to stay among the dead until the End of Time.

Saxo's version

The demigod Balderus (Baldr), son of Othinus (Odin), desires the maiden Nanna, daughter of Gevarus, after having spied on her while she was bathing. Balderus woos Nanna. She refuses him, as she loves her adoptive brother Høtherus (Høðr), who loves her back and decides to kill Balderus. After several vicissitudes, Høtherus pierces Balderus with his sword. Balderus dies.

The similarities between the names of the Irish and Norse characters had already been noted by ROTH, who regarded them as evidence for the influence of the Irish narrative on the Norse one (ROTH 1961: 126; 241). As argued in GINEVRA 2020A, however, the formal correspondences between Old Irish *Balar* (from Proto-Celtic **balar-o-* : **b^helHr-o-*) and Old Norse *Baldr* (from Proto-Germanic **balr-a-* : **b^holHr-o-*) may exclusively result from their common origin as two morphologically differentiated reflexes (both thematic, but with *-e*-grade and *-o*-grade of the root, respectively) of the same Proto-Indo-European (PIE) heteroclititic stem **b^hólH-ŕ-/b^hélH-n-* 'light' that is also reflected by Vedic *bhalla-* 'epithet of the Sun' (**b^hol[H]r-o-*, on which see below), Attic φάληρος

⁴ This is exemplified by the work of Snorri himself: there are huge differences between his mythographic *Edda* and his legendary/pseudo-historiographic saga *Ynglingasaga* 'Saga of the Ynglingar' in the treatment of the same mythological themes (e.g. the first war between Æsir and Vanir).

Doric $\phi\acute{\alpha}\lambda\tilde{\alpha}\rho\omicron\varsigma$ ‘white-spotted’ (ultimately from $*b^h\text{elH-}\acute{e}r$), and Gaulish Βελεινο- ‘name of a god’ (Proto-Celtic $*\text{Belīno-}$: $*b^h\text{elH-}\acute{e}n\acute{o}$ -), among others.⁵

The possibility of a borrowing must be ruled out in any case. One would expect Old Irish *Balar* to be borrowed as Old Norse $\ddot{r}\text{Balarr}$ (the $-d$ - of *Baldr* is completely unexplained), given that the suffix $-arr$ was fairly common within Old Norse onomastics, as exemplified by numerous onomastic formations of this kind attested in the mythological Eddic poem *Völuspá* (e.g. *Ánarr*, *Ginnarr*, *Hánarr*, *Lofarr*, *Víðarr*). The same holds true for Old Irish *Lug* (Proto-Celtic $*\text{lug-u-}$: $*\text{lug}^2\text{-u-}$) and Old Norse *Loki* (from Proto-Germanic $*\text{luk-an-}$: $*\text{lug}^2\text{-on-}$), which can be easily traced back to two morphologically differentiated derivatives ($-u$ - stem in Old Irish, $-n$ - stem in Old Norse) of the same PIE root $*\text{lug}^2$;⁶ in contrast, a borrowing scenario would require a number of unmotivated phonological and morphological substitutions (Old Norse $-o$ - for Old Irish $-u$ -; $-k$ - for $-g$ -; $-i$ for $-\emptyset$).⁷

A borrowing in the opposite direction (Old Norse to Old Irish) is even more unlikely in view of the fact that both Old Irish names have parallels in other Celtic traditions and must thus be reconstructed for Proto-Celtic: *Balar* exactly matches the Celtic name *Balarus* of a chief of the tribe of the Vettones (Sil. *Pun.* 3.378) and the Gaulish toponomastic element $*\text{Baláro-}$ attested by several French place-names (on both formations, see DELAMARRE 2003: 65); *Lug* is the Old Irish counterpart of the well-known Continental Celtic theonym *Lugus* (on which see STIFTER 2000).

Once the possibility of a borrowing is ruled out, the onomastic and narrative elements shared by the Irish and Norse episodes allow for the reconstruction of a common basic structure underlying these (at least West-)Indo-European myths of the “Killing of a god of ‘light’ ($*b^h\acute{o}lH\text{-}r\text{-}/b^h\acute{e}lH\text{-}n\text{-}$) by another god (‘the $*\text{lug}^2$ - one’)”. The following scheme summarizes this inherited pattern (particularly relevant semantic elements are marked in SMALL CAPITALS here and in the rest of this study):

Parallels between Balar’s and Baldr’s myths

(from GINEVRA 2020A: 203)

- (a) The name of the VICTIM is a reflex of PIE $*b^h\acute{o}lH\text{-}r\text{-}/b^h\acute{e}lH\text{-}n\text{-}$ ‘light’.
- (b) The name of the MURDERER is a reflex of a PIE root $*\text{lug}^2$.
- (c) The $*b^h\acute{o}lH\text{-}r\text{-}$ god is SLAIN with a PROJECTILE WEAPON by the $*\text{lug}^2$ - god.

⁵ For a detailed analysis of all these formations, see GINEVRA 2020A: *passim*; the same term may also underlie Gothic $\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\nu$ ‘horse with white spots’ ($*b^h\acute{o}l[H]\text{-on-}$), Albanian *balë* ‘white spot (on the forehead of animals)’ and Lithuanian *bálnas* ‘white, having a white back (cattle)’ (both reflecting $*b^h\acute{o}l[H]\text{-n-o-}$), on which see GINEVRA 2020A: 202 n. 34.

⁶ The name of the murderer may reflect either PIE $*\text{leug-}$ ‘destroy’ (*LIV*²: 415–6) or $*\text{leu}^2\text{-}$ ‘bend’ (*LIV*²: 416; cf. GINEVRA 2018A: 337–75 in support of the latter option).

⁷ This analysis supports the identification of *Lug* as a Celtic counterpart of the Norse god *Loki*, rather than of *Odin*: this older theory must be rejected, as convincingly argued in EGELER 2013: 92–6; cf. also GINEVRA 2020A: 204 n. 306.

As noted in GINEVRA 2020A: 203, two further features may be noted to be shared by the Norse and Irish mythological characters and are thus likely inherited. First, the **b^hólHr-* character is a god associated with the concept EYE, cf. Balar's epithet *birug-derc* 'of the piercing eye' and the Old Norse flower-name *Baldrs brá* 'Baldr's brow' (on which see below). Secondly, the **lu^g-* character may be interpreted as a trickster/culture-hero figure, an aspect of Loki (noted long ago by Jan DE VRIES [1933]) that finds parallels in Lug's traditional epithet *samildánach* 'equally gifted in all the arts' (cf. already DE VRIES 1933: 280–1) and in his characterization in myth (he uses a magic trick to kill the Children of Tuireann in the Early Modern Irish *Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann* 'The violent death of the children of Tuireann').

The Old Irish and Old Norse narrative may thus be analyzed as reflexes of a (West-)Indo-European myth, in which a god, associated with the PIE term **b^hólH-_r-/b^hélH-n-* 'light' and with the concept EYE, was fatally PIERCED by a TRICKSTER/CULTURE-HERO god, referred to as 'the **lu^g-* one', by means of a PROJECTILE WEAPON. As argued in GINEVRA 2023, however, the Norse myth of Baldr may also be noted to have a further set of linguistic and structural parallels, pointing to a common origin, in the Indic myth of the Wounded Sun as reconstructed by Stephanie W. JAMISON (1991: 133–303). The following is a summary of the elements of this ancient narrative as attested in the earliest Vedic scriptures, the *Rigveda* (RV):

The Vedic Wounded Sun (JAMISON 1991)

A prominent god of light, Father Sky or the Sun, desires or even rapes the maiden Uṣas 'Dawn', his own daughter. As a punishment for this sin, he is pierced 'with darkness' by the fire god Agni, variously called Svarbhānu Āsura or Rudra or 'archer'. The Sun falls from the heavens and is hidden in darkness. As the perception of all living beings is seriously impaired by the event (likely because of darkness), the gods send the hero Atri to find the Sun. Atri succeeds and restores cosmic order.

The parallels between several details of the Norse myth of Baldr's Death and the Indic myth of the Wounded Sun allow for the assumption of a common origin for both and for the reconstruction of an inherited mythological structure underlying these two Indo-European myths of the "Wounding/Killing of a God of Light", which may be summarized in the following points:

Parallels between Baldr's and the Wounded Sun's myths

(GINEVRA 2023)

- (a) The MALE protagonist is a GOD associated with LIGHT.
- (b) The MALE LIGHT GOD DESIRES or is MARRIED to or RAPES a MAIDEN who is SKY'S DAUGHTER (a reconstructed epithet of the Indo-European DAWN-GODDESS).
- (c) The MAIDEN is described as being SEEN while she is BATHING (a reconstructed feature of Indo-European SUN-MAIDENS).

- (d) The LIGHT GOD is PIERCED by a FIRE GOD with the aid of DARKNESS, conceptualized as either a COMPANION or a WEAPON.
- (e) After the LIGHT GOD is PIERCED, all GODS and LIVING BEINGS in general are in a state of GENERAL CONFUSION.
- (f) The GODS SEND a CHARACTER to SEARCH for the LIGHT GOD. The CHARACTER succeeds in FINDING him.

As already (albeit briefly) suggested in GINEVRA 2023: 99, further parallels for this inherited structure may be recognized in various Indo-European mythical traditions that have long been compared with the Norse and Vedic narratives, including (among others) the Greek myth of the rape of Persephone and the Irish myth of Balar's killing by Lug.

The latter is the focus of the present study, whose aim is thus to reconcile the two comparative analyses described above and to discuss further linguistic and structural parallels in order to argue for an analysis of the Irish myth of Balar, the Norse myth of Baldr, and the Indic myth of the Wounded Sun as reflexes of the same Indo-European mythological tradition; in order to do so, several details attested in the late Irish folktale recorded by CURTIN will be integrated into the comparative analysis, under the assumption that even more recent texts may preserve ancient traditional material.⁸ More precisely, several elements of the inherited structure reconstructed above on the basis of the Norse and Indic myths will be argued to have parallels in the epic and folktale versions of the Irish myth of Balar, namely: the identity of the VICTIM of the WOUNDING/KILLING (section 2); the latter's SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION with a FEMALE character (section 3); several details of the WOUNDING/KILLING itself (section 4). On the basis of these correspondences, a new reconstruction of the Indo-European myth of a "Wounding/Killing of a God of Light" will be advanced by taking into account the Irish data as well (section 5).

2. *The MALE VICTIM associated with LIGHT (PIE *b^hólH-r-) and EYE*

As anticipated above, even though Balar, a SUPERNATURAL BEING (one of the *Fomoiri* who battle the gods in the *CMT*) and the MALE VICTIM of the KILLING in the Irish myth, does not seem to be synchronically associated with LIGHT within Old Irish, his name may be traced back to a PIE archaism *b^hólH-r-/b^hélH-n- 'light, splendor', a heteroclitc derivative of a PIE root *b^helH- 'be white, shine' whose reflexes are often associated with SUN and SUNLIGHT in Indo-European traditions (see GINEVRA 2020A).

⁸ As demonstrated, e.g. by the evident elements of Indo-European heritage attested in the Baltic folk songs, which have only been written down in the past two centuries, but attest phraseology and themes which have strikingly close matches in, inter alia, the Ancient Greek and Vedic Sanskrit traditions.

Balar is also closely associated with the concept EYE: according to the epic [1], Balar had a magic *súil milldagach* 'destructive eye' always covered by a huge lid, which could only be raised in the battlefield in order to use the eye as a weapon; according to the folktale [2], Balor had an EYE in the middle of the forehead whose glance could burn anything to ashes, unless it was covered with nine shields of leather.

The Old Irish feminine *súil* 'eye' (earlier **sūl-i-* or **sūl-īā*) is a reflex of PIE **séh₂-ul-/sh₂-uén-* 'Sun':⁹ thus, the detail of the covering LID/SHIELDS preventing this *súil* from burning everything to ashes closely matches the role of the Old Norse mythological SHIELD called *Svǫl* or *Svalinn*,¹⁰ which 'stands before the Sun' (*sól* in Old Norse, another feminine reflex of PIE **séh₂-ul-* 'Sun'), 'a shield for the shining goddess; mountain and sea I know would burn up if he fell away from there' (*Grímnismál* 38.2–6).¹¹ It is thus conceivable that Balar's *súil* 'eye' acquired its covering shields when its possessor was still associated with LIGHT (PIE **b^hólH-r-*), just like its Old Norse cognate *sól* 'Sun'.¹²

- [1] *Imma-comairnic de Luc 7 di Bolur Birugderc esin cat[h]. Súil milldagach le suide. Ní ho(r)scailltie inn sóul acht i rroi catae nammá. Cetrar turcбайд a malaig die shól conu drolum omlithi triena malaig. Slúoac[h] do-n-éceud darsan sól, nín-géptis fri hócco, cie pidis lir ilmíli*

'Lug and Balar of the piercing eye met in the battle. The latter had a destructive eye which was never opened except on a battlefield. Four men would raise the lid of the eye by a polished ring in its lid. The host which he looked at through that eye, even if they were many thousands in number, would offer no resistance to warriors.'

(CMT 619-623)

- [2] 'He (i.e. Balor) had an eye in the middle of his forehead which he kept covered always with nine shields of thick leather, so that he might not open his eye and turn it on anything, for no matter what Balor looked at with the naked eye he burned it to ashes' (CURTIN 1894: 293)

Balar's synchronic and diachronic associations with the concepts LIGHT and

⁹ For the reconstruction **sūl-i-*, cf. DE BERNARDO STEMPEL 1999: 72; MATASOVIĆ 2009: 324. For the alternative analysis of *súil* as a reflex of **sūl-īā*, see UHLICH 1993A: 356–7.

¹⁰ *Svǫl* in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to), *Svalinn* in the Arnarnagnæanus (AM 748 I 4to).

¹¹ Original text: *hann stendr sólo fyrir / scioldr, scínanda goði / biorg oc brim / ec veit at brenna scola, / ef hann fellr í frá.*

¹² Of course, at least since Alexander H. KRAPPE (1927: 9), Balar has been interpreted by scholars of (comparative) mythology as the reflex of a solar deity, a view shared, e.g. by Thomas O'RAHILLY (1946: 58–60) as well. As I do not intend to venture into the problematic issue of "how solar" Balar was, I limit myself to the observation that Balar's name and myth certainly support his identification as the reflex of a god who was originally associated with LIGHT.

EYE obviously have close parallels in the Old Norse myth [3], within which Baldr, the VICTIM of the KILLING, is characterized as a god synchronically associated not only with the concept LIGHT – he is ‘so bright that light shines from him’, quite literally –, but also with the concept EYE, the whitest flower being called *Baldrs brá* ‘Baldr’s eyebrow’, a flower-name still attested in Modern Scandinavian languages (to refer to two species of mayweed) that reflects a widespread Indo-European flower-kenning “EYE of (GOD of) LIGHT/DAY/SUN”.¹³ This synchronic associations match the fact that diachronically, as anticipated above, the name *Baldr* (Proto-Germanic **balr-a-*) may be traced back to the same PIE stem **bʰólH₂-* ‘light, splendor’ that underlies Old Irish *Balar* as well (GINEVRA 2020A: 192–3 and *passim*).

- [3] *Hann er svá fagr álitum ok bjartr svá at lýsir af honum, ok eitt gras er svá hvítt at jafnat er til Baldrs brár*

‘He (Baldr) is so fair in appearance and so bright that light shines from him, and there is a plant so white that it is called after Baldr’s eyebrow’

(Gylf. 22)

As for the Indic tradition, the VICTIM of the WOUNDING in Vedic myth may be identified either with Father Heaven [4] or with the Sun [5],¹⁴ two MALE GODS who are both quite obviously synchronically associated with the concept LIGHT. As is well known, however, they are also both closely associated with the concept EYE in a number of Vedic passages: e.g. the Sun and the Moon are called *divó akṣī* ‘eyes of Heaven’ in [6] and the Sun itself is assigned an EYE in [7]. Finally, from an etymological perspective, the *Samaveda* [8] attests an epithet of the Sun *bhall-a-*, which, as argued in GINEVRA 2020A: 201, looks like an exact thematic reflex (**bʰol[H]₂-o-*, with laryngeal deletion by the so-called “Saussure Effect”) of the same PIE term **bʰólH₂-* ‘light’ that also underlies the names *Balar* and *Baldr*.

- [4] *mahé yát pitrá im rásaṃ divé kár*

‘When he made the sap [= semen] for great Father Heaven’ (RV 1.71.5a)

- [5] *yát tvā sūrya súvarbhānus*

‘When, o Sun, Svarbhānu ...’ (RV 5.40.5a)

- [6] *divó yád akṣī amṛtā ākṛṇvan*

‘When the immortals made the two eyes of heaven [= Sun and Moon]’ (RV 1.72.10b)

¹³ Also attested in Old English, Latin, and Vedic Sanskrit; cf. GINEVRA 2020A: 194–6. EYEBROW may be used as a metonymy for EYE in Old Norse, cf. MEISSNER 1921: 131–2.

¹⁴ See JAMISON 1991: 294–5 (and n. 286) for some remarks on the identical role of these two characters within the Vedic narrative.

[7] *śám no bhava cákṣasā śám no áhnā*

‘Be luck for us **with your eye, (o Sun,)** luck for us by day’ (RV 10.37.10a)

[8] *bhallāya svāhā*

‘Greetings **to the Sun!**’

(*Mantra-Brahmana* 2.5.18; *Gobhila-Grhyasutra* 4.6.14)

As for Vedic *bhalla-*, it must be noted, however, that problematic variants *bhala-*, *phala-*, and *phalla-* are attested as well (see *EWAia*: 2.254), which may point to a non-Indo-European origin for this word. Even if this were the case, given that PIE **bʰólH-ǵ-* seems to be an archaism whose reflexes in various Indo-European traditions are mostly attested in poetic language and religious names (GINEVRA 2020A: 201–2), the occurrence of its reflexes within the Irish and Norse mythological traditions may still be interpreted as an inherited feature that has instead been lost within the Vedic tradition. In view of the parallels discussed above, the element (a) of the reconstructed myth may correspondingly be reformulated as follows:

- (a) The VICTIM of the WOUNDING/KILLING is a MALE SUPERNATURAL BEING associated with LIGHT, originally expressed by means of the lexeme **bʰólH-ǵ-*, and with the concept EYE.

3. A SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION with a LIGHT GOD’S DAUGHTER

According to the Irish folktale [9], Balor prevented HIS OWN DAUGHTER from having sexual intercourse with other men by keeping her secluded in a tower: this practice (famously attested in other mythological traditions as well, e.g. for Ancient Greek hero Perseus’ mother Danae)¹⁵ may be described as “forced contraception by seclusion” and qualifies as a SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION.¹⁶ In the folktale, Balor’s behavior is motivated by a prophecy that he would only be killed by his own grandson (which indeed happens in the end); this detail is absent in the epic, according to which Balor voluntarily granted his daughter

¹⁵ As noted at least since D’ARBOIS DE JUBAINVILLE 1884: 209–18; cf. also KRAPPE 1927: 10–5 and *passim*.

¹⁶ I am aware that the label ABUSIVE INTERACTION may be regarded as anachronistic or problematic here, but I prefer to use it for the sake of brevity in place of Kim McCone’s (p.c.) suggestion ‘controlling, not to say lustful or even incestuous behaviour’ (even though the latter would probably be regarded as less problematic). On forced sterilization (a permanent form of contraception) of women as a historically well-attested form of sexual abuse, see, e.g. PATEL 2017; forced seclusion of women is currently considered a form of gender-based violence too, see Article 15 (4) of the United Nations’ *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979).

Eithne in marriage to one of the gods, Cían, in order to seal an alliance with them (CMT 16–8), apparently unaware of his grandson Lug’s fate.

- [9] ‘**Balor, to put the daughter in the way that she’d never have a son,** went to live on Tory, and built a castle on Tor Mor, a cliff jutting into the ocean. **He put twelve women to guard the daughter**’

(CURTIN 1894: 283)

This element finds parallels in the two versions of the Norse myth as well. On the one hand, Baldr is either MARRIED to – in Snorri’s account [10] – or AGGRESSIVELY DESIRES – in Saxo’s version [11]–[12] – a FEMALE character who is called *Nanna* ‘Maiden’ in both versions and even referred to as a *puella* ‘maiden’ in Saxo’s [12]. The ABUSIVE character of this SEX-linked INTERACTION is very clearly attested in Saxo’s text, where Baldr’s DESIRE for Nanna is described as *libido* ‘lust’ [11] and *petulantia* ‘impudence’ [12], linked with Baldr’s impatience and aggressiveness [11]–[12], and met with Nanna’s statement that it would not be a congruous union [12]. In contrast, this detail is completely absent in Snorri’s version of the Norse myth, according to which Nanna was Baldr’s devoted wife (although she was not better off: she died of grief after her husband’s death); one must keep in mind, however, that in his version Snorri consistently described Baldr as an all-positive character with quasi-Christian overtones, and abusive sexual behavior would have been hardly compatible with this characterization (even in the Middle Ages).

However, Snorri does seem to preserve another detail (this time unproblematic for Baldr’s good character) which has clear parallels in a detail of the Indic tradition (discussed below): as argued in GINEVRA 2023: 81–8, Baldr’s wife Nanna is the only deity who is consistently referred to by Snorri in passages like [10] as the DAUGHTER of another god,¹⁷ the latter being an otherwise unknown deity called *Nefr* who was likely associated with LIGHT: his name probably meant ‘Sky’ (as the expected reflex of Proto-Germanic **nebiz-* and PIE **néb^h-es-* ‘sky, cloud’). The combined evidence of the two versions of the Norse myth of Baldr thus attests a SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION of the MALE VICTIM with a MAIDEN (in Saxo), who is also characterized as the DAUGHTER of a LIGHT GOD (in Snorri).

- [10] ... *ok er þat sá kona hans Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó ...*

‘when **his wife Nanna daughter of Nefr** saw this she collapsed with grief and died’ (Gylf. 49)

- [11] *Accidit autem, ut Othini filius Balderus Nanne corpus abluentis aspectu sollicitatus* infinito* amore corriperetur. Vrebat illum uenustissimi cor-*

¹⁷ With the sole exception of the goddess Frigg in Gylf. 1, where, however, the use of the patronymic is clearly due to the euhemeristic character of the passage (on this, see further GINEVRA 2023: 81 n. 4).

*poris nitor, animumque perspicue pulchritudinis habitus inflammabat. Validissimum nanque **libidinis** irritamentum est decor. Hotherum itaque, per quem maxime uotum interpellandum timebat, ferro tollere constituit, **ne more impatiens amor ullo fruende libidinis obstaculo tardaretur.***

'Now it happened that **Balder**, the son of Odin, was stirred at the sight of Nanna's body as she was bathing and then **gripped by an unbounded passion**. The sheen of her graceful form inflamed him and her manifest charms seared his soul. There is no stronger incitement **to lust** than beauty. As he was afraid that Høther would constitute the most obvious block to his wishes, he decided to dispose of him with his sword, **so that there should be no delay or impediment to the swift satisfaction of his desires.**'

(Saxo 3.2.3)

- [12] ... *Balderus **postulande Nanne gratia** Geuari fines **armatus** ingreditur. A quo cum ipsius Nanne mentem cognoscere iuberetur, exquisitis uerborum delinimentis **puellam** aggressus **Que respondit nuptiis deum mortali sociari non posse, quod ingens nature discrimen copule commercium tollat.** ... **Quod cum Høtherus ex Geuaro cognosceret, multa super Balderi petulantia apud Helgonem querulus disserebat.***

'Balder **armed himself** and entered Gevar's territory **in order to claim Nanna**. The king told him to ascertain the feelings of **Nanna** herself and he therefore addressed himself **to the maiden** with carefully considered inducements She answered that **a god could not possibly wed a mortal**, as the huge discrepancy in their natures **would preclude any congruous union between them**. ... When Hother learnt this from Gevar he complained a great deal to Helgi about **Balder's impudence**. ...'

(Saxo 3.2.9–10)

Both the Irish tradition and the Norse one have straightforward parallels in Indic: as argued by JAMISON (1991: 289–97), in the Vedic narrative the LIGHT GOD who is later WOUNDED, namely the Sky as in [13] or the Sun as in [14], is said to DESIRE [14] or even RAPE [13] the goddess Dawn, who in the *Rigveda* is often referred to both as a MAIDEN – as in [13]–[14] – and as a LIGHT GOD's DAUGHTER, either the Sky's as in [13] or the Sun's as in [15], thus pointing to an INCESTUOUS interaction as well. The Indic tradition thus clearly attests a SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION of the MALE VICTIM with a MAIDEN who is HIS OWN DAUGHTER, and it also identifies the latter as the DAWN-GODDESS.

- [13] *púnas tát á vṛhati yát **kanāyā** / **duhitúr** á ánuhbṛtam anarvā ... / **pitā** yát **svām duhitāram adhiṣkán** / ... **saṃjagmānó** ...*

'Again he (Father Sky) tears out **from the maiden, his daughter (Dawn)**, what had been "brought to bear" on her – he the unassailable. ... When **the father "sprang on" his own daughter, he, uniting (with her)** ...'

(RV 10.61.5cd+7ab)

- [14] *sūryo devīm uśāsaṃ rōcamānām / mār̥yo ná yōśāṃ abhī eti paścāt*

‘Sun approaches the gleaming goddess Dawn from behind, like a dashing youth a maiden’ (RV 1.115.2ab)

- [15] *yuvō rātham duhitā sūryasya / sahā śriyā nāsatyāvṛṇīta*

‘Your chariot did the Daughter of the Sun (= Dawn)¹⁸ choose, Nāsatyas, together with its splendor’ (RV 1.117.13cd)

In all three traditions, the MALE SUPERNATURAL BEING who is later WOUNDED or KILLED has some kind of INTERACTION with a MAIDEN, an INTERACTION that is both linked with SEX and ABUSIVE in some respect. The MAIDEN is referred to as the VICTIM’S OWN DAUGHTER in the Irish myth, as the DAUGHTER of a GOD associated with LIGHT in Snorri’s version of the Norse myth, and as both in the Indic myth. The latter is likely to preserve the original state of affairs, as an original association with LIGHT may be reconstructed for the Irish character Balar as well (see above, section 2): the characterization of the MAIDEN as both the DAUGHTER of the MALE VICTIM of the WOUNDING/KILLING and of a LIGHT GOD may thus be interpreted as an archaism within the Indic narrative, an inherited element that has left traces in Irish and has been completely remodeled in the Norse tradition.

The same is likely true for the identification of the MAIDEN as the DAWN-GODDESS in the Indic myth: even though this detail is not attested in Irish and Norse, the noun phrase ‘DAUGHTER of the SKY’ has long been reconstructed as a formulaic epithet of the PIE DAWN-GODDESS (DUNKEL 1988–1990: 8–10), on the basis of its several reflexes in Vedic Sanskrit (*divō duhitār-*, exclusive epithet of Uśas ‘Dawn’), Homeric Greek (*Διὸς θυγάτηρ*, epithet of the Sun-maiden Helen and other Greek reflexes of the PIE DAWN-GODDESS), and Lithuanian (*Diēvo dukė/dukrūtė*, epithet of the Sun-goddess). Therefore, if the MAIDEN of the inherited myth was referred to as the DAUGHTER of a LIGHT GOD, she would have probably been synchronically identified with the DAWN-GODDESS by anyone familiar with Indo-European poetic language. In view of these parallels, the element (b) of the reconstructed myth may be reformulated as follows:

- (b) The LIGHT GOD who is the MALE VICTIM of the WOUNDING/KILLING has a SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION with a MAIDEN who is the DAUGHTER of a LIGHT GOD (a reconstructed epithet of the Indo-European DAWN-GODDESS), namely HIS OWN DAUGHTER.

¹⁸ I follow JAMISON (1991: 294) – as well as several other scholars (e.g. McCONE 2020: 154; JANDA 2005: 347) – in assuming that the Vedic “Daughter of the Sun” (also known as Sūryā) must have originally been an epithet of Dawn, who is indeed accompanied by the twin-gods Nāsatyas with their chariot according to, e.g. RV 8.5.2. Even though Sūryā has become a character of its own in the RV, there is at least one passage (RV 7.75.5) that strongly supports her identification with Dawn, where the latter is called *sūriyasya yōśā* ‘maiden of the Sun’ (WEST 2007: 234).

4. *The WOUNDING/KILLING of the LIGHT GOD*

The previous two sections have focused on two of the main characters of this ancient myth; let us now turn our attention to its central plot event in the present section, first by taking into account only details that are shared by all three traditions (4.1), then by integrating our preliminary reconstruction with two parallels that may be found between two traditions out of three (4.2).

4.1 *The common structure underlying all three traditions*

Within the Irish myth, according to both the epic [16] and the folktale [17], Balar was **PIERCED** (**KILLED** in the epic, **WOUNDED** in the folktale) by Lug.

The latter used a **PROJECTILE WEAPON**: a slingshot in the epic [16] and a spear in the folktale [17]; even if spears may also be thrust as hand weapons, the fact that it is thrown as a **PROJECTILE WEAPON** – ambiguously expressed as ‘sent the red spear’ in passage [17] from the main version of the Irish folktale – is explicitly stated in a passage [18] from the second version of the folktale recorded by CURTIN (1894: 296–311 “Balor of the Evil Eye and Lui Lavada his Grandson”), in which Lui must literally ‘throw the red spear’ against Balor; the more archaic variant of the tale may thus have involved a spear (see also McCONE 2022: 195) used as a **PROJECTILE WEAPON**, which was later substituted with another **PROJECTILE WEAPON**, the slingshot, by influence of David’s Biblical slingshot (McCONE 1989: 137–9; 1990: 158–9).

FIRE is involved as a **WEAPON**: according to the folktale [17], the spear was **RED-HOT** from the **FORGE-FIRE**; this is also mentioned more than once as an essential detail in CURTIN’s second version [18].

BLINDNESS is involved as a **RESULT**: it was Balar’s **EYE** that was **PIERCED** by Lug both in the epic [16] and in the folktale [17], eventually killing him; as noted by McCONE (2022: 193), ‘Balor was undone by (his own) blinding and Baldr by (another’s) blindness’ (on which see immediately below).

[16] *Tócauhar a malae dia deirc Balair. Fucaird Luc ier sin liic talma dó, co ndecheid an súil triena cend. Conid a slúag bodessin derécatcha. Co torcair four slúag na Fomore conda-apatar trí nónuhair díb foua tóeb*

‘The lid was raised from Balor’s eye. **Then Lug cast a sling stone at him which carried the eye through his head**, and it was his own host that it looked at. He fell on top of the Fomorian host so that twenty-seven of them died under his side’
(CMT 644-647)

[17] ‘Balor went toward Gavidin’s forge. The grandson [= Lui] was there before him, and had **a spear ready and red hot**. When Balor had eight shields raised from the evil eye, and was just raising the ninth, **Lui Lavada sent the red spear into it [= Balor’s eye]**.’ (CURTIN 1894: 293)

- [18] “... and **your son (Lui)** must be ready **to throw the red spear** at the right moment.” Gaivnin Gow came. They brought the forge, the spear, and all that was needed, put them behind a rock on the side of Muin Duv. On the fifth morning, at daylight, **Balor was on the top of Muin Duv**; and the instant the last shield reached his upper eyelid **Lui Lavada struck him with the spear**, and Balor fell dead.’ (CURTIN 1894: 311)

All details noted above for the Irish tradition find parallels in the Norse one: according to both Snorri [19] and Saxo [20], Baldr was **PIERCED** (and **WOUNDED /KILLED**) by a character called Hǫðr.

The latter used a **PROJECTILE WEAPON**: according to Snorri [19] and other Old Norse sources (e.g. *Völuspá* 31–2), it was a twig (*mistilteinn* ‘mistletoe’) shot from a distance, a peculiar detail whose great antiquity is confirmed by some “type B1” bracteates (*Drei-Götter-Brakteaten*; PESCH 2007: 99–103; produced in Northern Europe during the Migration Period, 5th–7th c. CE) displaying three characters, one of which is pierced by a twig and currently identified as Baldr (PESCH 2007: 334); this iconographic parallel shows that the sword used by Hǫðr in Saxo’s version [20] is a secondary rationalization of an earlier **PROJECTILE WEAPON**.

FIRE is involved as a **GOD**, and perhaps even as a **WEAPON** in a secondary source: Baldr’s killer Hǫðr is actually maneuvered like a puppet by the mischievous Loki, a **GOD** who was originally associated with **FIRE**;¹⁹ this is confirmed by a Faroese folktale [21], in which a character called Lokki uses the exact same weapon used in the Irish folktale – a **RED-HOT IRON ROD** – to **PIERCE** in the **EYE** (and kill) a malevolent giant.

DARKNESS and **BLINDNESS** are involved as a **GOD**, a **WEAPON**, and a **RESULT**: Baldr’s killer is a **BLIND GOD** in Snorri’s version [22] and his name is *Hǫðr*, which originally meant ‘Darkness’ (PIE **kót-u-*; GINEVRA 2023: 88–93); the **WEAPON** used in [19] is a *mistil-teinn* ‘mistletoe’, a plant that did not grow in medieval Iceland and that was most likely chosen (in place of an originally generic twig) because of its paraetymological association with the lexical family of Old Norse *°mistr* ‘fog, mist’, as proposed by Anatoly LIBERMAN (2016: 209–10);²⁰ finally, it may be noted that **BLINDNESS** as a **RESULT** is also attested by the **PIERCING** of the **EYE** in the Faroese folktale of Lokki and the giant [21], which closely resembles the Irish one, as noted above.

¹⁹ As shown, inter alia, by his association with the fireplace in Scandinavian folk traditions (HEIDE 2011), by archaeological findings (GESTSSON 1961), and by the analysis of his myths both within their Scandinavian context (GINEVRA 2018c) and in comparative Indo-European perspective (GINEVRA 2018b; GINEVRA [forthcoming]).

²⁰ Only attested as second element of *þoku-mistr* ‘fog-mist’ (*MarD635x* 1051³⁵), but cf. Modern Icelandic *mistur* ‘mist’ (cf. *ÍO*, s.v.). The first element *mistil°* of *mistilteinn* ‘mistletoe’ actually reflects Proto-Germanic **mist-ila-* ‘id.’ (Old English *mistel*, Old High German *mistil*, etc.), analyzed by Irene BALLE (1999) as an **-ila-* derivative of a reflex of PIE **mi-sd-o-* ‘that sits on (the tree)’ or ‘that sits in the middle (of the tree)’.

- [19] *Hqðr tók mistiltein ok skaut at Baldri at tilvísun Loka. Flaug skotit í gognum hann ok fell hann dauðr til jarðar*

'Hqðr took the **mistletoe** and **shot at Baldr at Loki's direction**. The **missile flew through him** and he fell dead to the ground' (Gylf. 49)

- [20] *Qui cum pristinum iter remetiendo calle, quo uenerat, repedaret, obuui sibi Balderi latus hausit eumque seminecem prostrauit.*

'As he was retracing his steps the way he had come, **he came face to face with Balder, plunged his sword into his side** and flung him half-dead to the ground.' (Saxo 3.7)

- [21] *men Lokki hefur gløtt jadvnstong í eldinun og rennir í eygað á honun, so hann doyr*

'Lokki **heats an iron rod in the fire until it glows** and **runs it into his eye**, so that he (the giant) dies'

(*Risin og Lokki* 'The Giant and Lokki'; JAKOBSEN 1898-1901: 267; tr. GINEVRA)

- [22] *hann var blindr ... "ek sé eigi hvar Baldr er"*

'**He (Hqðr) was blind** (He said:) "**I see not** where Baldr is"' (Gylf. 49)

Close matches for both the Irish and the Norse traditions may be found in the Indic myth: according to the *Rigveda*, the MALE LIGHT GOD – identified as the Sun in [23] and as Father Sky in [24] – was **PIERCED** (and **WOUNDED**) by a character referred to as *Svár-bhānu*- 'he who has the splendor of the Sun' (on which see below, section 4.2) in [23] and as *ástr*- 'archer' in [24].

As clear from the latter epithet, the perpetrator used a **PROJECTILE WEAPON**: according to [24], the 'archer' hit Father Sky with a *didyú*- 'missile'; the variant of the myth where the Sun is the victim does not specify the type of weapon used, but only its material ('darkness', discussed below).

FIRE is involved as a **GOD**: the perpetrator of the wounding has been convincingly identified by JAMISON (1991: 264–7) as the prominent Indic god called *Agní*- 'Fire' (to whom the whole hymn of [24] is dedicated), whose characterization in Vedic poetry perfectly fits the suspect's description as an 'archer' who 'has the splendor of the sun'.²¹

DARKNESS and **BLINDNESS** are involved both as a **WEAPON** and as a **RESULT**: according to [23], *tāmas*- 'darkness' was the weapon used by Agni to pierce the Sun (perhaps figuratively, by blinding him) and, as a result, the perception of all living creatures was impaired (i.e. they were blinded), 'like a befuddled man not knowing the territory'; this happened because the Sun was 'hidden by darkness' [25] and, as explicitly told in the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā*, 'did not shine anymore' [26].

²¹ For the older and unlikely interpretation of Svarbhānu as an "eclipse demon", cf. e.g. SCHAFFNER 2010: 126–129 with literature.

- [23] *yāt tvā sūrya súvarbhānus / támasāvidhyad āsurāḥ / ākṣetravid yāthā mugdhó / bhūvanāni adidhayuḥ*

‘When, o Sun, Svarbhānu Āsura pierced you with darkness, like a befuddled man not knowing the territory did the living beings perceive.’ (RV 5.40.5)

- [24] *srjád ástā dhṛṣatā didyúm asmai / svāyāṃ devó duhitāri tvīṣiṃ dhāt*

‘The archer (Agni) boldly loosed a missile at him (Father Heaven), (when) the god placed his “spark” in his own daughter’ (RV 1.71.5cd)

- [25] *gūlham sūryam támasā pavratena / turīyeṇa brāhmaṇāvindad átriḥ*

‘Atri with the fourth formulation found the Sun, hidden by darkness because of (an act) contrary to commandment’ (RV 5.40.6cd)

- [26] *svārbhānur vā āsurás sūryam támasāvidhyat sá ná vyārocata*

‘Svarbhānu Āsura pierced the Sun with darkness. He did not shine forth.’ (Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā 11.5; tr. JAMISON 1991: 134)

The parallels between all three mythological traditions analyzed so far allow for the following preliminary reconstruction of the basic event at the core of the myth:

- (d.1) The LIGHT GOD is PIERCED by another GOD with a PROJECTILE WEAPON; FIRE is involved (as a WEAPON or as a GOD); DARKNESS/BLINDNESS²² is involved (as a RESULT, a GOD, or a WEAPON).

4.2 Integrating a further Irish-Norse parallel and an Irish-Indic one

If a couple of bilateral correspondences (found in only two of the three traditions) are taken into account and integrated with data from other Indo-European traditions, it is possible to identify further parallels that support a more precise reconstruction of the perpetrator of the wounding/killing.

First, as mentioned above (in section 1; as per GINEVRA 2020A: 203), in the Irish tradition Balar’s killer Lug is a CRAFTY god (*samildánach* ‘skilled in many arts’) whose name *Lug* (Proto-Celtic **lug-u-*) may be traced back to a PIE root **luǵ-*, closely matching the fact that in the Norse tradition Baldr’s killer Loki is a TRICKSTER god whose name *Loki* (Proto-Germanic **luk-an-*) may be traced back to a PIE root **luǵ-* as well. Now, although the CRAFTY TRICKSTER detail is absent in Indic and only attested in the Irish and Norse versions of our myth, it also has a close correspondence in the mythology of an Ancient Greek

²² DARKNESS and BLINDNESS are here treated as a single concept because of their extremely close semantic association in Indo-European, reflected in several languages by a polysemy that is likely inherited: Vedic *andhā-* ‘blind; dark’; Latin *caecus* ‘id.’; Proto-Germanic **blinda-* ‘id.’ (EWA, s.v. *blint*).

character that has long been compared with Loki (first by OLRİK 1902; more recently by HANSEN 2007), namely the titan Prometheus, a CRAFTY TRICKSTER whose famous theft of FIRE has been argued to reflect Indo-European heritage (NARTEN 1960: 25 n. 40; WATKINS 1995: 255–6 n. 3) and whose following punishment (involving imprisonment and torture) has very close parallels in the mythologies of both Loki and Agni, pointing to a common origin of these myths (GINEVRA [*forthcoming*]). On the basis of these parallels, the following detail may thus be added to the reconstruction:

- (d.2) The LIGHT GOD is PIERCED by a CRAFTY TRICKSTER associated with a PIE root **luǵʰ-*.

As for the second additional detail, it is absent in the Norse tradition and only attested by the Irish and Indic ones, but it is perhaps even more important if the identity of the perpetrator is to be uncovered. According to a famous Irish passage [27], the face of Balar's killer, Lug, had the RADIANCE (*dealradh* in the text) of the SUN (*ghrian*), so that the god Bres once mistook Lug for the Sun and wondered why the latter was rising from the west.²³ This peculiar detail has a very close parallel in the Indic tradition: according to [23], repeated here as [28], and several other Vedic texts, the character who pierced the Sun was called *Svār-bhānu-* 'he who has the splendor (**bhānu-*) of the Sun (*svār*)', an epithet which, in the words of JAMISON (1991:265), 'to anyone familiar with the traditional phraseology of the RV, ... would [have] automatically evoke[d] Agni', the god who 'shines forth like the Sun (*svār*) with its radiance (*bhānúnā*)' [29].

- [27] "*Is iongnadh liom,*" ar se, "*an ghrian ag éirghe a n-iar a n-diu agus a n-oir gacha laoi eile.*" "Dob' fheárr go m-budh í," ar na draoithe. "Creud eile" ar sé. "*Dealradh aighthe Lógha Lámhfhada,*" ar siad

'(Breas son of Balar said) "I wonder that the Sun is rising in the west to-day, and in the east every other day." "It were better that it were so," said the Druids. "What else is it?" (but the Sun), said he. "It is the radiance of the face of Lugh Lamhfhada," they said'

(*Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann* 19; O'DUFFY 1888: 15; 82–3)

- [28] *yát tvā sūrya súvarbhānuḥ / támasāvidhyad āsuráḥ / ákṣetravid yáthā mugdhó / bhúvanāni adīdhayuh*

'When, o Sun, *Svār-bhānu-* 'he who has the splendor of the Sun' Āsura pierced you with darkness, like a befuddled man not knowing the territory did the living beings perceive.'

(RV 5.40.5)

²³ This passage has sometimes been taken as evidence that Lug was identified with the Sun, but it literally tells us the opposite – it explicitly opposes Lug's path (coming from west) and the Sun's (rising from east), exclusively highlighting their single shared feature, SPLENDOR.

[29] *ā yāḥ svār nā bhānúnā* / *citró vibhāty* arcīṣā / *añjānó ajárait abhí*

‘(Agni) who, like the Sun with its radiance, shines forth bright with his flame, anointing himself with his own unaging (flames).’ (RV 2.8.4)

On the basis of these correspondences between Irish and Indic, the following detail may thus be added to the reconstruction:

(d.3) The LIGHT god is PIERCED by a GOD who has the SPLENDOR of the SUN, but is not the SUN.

4.3 The GOD who PIERCED the LIGHT GOD

Once all correspondences (d.1–3) discussed above are taken into account, it is possible to identify with more precision the antagonist of the LIGHT GOD in this myth. As summarized in (d.1), in all three traditions the latter character was always PIERCED by another GOD, who was connected with the two concepts FIRE and DARKNESS/BLINDNESS in Norse (both) and Indic (only FIRE). Within the inherited myth, the perpetrator may thus have been associated with either one of these concepts (or, less likely, both).²⁴ A close association of the GOD who PIERCED the LIGHT GOD with FIRE may be reconstructed on the basis of both the Norse and Indic traditions, whereas DARKNESS/BLINDNESS seems to have been personified exclusively in the Norse one; this trivial observation and two further considerations discussed below point to the reconstruction of a FIRE GOD as the most likely perpetrator in the inherited narrative.

First, if the bilateral Irish-Norse parallel (d.2) is to be taken into account, then the GOD who PIERCED the LIGHT GOD was a CRAFTY TRICKSTER, a feature that the Irish antagonist, Lug, and the Norse one, Loki, share with Prometheus, an Ancient Greek CRAFTY TRICKSTER of likely Indo-European heritage who was closely associated with FIRE. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, if the bilateral Irish-Indic correspondence (d.3) is to be factored in our reconstruction, the GOD who PIERCED the LIGHT GOD had the SPLENDOR of the SUN (but was not the SUN): this detail logically excludes DARKNESS/BLINDNESS from the list of suspects and allows for the selection of a FIRE GOD who had the SPLENDOR of the SUN (the attested situation in Indic texts) as the GOD who PIERCED the LIGHT GOD in the inherited myth, with DARKNESS/BLINDNESS as the expected result of this event and, perhaps, also with the aid of the elements FIRE and/OR DARKNESS (whose personification as a COMPANION only took place in Norse).

Of course, if the Irish god Lug had an original connection with the concept FIRE, it seems to have been lost quite soon and to have left no clear evidence in his mythology; there may be, however, a few indirect traces in the texts. In addition to his weapon of choice in the folktale (a RED-HOT spear from the

²⁴ This option may be easily discarded in view of the incompatibility between these two concepts within Indo-European traditions, where FIRE GODS are not usually linked with DARKNESS/BLINDNESS.

FORGE-FIRE) and to his SUN-like SPLENDOR (which he shares with the Indic FIRE-GOD), it may be noted that Lug's name occurs in onomastic compounds with *áed* 'fire' in Old Irish (on which see UHLICH 1993B: 146–7; 271–2), such as *Lug-áed* 'who has Lug's fire (?)' (Ogam gen.sg. *LUGADDON*) and *Áed-lug*, which may be analyzed either as a "reversed" compound with the same meaning as the former or as the univerbation of a phrase *Áed Loga/loga* 'fire of Lug'. Furthermore, the Irish myth of Lug's escape and death in water as attested in the *Metrical Dindshenchas* (GWYNN 1924: 278–9: 'Now the sons of Cermait ... had laid a plot to kill Lug. ... Then Lug escaped from them by his prowess to yonder lake. There he was killed and drowned') is not only highly fitting for a former FIRE GOD (death being a naturally expected fate for FIRE in water),²⁵ but also highly reminiscent of both Loki's and Agni's mythological escapes in bodies of water in the Norse and Indic traditions (see GINEVRA [*forthcoming*] for an extensive discussion of the correspondences). Lastly, it may be noted that the place where Lug's forge is located is called *Druim na Teine* 'hill of fire' in the folktale.

The finalized revision of the reconstruction of the core event of the narrative may thus be summarized as follows:

- (d) The LIGHT GOD (**b^hólHr-*) is PIERCED by a FIRE GOD (**luǵ²-*), a CRAFTY TRICKSTER who possesses the SPLENDOR of the SUN, by means of a PROJECTILE WEAPON and with the aid of FIRE OR DARKNESS; as a RESULT of the event, DARKNESS/BLINDNESS naturally follow.

6. Conclusion:

The Indo-European background of Balar's killing by Lug

Let us now summarize the results of this study: a series of linguistic and structural parallels point to a common origin for the Irish myth of Balar, the Norse myth of Baldr, and the Indic myth of the Wounded Sun, as several elements (a–b and d, perhaps its core ones) of the inherited structure (a–f), reconstructed above (in section 1) on the basis of the Norse and Indic myths, find close parallels in both the epic and folktale versions of Balar's myth. The characterization of Balar in both the epic and the folktale as a terrible and cruel villain who must be eliminated for the good of the cosmos explains the absence of parallels for the final plot elements (e–f) of the inherited structure found in Norse and Indic, namely those involving the COSMIC consequences of the WOUNDING/KILLING of the LIGHT GOD and a heroic character's SEARCH for the latter (in order to restore COSMIC ORDER – already restored by Balar's death in the Irish tradition).

On the basis of these correspondences, it is now possible to advance a revised

²⁵ Although this is famously not the case with the paradoxical Indic myth of Agni's hiding in water (on which see FELLER 2004: 49–126), already extensively attested in RV 10.51–3 (but mentioned in several other hymns), as well as in later Indic sources (e.g. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.2.3; *Mahābhārata* 3.212).

reconstruction of the Indo-European myth of a “Light god’s Wounding/Killing”, taking into account the Irish tradition as well (bolded letters mark elements that have reflexes in Irish):

- (a) The VICTIM of the WOUNDING/KILLING is a MALE SUPERNATURAL BEING associated with the concepts LIGHT, originally expressed by means of the lexeme **bʰólHr-*, and EYE.
- (b) The LIGHT GOD has a SEX-linked ABUSIVE INTERACTION with a MAIDEN who is a LIGHT GOD’s DAUGHTER (a reconstructed epithet of the Indo-European DAWN-GODDESS), namely HIS OWN DAUGHTER.
- (c) The MAIDEN is described as being SEEN while she is BATHING, a reconstructed feature of Indo-European SUN-MAIDENS.
- (d) The LIGHT GOD (**bʰólHr-*) is PIERCED by a FIRE GOD (**luǵʷ-*), a CRAFTY TRICKSTER who possesses the SPLENDOR of the SUN, by means of a PROJECTILE WEAPON and with the aid of FIRE or DARKNESS; as a RESULT of the event, DARKNESS/BLINDNESS naturally follow.
- (e) After the LIGHT GOD IS PIERCED, all GODS and LIVING BEINGS in general are in a state of GENERAL CONFUSION.
- (f) The GODS SEND a CHARACTER to SEARCH for the LIGHT GOD. The CHARACTER succeeds.

Even though any hypothesis of linguistic borrowing must be ruled out in the case of the proper names *Balar* vs. *Baldr* and *Lug* vs. *Loki* (see section 1), the possibility that at least some of these narrative parallels reflect contact and diffusion of cultural motifs between two traditions is, of course, highly unlikely in the case of Irish and Indic, but at the very least conceivable in the case of Irish and Norse. If one wishes to argue for such an hypothesis, however, the circumstances of such a cultural borrowing (in any direction) should be properly clarified and motivated, as stressed by Matthias EGELER (2013: 128): ‘why and in what historical, social and literary context was a motif borrowed, why and how was it changed in the course of the process of borrowing, how was it integrated into the narrative into which it was borrowed, and what does this tell us about contemporary interests and perspectives?’. As the survival of inherited features of Indo-European poetics and mythology in both the Irish and Norse traditions is a well-known phenomenon that has long been demonstrated (e.g. by Calvert WATKINS [1995: *passim*]), Indo-European heritage is advanced here as the most economic explanation for the systematic onomastic and structural correspondences between these three mythological traditions; the diffusional character of at least some of the non-onomastic parallels discussed in this contribution, however, may still be argued for in the future, as long as Egeler’s methodological caveats are followed.

Future research may focus on including other Irish folktale versions of the tale of *Balar* in the comparative analysis (here based on CURTIN’s 1894 version), as well as more recent Scandinavian texts such as the folktale *Risin og Lokki* (briefly mentioned above) and the ballad *Lokka Tåttur* of the Faroese tradition,

and on extending the analysis to other Indo-European traditions, including (but not limited to) the Ancient Greek myths of the Rape of Persephone as attested in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (whose parallels with the Norse and Indic traditions are discussed in GINEVRA 2019; 2020B; 2020C) and of Polyphemos' blinding by Odysseus (*Odyssey* 9.166–566), which McCONE (2022: 194–6) has proposed to identify as a further reflex of the same inherited myth underlying Balar's and Baldr's stories.

To conclude, I would like to stress that, if a component of Indo-European heritage played a major role in the development of the Irish myth of Balar, it was only one out of several historical components that came to blended within this tradition, some of which undoubtedly arose by contact between several cultures: such major influences included Biblical lore that came along with Christianity, as shown by McCONE (1989: 138–9) in regard to the epic version of CMT, but also, much later, the historical experience of British rule, as discussed by RADNER (1992) in regard to the folktale version. Also, rather than to heritage or contact, one may trace back to a mythological motif of (perhaps universal) diffusion the quite exact typological parallel between the destructive EYE of the (former) LIGHT GOD Balar and the Ancient Egyptian myth of the SUN GOD Re's destructive EYE, identified as the goddess Hathor/Sekhmet in the myth of the "Destruction of Mankind" attested in New Kingdom texts (2nd millennium BCE). Myths, just like many (or perhaps all) other linguistic and cultural objects, arise from the integration of several inputs of various type and origin (e.g. tradition, genre, context, audience) into a single more-or-less internally coherent output (which, if felicitous, may in turn become the input for future blends): when appropriate, ancient traditional material of Indo-European heritage should thus be identified and recognized as an important piece of the puzzle, but by no means as the only one, nor the most important one.

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