

Chapter Two

Indo-European conceptions of wild animals, and names for them

2.1. Animals of the Middle World

2.1.1. Wolf

2.1.1.1. The earliest Indo-European words for 'wolf'

The semantic unit 'wolf' is represented by several lexemes in Indo-European. One of the earliest ones, showing variations correlated with different chronological levels of Indo-European, is **wlk^{ho}-*: Skt. *vṛkaḥ*, Avest. *vəhrka-*, Gk. *lúkos*, OCS *vlikŭ*, Lith. *vilkas*, Alb. *ulk*. A feminine stem meaning 'she-wolf' arises independently in some dialects: Skt. *vṛkīḥ*, Russ. *volč-i-ca*, Oícel. *ylgr*; Lith. *vilké*; Gk. *lúkaina* (Meillet 1937 [1938:395]). There is also a phonetic variant in **-ph-*, **wlph-*, in individual dialects: Hitt. *ulippana-*, Goth. *wulfs*, Lat. *lupus*; also Arm. *gayl*, with regular absence of final **-ph-*.¹

Parallel to this root, another Indo-European base meaning 'wolf' can be reconstructed, **weit'-(n)-*: Hitt. *wetna-*, Oícel. *vitnir*, Slovene *vedanec*, *vedomec*, *vedavec*, Ukr. *viščun* 'werewolf', OCz. *vêdi* 'she-werewolves' (Jakobson 1966a:346-50).

The fact that there are several words for 'wolf' of Common Indo-European date shows that the wolf was widespread throughout the Indo-European territory. It also indicates its cultic and ritual significance, which is clearly attested in the oldest Indo-European traditions.

2.1.1.2. The ritual role of wolves in ancient Indo-European traditions

In Old Hittite tradition the wolf plays a special role, functioning as the embodiment of sacral qualities. In particular, wolves and wolf packs serve as an

1. **wlk^{ho}-* and **wlph-* ultimately break down into a root **wel-* with the original meaning 'lacerate, tear apart; wound; kill' and suffixes **-k^{ho}-* and **-ph-*, which yield the two Indo-European dialectal variants. For the original meaning of **wel-* cf. Lat. *uellō* 'tear, tear apart', *uolnus* 'wound', Gk. *oulē* 'wound', Oír. *fuil* 'blood', Mír. *fuili* 'bloody wounds', Goth. *wilwan* 'plunder', *wulwa* 'robbery, brigandage', Oícel. *valr* 'corpses on battlefield', Toch. A *wāl-* 'die', Luw. *u(wa)lanti-* 'dead', Hier. Luw. *wal(a)-* 'die' (Hawkins 1980). Consequently, the original Indo-European meaning of 'wolf' was 'animal which tears apart (its prey)', 'killer beast'. For other derivatives of **wel-* with the same meaning 'beast of prey', see below.

image of unity and omniscience. Thus King Hattusilis I (who reigned in the seventeenth century B.C.), addressing his council, urges his warrior subjects to unite 'like a wolf pack': *ú-e-it-na-aš ma-a-an pa-an-gur*. Dressing in wolf skins (cf. Hitt. LÚMEŠ UR.BAR.RA 'wolf people', i.e. people dressed in wolf skins, KBo XVI 68 I 13; 78 IV 9 et al.) conveys magical power, evidently conferring omniscience on the wearer, and may have been symbolic of a special juridical status. The formula for people turning into wolves, attested in *zik-wa UR.BAR.RA-aš kištat* 'you have turned into a wolf' of the Hittite Laws (§37), resembles Skt. *vṛko hí śáh* 'he is a wolf', referring to a special juridical status in the wedding ritual of kidnapping the bride (Watkins 1970a).²

Parallels to these Hittite formulas and rituals can be found in a number of other early Indo-European traditions, which testifies to their Proto-Indo-European character and reconstructibility. In ancient Greek tradition, a person 'becomes a wolf' (*lúkōi genésthai*, Plato: *Republic*) in connection with a special ritual form of killing. This corresponds exactly to a Germanic formula: in an Old Icelandic peacemaking oath a murderer 'shall be called a wolf' (*skal svá víða vargr heita*): Ivanov 1975.

There is a striking parallel to the Old Hittite ritual of putting on wolf skins, and to dances of 'wolf people' (LÚMEŠ UR.BAR.RA), i.e. those dressed in wolf skins, in an ancient Germanic tradition where warriors are depicted as wearing wolf skins and referred to as wolves (OE *heoruwulfas*, *wælwulfas* 'wolf warriors'). The custom is also found in Gothic: in Byzantium, Christmas was marked by ritual dances of Gothic warriors in wolf skins down to the end of the Byzantine period (see Kraus 1895). It is also noteworthy that the word 'wolf' was frequently used in Germanic personal names such as Goth. *Ulfilas* (see Kock 1924), OIcel. *Ulf-björn*, *Björn-olfr*, OHG *Wulf-bero*, OE *Bēo-wulf*; also relevant is the Frankish term *werwulf* 'werewolf', lit. 'person wolf'.

Ancient Slavic and Baltic traditions exhibit an especially clear correspondence with the Hittite and Germanic ones in a ritual transformation of a human into a wolf, which confers supernatural strength and the special status of vatic or all-knowing person (Jakobson 1966a, Ridley 1976). The omniscient Wolf King of the Slavs had wolf hair growing on his head, thus Slovene *voščja dláka* 'wolf hair, wolf locks' (cf. OIcel. *vargshár*, id.); the same expression subsequently provides the name for werewolves: Russ. *vurdalak*, Bulg. *valkolak*, etc. A distinctive characteristic of 'wolfskin people' and werewolves was their omniscience. This must reflect an ancient tradition, going back to Proto-Indo-European, of omniscient humans in wolf form (cf. Ukr. *viščun*, OCz. *vědi*, etc.), reflected in the evident link of **weit'-(n)-* 'wolf' and **weit'-* 'know' (Gk. *oîda*, Skt. *véda*, Russ. *vedat'*).

2. Cf. the wolf (*vṛkah*) as the image of a thief or robber (*aghásansa-*) in the Rigveda, I, 42, 2-4.

2.1.1.3. The ritual status of the wolf, and dialect terms for 'wolf'

The special cultic and ritual status of wolves in Indo-European traditions, and their complex of sacred properties, give rise to the descriptive word for 'wolf', cognate to **weít*- 'know', which coexists with original **wl̥kʰo-* ~ **wl̥ph-*. These two roots are distributed throughout the Indo-European dialects, variously in the ritually marked sense and as the basic word for 'wolf'. The heavy functional load of the semantic element 'wolf' and the tendency to taboo certain original animal names may explain the appearance of new, sometimes euphemistic, formations meaning 'wolf' in various dialects (Zelenin 1929-1930).³ For instance, in Latvian we find ancient euphemisms such as *dieva suns*, lit. 'god's dog', *meža suns* 'forest dog'.

The wolf as a predatory animal is designated with a new term cognate to the root **dheu-* 'smother', 'crush', 'kill', attested in OCS *daviti* 'smother', 'crush', Goth. *afdauiþs* 'tormented' (causative participle), *þata diwanō* 'mortal' (*tò thnētón*), *undiwanei* 'immortal' (*athanatía*) (see above for the term for 'mortal; human' from this root).⁴ Also formed from this root are ancient Balkan Indo-European words: the name of the Maionian god *Kandaulas*, which according to Hipponax means 'dog-strangler' (*kunágkhēs*), interpreted as one of the incarnations of an Indo-European wolf god to whom dogs were sacrificed (O. Masson 1962:106). Such words are attested with the meaning 'wolf' (etymologically 'killer, smotherer') in forms like Phrygian *dáos* (Hesychius) and Illyrian *Daurus* (cf. also *thaûnon* · *thērion* in Hesychius).

2.1.1.4. Ethnonyms and toponyms connected with 'wolf'

Wolves were important in Indo-European tradition throughout its entire history, from Proto-Indo-European to historical times, as is testified by widespread

3. This could also be the explanation for the Germanic designation of the wolf as 'criminal': Olcel. *vargr*, OHG *warg*, OE *wearg* (Jacoby 1974), cf. Goth. *ga-warg-jan* 'condemn, sentence', cognate to Hitt. *hurk-el* 'repulsive crime' (Puhvel 1971), cf. also LÚMEŠ *hurkilaš* 'people of crime' as the name of mythological beings who capture a wolf in their hands (in KUB XII 63 I 21ff.). The pan-Germanic term *vargtré* 'wolf tree' mentioned above (II.1.4.4) can be compared to Hitt. *hurki-* 'wheel' (§198 of the Hittite Laws, Sumerogram GIŠDUBBIN, DDUBBIN 'divine wheel' in the Autobiography of Hattusilis, I.36, in a context concerning the punishment of a criminal). Cf. the ritual meanings of the same root in Slavic: ORuss. *voroziti* 'foretell', *vorozija* 'witch', *vorog* 'enemy', *vorozja* 'witchcraft', Russ. dial. *vorozejka*, a weathervane consisting of a pole stuck in the ground and a horizontal stick at the top with a bundle of tow at the end (Filin 1965-:5.109) (cf. the meaning of Olcel. *vargtré*, referring to a ritual pillar).

4. **wl̥kʰo-* and **wl̥ph-* had essentially this same original meaning; cf. Homeric *lússa* 'warrior's rage' (lit. 'rage of wolf') from *lúkos* 'wolf': *lússa dé hoi kêr aièn ékhe krateré* 'his (Achilles') heart was forever ruled by a powerful wolf's rage', Iliad 21.542-43 (see Lincoln 1975). However, this original meaning of 'wolf' could subsequently have been lost, which made possible the rise of new terms for 'wolf' based on the same characteristic.

ethnonyms and toponyms containing the root 'wolf'. Whole peoples and countries were named for the wolf, due to the place given to wolves in the cultural traditions, probably of totemic origin, of various Indo-European tribes. The following examples are listed in order from west to east.

Ancient Italy: the tribe names *Lukani* (transmitted via Greek), *Hirpini* from **hirpus* 'wolf' (cf. the oracular prophesy reported by Servius, according to which *Hirpi Sorani* '*lupos imitarentur*', 'imitate wolves'), the Illyrian tribe *Daúnioi*.

The ancient Balkans: Strabo's name for the Dacians, *dáoi* 'wolves' (Eliade 1959); north Balkan *Daúnton teíkhos* 'wolf wall' (in Stephanus Byzantinus).

Greece and the Greek part of Asia Minor: *Lykaonia*, related to the name of the mythic king Lykaon; the city name *Lukósoura*; possibly *Lukka-*, a name in Hittite texts for a region of Asia Minor; the tribe name *Orka* (*Orkoi*) in Phrygia (Eisler 1951:137).

Iranian: the Sarmatian tribe *Oúrgoi* 'wolves' (Strabo); Old Iranian formations like **Vrkāna-* (in Elamite transmission *mi-ir-ka-nu-ya-ip* 'inhabitants of Hyrcania' beside the *Hyrkanoi* of classical authors); *Hyrkaniā*, located on the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea and in the Transcaucasus (Cereteli 1963).

2.1.1.5. *Typological and areal parallels to the status of wolves among the ancient Indo-Europeans*

Striking parallels to the Indo-European wolf cult are to be found in South Caucasian (Kartvelian) culture. A wolf cult occupies a special place in the earliest traditions. The depiction of people in wolf masks is a basic motif of ritual art. Traces of the wolf cult are especially clear in Svan traditions, where as in ancient Indo-European wolves are a symbol of a certain type of social organization (Bardavelidze 1957:37ff.). Moreover, Svan tradition equates the mobility of wolf packs with that of human groups: the organization of wolves is a reflection in nature of human social organization (Charachidzé 1968:482).

In Old Georgian tradition the significance of the wolf cult is reflected in the names of the rulers of Iberia, which contained Iranian words meaning 'wolf', for example the epithet of the Old Georgian king Vakhtang Gorgasala 'Vakhtang Wolfhead'; the very name Vakhtang may be Iranian, from **warx-tang* = *vāhrka-tanū-* 'wolf-bodied' (cf. the Ossetic hero's name in the Nart epic, *Wærxæg*, from 'wolf' according to Abaev 1949:I.187, 1965:95). The name of ancient Iberia itself, **Vrkān-* = *Hyrkaniā*, goes back to the same Iranian word for 'wolf' (Cereteli 1963). As a result of the cultic status of wolves, the original Kartvelian word for 'wolf' undergoes taboo and is replaced by borrowings from other languages. Georgian *mgel-i*, Mingrelian *ger-i* are probably taken from Armenian (cf. Arm. *gayl* 'wolf'); Svan *txer* 'wolf' is obviously connected to Gk.

—*thēr* 'wild animal'. Similarly, in Ossetic, where the wolf was an ancient totemic animal and the mythic ancestor of the tribe, the original Indo-European word was tabooed and is preserved only in mythic names. It is replaced by a word of apparent Turkic origin, *bīræǵ/beræǵ* (Abaev 1958:I.262-63, 1949:I.48-49).

The wolf cult plays a special role in the South Caucasus,⁵ and many traits of the tradition connected with ritual status of wolves coincide in their essential elements right down to striking details with the ancient Indo-European traditions. The coincidence of this entire complex unites the Indo-European and South Caucasian traditions with a wider circle of mythic conceptions characteristic of a much broader area which extended far to the east (see Alföldi 1974:32, 150ff. for the wolf cult in this area).

According to the most recent archeological data, the earliest evidence of wolves is observed at the turn of the eighth and seventh millennia B.C. in a broad area of Southwest Asia, including continental Greece: Thessaly, eastern Asia Minor, the Iranian plateau, and Palestine, as well as some regions of western Europe and England (Berger and Protsch 1973:223).

2.1.2. Bear

2.1.2.1. The Indo-European word for 'bear'

Another Proto-Indo-European word denoting a large predator is **H₁rt̥h₂k̥h-*, with regular correspondences across the early Indo-European dialects: Hitt. *hartagga-*,⁵ Skt. *ṛkṣaḥ*, Avest. *arəšō*, Gk. *árktos*, Arm. *arj*, Lat. *ursus*, Mlr. *art*.⁶ That the bear was well established in the ecological environment of the ancient Indo-Europeans can be inferred from the presence of this word in Proto-Indo-European and its reflexes in the basic dialect groups.

2.1.2.2. The cultic role of the bear in Hittite and other ancient Indo-European traditions

Although the bear has a role in ancient Indo-European tradition, its ritual significance is less than that of the wolf, with which it is often associated in

5. Contrary to Otten's suggestion (see Neu 1974:32, 103) that *hartagga-* should be translated 'wolf' rather than 'bear', 'bear' is the more probable translation and in accord with the word's etymology (see Watkins 1975h). In addition, the contextual interpretations of the word indicate 'bear', not 'wolf'; for instance, Hittite texts (KUB XXIX 1 I 30 and others) mention the ability of the *hartagga-* to climb trees. Furthermore, at least two words for 'wolf' are attested in Hittite: *ulippana-* and *wetna-* (see 2.1.1.1 above).

6. This Celtic word is borrowed from Celtiberian into Basque as well, in the form *hartz* 'bear' (Čižmarov 1941:19).