Time and the Indo-European Gods in the Slavic Context

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The potential of divisions of time to give clues to the number and identity of the Indo-European gods has not yet been fully explored and an attempt is made here to move forward the discussion of this possible additional source of information. It is assumed that the fragmentary evidence for the Slavic gods can usefully be placed in a wider Indo-European framework. Recent work by Slavic scholars on divisions of time has laid an excellent foundation for further exploration.

Time

It is interesting that when we talk about time in a cosmological context, there is no need to talk specifically about "the year" or "the day", for example, and in fact it is inappropriate to do so when we are trying to grasp the overall concept. The total idea is of time as having limits which apply at all levels. This means that there is only one system to be understood and that evidence from any level can contribute to our understanding.

Scholars concerned with cosmological time have been well aware of this and I shall start with the definitions of the properties of religious time as listed by Marc Gaborieau in a study of the Hindu calendar (1982: 20; my translation and numbering):

1) The different divisions of time (days, years, cosmic periods …) each form a cycle.
2) These cycles are isomorphic.
3) Each cycle has a beginning and an end.
4) Each cycle represents an evolution from order towards disorder arriving eventually at chaos before the regeneration which will mark the start of a new cycle.
5) The end of the cycle, that is to say the phase of chaos and regeneration, is not considered to belong to the temporal cycle; it represents the axis which communicates with eternity.
6) The temporal and spatial cycles are isomorphic.

Gaborieau's set of cycles does not mention the human life cycle but this is one of the divisions of time that belongs under No. 1 in his list, and it is of key importance for understanding cosmology. In Svetlana Tolstaya's valuable article on time in Slavic popular culture (1995), it is included along with the annual, diurnal and lunar cycles, and I shall discuss these four cycles in this paper taking the diagram she published as my base, with English translations from the French of the original (Figure 1). I should mention, however, that Tolstaya also treated the ritual and vegetation cycles (1995: 29).

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Spring, spring equinox	Summer, summer solstice	Autumn, autumn equinox	Winter, winter solstice
Morning, sunrise	Noon	Evening, sunset	Midnight
Waxing moon	Full moon	Waning moon	New moon
Infancy, youth	Maturity	Old age	Death (and new birth)

Figure 1 Divisions of the time cycle (after Tolstaya 1995: 29).

We can now set about developing this diagram. I shall deal first of all with the annual, diurnal and lunar cycles. It can be seen that sometimes both a period and a point of time are given (e.g. the season "spring" and the "spring equinox" that falls within it) and that in other cases there is a single entry. We shall find that it is important to distinguish carefully between the period and the point and so I have included them both in all cases. (It should be noted that, although I am contrasting a "point" with a full "period", the "point" itself may have some duration.) In Figure 2, I have taken it that the point of time is at the centre of each period and I have marked it "C". I have also taken it that the division of the time cycle into four means that we are dealing with four equal quarters and I have tried to describe them when there is no specific word available for this section of a cycle.

We can continue to develop the diagram by identifying the place of "chaos and regeneration" which will, according to Gaborieau, give us our point of transition between cycles. We can look for this in the section marked "death (and new birth)" by Tolstaya, but I suggest that we can define it more closely by identifying it in the year as the "12 days" that are found in the Church calendar between Christmas and Epiphany but are notionally connected with the winter solstice. In the diurnal cycle the equivalent point is midnight and in the lunar cycle it is dark moon (see Figure 2). In the life cycle, it can be seen as the location of death. Death is not a measurable period, like "youth" for example, and, although we need to take account of it when considering the life cycle, it is probably best to treat it as the "other" of the entire lifetime between being born and dying. The idea of compressed time that is excellently discussed by Tolstaya elsewhere in her article (1995: 40-42) seems to fit well here, for the twelve days reflect in miniature the months of the year to come, as we can see from divination practices.

It is not entirely obvious how we should proceed to relate the quarters in the system to the life cycle – unless, indeed, we are prepared to follow the guidance offered by the age-grade structure that I have argued is at the base of the trifunctional ideology discerned by Dumézil (Lyle 1997; 2004: 7-9). Since I do think that it is likely to be fruitful, I shall follow

Spring, C spring equinox	Summer, S summer solstice	Autumn, C autumn equinox	Winter, C winter solstice
Morning, C sunrise	Middle part of the day, C noon	Evening, C sunset	Middle part of the night, C midnight
Waxing moon, C first quarter	Near full moon, C full moon	Waning moon, C last quarter	Old & new crescents C dark moon
Infancy, youth	Maturity	Old age	Death (and new birth)
			12 days

Figure 2 Divisions of the time cycle showing periods and centre points, including the "12 days".

it here, although, like much of this outline of a temporal model, it is still open to debate. I should like to thank Mirjam Mencej for raising questions concerning my previous placement of life cycle periods within the year (e.g., 1990: 80) and discussing an alternative view, in the light of Svetlana Tolstaya's formulation, which I have gratefully adopted here so as to show the period of maturity corresponding to the summer half.

In the proposed model of male age-grading (suggested by the practice of East African pastoralists), the men fall into three groups – young warriors following initiation, mature men following marriage, and old men. Half of the men in the society are in the classes of old men and young men while the other half are in two classes of mature men. Uninitiated boys are not represented. Applying this scheme to Tolstaya's categories, we would fill the quarters with young men = vigorous warriors (2nd function), two sections of mature men = fertile and prosperous (3rd function), and old men = wise intermediaries with the sacred (1st function). The point concerned with death and the ancestors, which is probably to be regarded as outside normal time (Lyle 2008a; Gaborieau 1982: 20, 23-25), falls in the centre of the period connected with old men and the sacred as shown in Figure 3. This formulation would mean that the concept of the life cycle was being culturally controlled, and that the correspondence of the sections of the natural cycles was not with the whole of life, as we might reasonably have expected, but with the parts of life where males had full social identity. Note, however, that the three stages of life form a temporal sequence that allows them to be put into relationship with the sequences in the cycles of time. Dumézil's set of functions does not have this time sequence, and I suggest that it makes a big difference to the cosmological possibilities of the system to have this temporal dimension built in at the level of human life.

This is not all that there is to say about the age-grade sequence and I shall return later to consider the place of the female, but I shall first move on to consider the shape of the day and the year as explored by Nikita Tolstoy (1995; 2002) and to incorporate a suggested revision into the Tolstaya diagram.

Spring, C spring equinox	Summer, S summer solstice	Autumn, C autumn equinox	Winter, C winter solstice
Morning, C sunrise	Middle part of the day, C noon	Evening, C sunset	Middle part of the night, C midnight
Waxing moon, C first quarter	Near full moon, C full moon	Waning moon, C last quarter	Old & new crescents C dark moon
Young men	Mature men	Mature men	Old men

Death

Figure 3 Divisions of the time cycle showing age-grades and a death point.

Tolstoy was very interested to find a correlation in the Slavic calendar between the periods around midnight and around midwinter and recognised that the day was split in two at midnight and noon and the year at the solstices. These halves of the year are very evident in the Indian calendar where the half from midwinter to midsummer is called the rising half and the half from midsummer to midwinter the descending half (Gaborieau 1982: 15-18). The same division is found in interpretations of the Christian calendar where Christ's birth at midwinter starts the ascent and John the Baptist's birth at midsummer starts the descent (Billington 2000: 10-11). Of course, this correlates with the actual experience of increasing and decreasing light through the annual movement of the sun.

Tolstoy also realised that this halving of the year was cross-cut by another division into halves – the halves of summer and winter. In this case, it seems that we need to be careful not to correlate these half-years with day and night as Tolstoy did in his diagram, for the situation is more complex as his own discussion illustrates (2002: 193-95). Sunrise and sunset, that divide day from night, and are the half-way points between midnight and noon, are equivalent in terms of time to the spring and autumn equinoxes that are the half-way points between the winter and summer solstices, but, although there are festivals that fall near the equinoxes, the overwhelming evidence in the Slavic context, arising from study of the wolf days, is that both the summer and winter halves begin well after the equinoxes (Mencej 2001; 2005), so that the suggested correspondence does not hold. This lack of connection between the equinoxes and the beginnings of the summer and winter halves is in keeping with evidence from elsewhere. The strongly marked summer and winter halves in the Celtic calendar, for example, begin (in the modern calendar) on the eves of 1 May and 1 November. As regards the Germanic calendar, it can be noted that the summer and winter nights that begin the half-years in Iceland are in April and October and that the 8th-century evidence from Bede confirms the October start of winter for the Anglo-Saxons (Wallis 1999: 53-54). It seems that we have to recognise – and eventually attempt to elucidate – an asymmetry here. In terms of the Tolstaya diagram, we can see that, while

the solstices fall at centres of periods, the openings of summer and winter fall at the divisions between periods, as shown in Figure 4, where the winter half is shaded. The winter solstice / midnight point is indicated by a double line since, as Tolstoy noted, it is much more heavily stressed in traditional practice than the summer solstice / noon point.

Tolstoy used a circular diagram to illustrate the "magic circle of time" that he found in the day and the year, and a diagram of this sort allows us to see some connections much more clearly than a tabulated diagram does. However, a circular diagram of the time cycle raises questions about how it should be placed on the page. Tolstoy's diagram has the winter solstice at the bottom and so is ideally suited to bring out the concept of the rising and descending halves of the year but it does not serve the summer / winter division so well.

I propose to take the summer / winter division as the main one and would like to recall No. 6 of Gaborieau's definitions where he notes that time is correlated with space, since it is the connection with space that will tell us what should come at the top of the time diagram when the spatiotemporal aspect is being taken into account. In my theory that three axes of polarity underpin the entire cosmological structure (1990: 68-74; 1995: 171-79), I have presented as the first axis, called A, a polarity which is that of above and below in space and of winter (= cold) and summer (= hot) in time. Above is strongly connected with the male and below with the female, so that this is also a gender pairing, and male is normally understood to be at the positive pole.

The question raised by these correlations is which of the two halves of the year – summer or winter – should be connected with the above and the male. Within the last year or so, I have experienced a total change in my thinking on this matter as a consequence of my adopting the connection between summer and maturity, as mentioned above. Maturity reflects the 3rd function and, in age-grade terms, it is in the "female" half (Lyle 1995). Seeing the bright half of the year as connected with the female, and not with

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Young men	Mature men	Mature men	Old men
			Death

Figure 4 Divisions of the time cycle indicating the solstices and the distinctions between winter and summer.

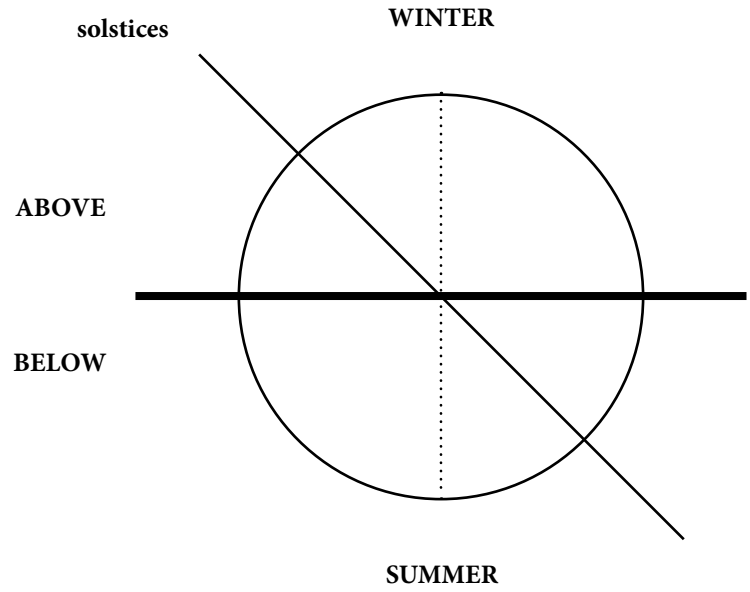

Figure 5 A circular representation of the year, indicating the divisions into winter and summer halves and rising and descending halves.

the male as in my previous formulation, implies that the values of the poles of the dualities I have worked with for some time (see, e.g. 2006b) require to be reversed.

Once the hierarchically superior 1st-function old men and 2nd-function young men are placed in the winter half of the year, this inevitably implies that winter is the positive half belonging to the above. This in turn means that the "dull" end of the dull/bright polarity that I found in all three of the proposed axes of polarity (Lyle 1995: 171-79) is at the positive pole. I had assumed (influenced no doubt by the familiar Chinese yin-yang polarity) that the bright half would be male. If, as now seems more probable, it is the dark half that is male for the Indo-Europeans, I think we have to seek the explanation in ideas about the hidden and the sacred being male while the everyday, mundane world is female.

In Figure 5, the winter half is shown in the superior location (above) and the summer half in the inferior location (below), and the division at the solstices cuts across this division at an angle. The two winter seasons of winter and spring are shown separated by a dotted line and the two summer seasons of summer and autumn are similarly divided.

The Indo-European Gods

Cosmological time is embedded in a total context, as we can see from the discussion so far, and the universe of meaning would have included the divine as well as the human. I argue that the spatiotemporal sections "hold" the gods, and would even be prepared to say that the concepts of the gods were evolved in relation to the perceived spatiotemporal

environment as well as in relation to the social organisation of the founders of this complex system that we have inherited from prehistoric times (Lyle 2006).

There are four slots in the main circle of the year and I show these in Figure 6 in relation to three gods identified by the Dumézilian function numbers plus the female component that I have argued should be added – a goddess. Within the winter half, which is shown as the upper part of the diagram, there is the winter quarter which I understand takes its special character from the fact that it is correlated with the period of darkness between last light (dusk) and first light (dawn) (Lyle 2008a). The black arrow represents the "12 days" and suggests the incursion of the ancestors at this time.

In the Indo-European context, there are definite traces of descent so that we can say with some confidence that the gods of the pantheon are not all of the same generation. I have been proposing for some time (see, e.g., Lyle 1990; 2006b) that we can understand the pantheon best when we see it as consisting of ten gods, four of whom are "old" and six "young". I suggest that the four slots relate to four young gods, while four equivalent slots in the compressed counterpart of the main circle found at the "12 days" relate to the old, or cosmogonic, gods. An alternative representation would be that each quarter of the year contains both a young god and a matching old god.

A main myth about the four old gods presents them as corresponding to heaven, atmosphere and sea (the males) and to earth (the female), and deals with the rivalry among the gods for the single goddess, culminating in her giving birth to the offspring of all three of them (Lyle 1990: 109-15; 2007).

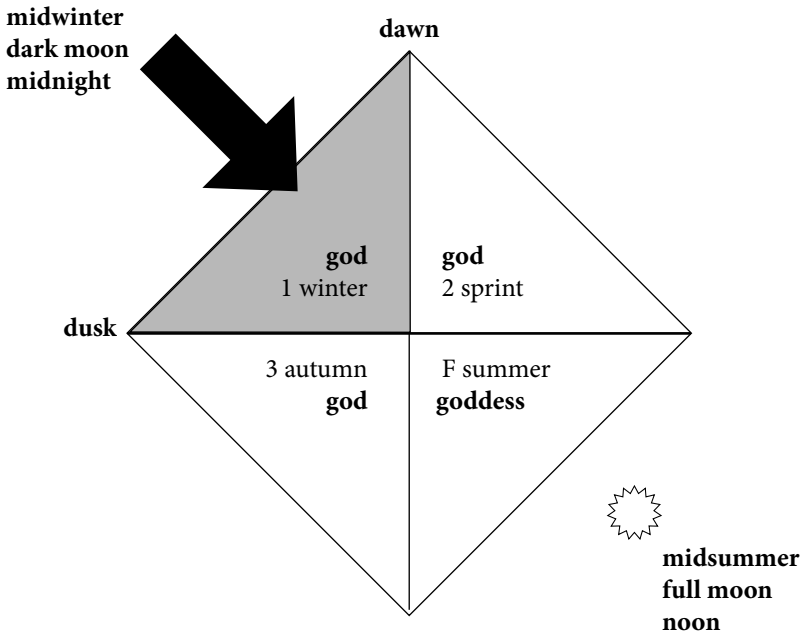

Figure 6 . The seasons and the gods.

A main myth about the six young gods concerns the abduction of the single young goddess and her rescue by her husband with the help of other young gods (Lyle 2008b). The young goddess is a queen (e.g. Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and both the husband (e.g. Rāma) and the abductor (e.g. Rāvaṇa) are kings. In terms of space, the kings can be placed in the centre, representing the whole, while the other gods can be located in the world quarters. In terms of time, it seems likely that the "good" king (the husband) is celebrated throughout most of the year, while the "evil" king (the abductor) has a period of dominance at a specific time connected with the dead, probably within the winter quarter.

The young goddess is one of the set of the four young gods apart from this pair of kings and I have placed her in the sequence after the gods of the 1st and 2nd functions and before the god of the 3rd function. That is, she would belong to the summer quarter, which has been shown in the diagrams up to now as the first of the two phases allocated to the mature men. This is the stage in their life career when they have just married and are focussed on domestic life. It is certainly the phase most strongly connected with the female, and, in terms of the gods, should, I think, be seen as the place of the goddess. The young goddess, identifiable in the Greek context as Helen of Troy, has twin brothers, the Dioskouroi, Castor and Polydeuces (cf. the Indian Aśvins). They have been distinguished from each other as the "warrior horseman" and the "intelligent cattleman", and I would relate them respectively to the 2nd and 3rd functions and place them in the spring and autumn quarters of the year, on either side of their sister.

The Slavic Context

We can now ask how much of this has resonance in the Slavic context. In an overview of mythological studies in 1995, Mikhailov distinguished (p. 172) two strands of research, mentioning V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, L. Moszyński and R. Katičić on the one hand (concerned with the reconstruction of certain elements and motifs of Slavic mythology and of the Slavic pantheon), and N. Tolstoy, S. M. Tolstaya and L. N. Vinogradova et al. on the other (with a more concrete, descriptive and circumscribed approach). The latter approach, as we have seen, has laid the solid basis drawn on in this article and has suggested a structure which may well be a framework that can usefully be put into juxtaposition with the results of the more wide-reaching and speculative enquiries.

I cannot hope to make any extended contribution to this impressively rich field of study that is being actively explored by Slavic scholars, but I shall consider briefly the "ur-Slavic myth of the contest of the thunder-god with the dragon" (Katičić 1988; cf. Ivanov and Toporov 1970). There has been considerable consensus about there being an Indo-European thunder-god, and the Slavic Perun has been equated with Perkunas / Perkons, Thor, Indra and Zeus. The location of this god in the system is still being debated, however. Although he can be interpreted as the king of the gods, and I interpret him in this way (cf. Allen 1999), Dumézil placed him in the 2nd function, and saw him merely as warrior, and, in a recent survey, West also saw him like this and not as king (2007). If he is warrior, he can be placed in the spring quarter of the year, and if he is king he has no one place in the quarters. An identification with St George, with his feast day in the spring, suggests itself, but I think we have to keep in mind the idea that the king might be supported by the warrior in a conflict and that a fusion of the royal figure and his supporter would not be a totally unexpected development, and also that there would be a strong possibility of

simple confusion between these two positive and forceful gods. Ambiguity seems to be even more fully present in the case of the thunder-god's opponent. As Maja Bošković-Stulli puts it (2003: 34), the Slavs "had a religion with a basic myth about the fight of the thunder god Perun with an opponent dragon, i.e. Veles, the god of cattle and ruler of the Kingdom of the Dead". The conflict, as I understand it in the Indo-European context, is between the thunder-god king and his dark brother, who is king of the dead (and this connects fully with one aspect of Veles) but I would see the Indo-European god of cattle as a different character (one of the twins mentioned above) who would be placed in the autumn quarter, whereas the king of the dead seems most likely to have a separate place within the winter quarter.

It is exciting to find that the divine struggle can still be explored today through the study of festivals and toponyms, and Zmago Šmitek presents the conflict as a triangle with Perun and Veles in dispute over the goddess Mokoš, who is taken captive by Veles and rescued by Perun (Šmitek 2008: 18–22; cf. Belaj 1998). This would be a good example of the main myth of the young gods that I mentioned above. The goddess would be connected with summer, and the king, in rescuing her, would, according to the Indo-European model, have the support of her twin brothers (who, in the scheme of the year, seem to be connected with spring and autumn).

Many questions are still open. It is not a matter of everything in a theoretical structure being fixed in advance and the evidence from the Slavic part of the Indo-European world being forced to fit it, but rather of the incorporation of fresh materials and insights from a variety of sources, including Slavic ones, into an evolving model.

If we do not have a theory about how many major gods there are, it is especially difficult to discuss possible gaps or fusions when we are dealing with the isolated names and the elusive glimpses in folk memory that reach us in the Christian period. If we know, or think we can reasonably guess, that there are ten gods enclosed in a spatiotemporal framework, then the question 'Which of the gods is this?' can be asked with much greater confidence, and I see this as one of the values of giving detailed examination to the study of the Indo-European divisions of time. However, temporal structuring is also a very intriguing topic in its own right and exploring it should lead eventually to an improved understanding of the worldview of the Indo-Europeans and of any other peoples who shared their cosmology.

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Čas in indoevropski bogovi v slovanskem kontekstu

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Strokovnjaki še niso nadrobneje preučili možnosti, ki se skrivajo v analizi delitve časa, da bi tako dobili podatke o številu in identiteti indoevropskih bogov. Pričujoči tekst skuša nadaljevati polemiko o možnih dodatnih virih za to temo in domneva, da je moč ta nepopolni dokaz o slovanskih bogovih koristno umestiti v širši indoevropski okvir. Sodobna dela slovanskih raziskovalcev o delitvi časa so ustvarila odlične temelje za prihodnje raziskave.