

holidays. This tendency to build the whole work on one preconceived idea and make the facts conform with the theory has led to strained conclusions, schematism and onesidedness.

**Theory and History of Folklore** has a bibliography of over 400 items, which refer directly or indirectly to Vladimir Propp. We can add only a few more:

Mary C. Coote, "Beyond Morphology: Vladimir Propp's *Istoriceskie korni volsebnj skazki*," **Russian Language Journal** 31 (1977): 133-39; Isidor Levin, "A Belated Open Letter to Vladimir Propp," **Linguistica Biblica** 23/24 (1973): 63-68; Carl Stief, **Studies in the Russian Historical Song** (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953).

The detailed notes help to clarify questions the reader in Russian folklore may have. Professor Anatoly Liberman and his staff of translators have done an excellent job of organizing and translating this collection of studies previously unaccessible to Western readers. Executed with extreme care, this work is one of the best specimens of American Slavic scholarship.

**The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil.** Third edition. By C. Scott Littleton. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. Pp. xvii + 319, bibliography, index, paper, no price.

Reviewed by Hugo A. Freund

The study of comparative mythology, so predominant in the 19th century, has been almost completely discredited. 20th century anthropologists and folklorists place myth in the context of a group that exists in the here and now. Consideration of Indo-European mythology and culture has been forgotten except for the French scholar Georges Dumézil and a corps of his students and disciples. C. Scott Littleton's book is an introduction to the thinking of Dumézil and the work of his disciples. Littleton traces the criticism leveled at them, but is less of a critic himself, although he does quibble with Dumézil on his use of the word 'function'. As Littleton points out in the "Preface to the First Edition" this book is not an intellectual biography.

Comparative linguistic studies of the 19th century determined the protolanguages of such tongues as Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. Some 6400 years ago a hypothetical Proto-Indo-European speaking group fanned out from the Kazakh-Kirghiz region, eventually spreading from Iceland to India. In studying the reconstructed protolanguage, Indo-European languages and mythology, Dumézil concluded that there is a Proto-Indo-European culture. He assumed that all the genetically related languages of Indo-European share a common set of collective representations, ideology and culture which can be compared and treated interchangeably.

In this third edition, Littleton's book can be broken up into six areas. The first is a quick overview of Dumézil's theory, presented in the introduction. The second is a historical grounding. This includes a discussion on the nature of Proto-Indo-European culture as well as the scholarly research on comparative mythology that preceded Dumézil. In the third, Dumézil's career (beginning in 1924 and spanning over 55 years) is broken up into four periods. In the fourth area of the book Dumézil's disciples and critics are given their turn. In the fifth, Littleton assesses Dumézil's system and theory, largely supporting Dumézil's conclusions. Finally, in the appendix, Littleton describes Dumézil's more recent work, as well as that of the disciples. The appendix also contains a fascinating discussion on the links between Dumézil and Claude Lévi-Strauss. One can easily see that Dumézil is a proto-structuralist. Dumézil does not set about the structuralist project of examining universal binary oppositions but is rather interested in the **structured** ideology that organizes a system of thought in a culture.

Dumézil's answer to the late 19th century critics is to emphasize ideology rather than a 'naturalistic' analysis. Mythology, like ritual and custom, is seen as organized by a culture's ideology. Ideology is the organizing principle for all of culture whether it be expressed in religion or mythology. Dumézil argues that the ideology of Proto-Indo-European culture is tripartite, based on a hierarchy of priests, warriors and herder-cultivators. This tripartite system is found in the social organization

as well as in myths. The priest's function is the "maintenance of magico-religious and juridical sovereignty or order" (p.5). This cultural legacy of tripartite ideology continues into the various Indo-European cultures. Tripartite structures can be found to this day in German philosophical thought, Soviet Russia and even in the United States Constitution (the division of government into three branches).

Dumézil is a precursor of Lévi-Strauss in that he proposes two major oppositions within the tripartite system. There is firstly, "an inherent Indo-European antagonism between the priest and the warrior" (p. 321). Secondly, the first two functions (priests and warriors) are in opposition to the third (herder/cultivators). It is only in this opposition that the third function is incorporated into the system.

In perhaps overemphasizing the notion of tripartition, Littleton does not explain the meaning of such a structure for a culture. (In this regard Alan Dundes's study of "The Number Three in American Culture" would be helpful.) How would tripartition infuse, for instance, a ritual or festival with meaning? Dumézil discusses such festive behavior only in terms of how it reflects the tripartite nature of Proto-Indo-European mythological systems.

This book will be of interest to folklorists, anthropologists and religionists interested in the school of new comparative mythology. The issue of Proto-Indo-European culture may be too narrow for most, but perhaps an ambitious soul can vitalize the notion of tripartition such that it is seen as an ongoing process that energizes a culture.

Littleton is very adept at presenting the viewpoint of this new school of comparative mythology. He crisply presents the major conclusions of Dumézil's many books and articles. Perhaps it is too much to ask for a more balanced appraisal of this school's deficiencies. Proto-Indo-European culture is very much a hypothetical model that relies heavily on linguistic and mythological data to reconstruct ideology and culture. Proto-Indo-European culture existed just before the dawn of written records and it is perhaps this kind of data that Dumézil really needs in order to say as much as he does about culture and ideology.