

# What the Comparative Method has to Tell Us

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## A. "To Know" – dialogues between Cosmo and Waldo

1. Cosmo: I know how to prove the Pythagorean theorem.

Waldo: Tell me how!

Cosmo: First you mark of squares on each side. Then, ...

Presupposition: Waldo presupposes that Cosmo has an articulated conception of premises and deductions that can be stated in some logical order (entailment).

"To know" implies a reflective level of consciousness with articulable knowledge.

2. Cosmo: I know German.

Waldo: Tell me about it!

Cosmo: Well, my grandmother spoke it to me when I was a child.

Waldo: No, I mean tell me how German works.

Cosmo: I can't, but I know how to speak it. Ich habe einen Platz bekommen, ...

Waldo: Why 'einen Platz'?

Cosmo: Because...

Presupposition: Waldo presupposes that Cosmo has a capacity to speak German.

"To know" implies a competence, but need not entail a reflective level of consciousness.

3. Cosmo: I know a great myth of the Storm God

Waldo: Tell me about it!

Cosmo: Well long ago this young maiden was bathing in a stream. She was so beautiful that she glowed and lit up the surrounding banks ...

Waldo: No, tell me how you know this tale.

Cosmo: Because my grandmother told it to me.

Waldo: Let me rephrase that. Why is this tale as it is? Why is she bathing? Why does she glow? How can she glow?

Cosmo: Because...

Presupposition: Waldo assumes that Cosmo has learned a tale from some story teller. Cosmo has no privileged

access to the reasons why the tale has the details that it does.

“To know” implies a competence similar to that of knowing a language. No reflective level of consciousness is entailed.

## **B. Culture vs. Choice**

1. The cultured organism can adapt with minimal loss to its gene pool.
2. For culture to be adaptive its lessons must be retained as long as the selective pressure for them prevails. As long as they confer “fitness” on the culture.
3. Retention is called “conservatism” in political or social discourse.
4. In order to adapt when change occurs innovation must be possible. Without innovation culture is pointless and equivalent to genetic selection.

5. Therefore, a cultured species must live in constant tension between conservative and innovative tendencies to be “fit.”

6. Choice consists of the selection of two givens or the creation of something new.

7. The innovation is most often an addition to or modification of the older choices. The utterly new (“before its time”) is usually seen as incoherent, meaningless, because meaning is contextual, systematic.

8. Therefore, choice is embedded in the past, and the past leaves non-adaptive relics

9. Question: Can the past explain cultural aspects that are otherwise inexplicable, non-adaptive, “odd” details?

Answer: Yes, but only through the comparative method.

10. Conjecture: When we know without reflective consciousness (inarticulable knowledge), is it because we follow the

scripts of the past as blind actors or we follow genetically inherited agendas?

11. Two tentative answers to (10):

a. Inherited details (encoding certain motifs) are revealing, particular, and non-adaptive.

b. Built in behaviour (motifs, or the Darwinian drivers of socio-biology) is universal.

12. The meaning of cultural activity is a reflective consciousness created to “explain” our behaviour (adaptive or not) in contemporary terms. It is always innovative, but rarely “correct.”

**C. An Example: a myth from the Caucasus**  
**“Sosruquo and Sotrash,”**  
 (Colarusso, 2002: 236-243)

1. So-trash, also To-trash, implies \*Two-astr “two stars”, Morning and Evening Stars, (Skr *Tvastr* ‘maker’ from *tvak-tr* must be a folk

etymology). (Both names must come from a Khotanese or Saka form of Iranian, with \*Cw- > Co-, instead of the usual \*Cw- > Cp-.)

2. Sosruquo from a rock (Storm God)

3. sired by Sos (< IE \*k<sup>y</sup>wes- ‘breath,’ Skr *śvas-*, Eng *wheeze*) or Gorgonizh.  
Also, the “sire” of So-trash.

4. Sosruquo has a voice like thunder.

5. Totrash is a darkness with eyes that gleam like the Morning and Evening Stars (Abaza variant).

6. First duel:

a. Totrash makes Sosruquo plow the sky like a woolen ball (cloud?)

b. T makes S plow the earth with his shoulder like a team of oxen.

c. T makes S vomit up all the mother’s milk that he had ever drunk.

d. T dirties S's moustache, and S snots like eight oxen.

f. Sosruquo begs for mercy.

g. Totrash grants him a reprieve.

h. They agree to meet on Harama Hill.

7. Second duel:

a. Setenaya (Sosruquo's mother) advises Sosruquo to put bells on his horse.

b. She says that Totrash was one of 9 brothers.

c. The other eight are already dead.

d. Totrash must "follow their path."

e. The bells will frighten Totrash's horse.

f. Sosruquo reaches Harama Hill before Totrash.

g. Sosruquo creates a fog



- h. When Totrash arrives Sosruquo makes his horse ring the bells.
- i. Totrash's horse rears up.
- j. Totrash rips out its jaws trying to rein it in. It falls and he is toppled.
- k. Sosruquo strikes at him from the fog.
- l. Sosruquo sits atop Totrash and calls him a piglet.
- m. When Totrash begs for mercy Sosruquo says they could go on forever this way.
- n. He cuts off Totrash's head.
- o. He brings it to Setenaya.
- p. Setenaya flies into a fury and demands that he take it away to Totrash's mother.
- q. He brings it to Totrash's mother.

r. She calls him ‘a dog’ and throws a spit/knitting needle at him.

s. It wounds him in the leg.

t. He is called Lame Sosruquo henceforth.

Much of this tale is enigmatic to Abazas, who tell it.

## **D. Comparisons of detail across cultures and through time.**

### 1. Storm gods

#### North West Caucasian

To-trash is a darkness,

Sosruquo is a degraded storm god.

Sosruquo is a shape changer, and strikes his enemies as a fog.

Sosruquo has a voice of thunder

Hittite

Zaskhapuna (Hattic, pre-Hittite, name)/

Tarhunnash ‘Conqueror,’ is the storm god.

Hurrian

Tesh(sh)ub is the storm god.

India

Both Indra and Vrtra duel with rain, hail, and lightning.

Ireland

Cú Chulainn exhibits bizarre battle ‘tremors.’  
He has a deafening, terrifying battle cry.

Norse

Thor, and his parents, Förgynn and Förgyni,  
storm gods and fertility figures.

Russian

Perun is the god of thunder and lightning, also of fertility.

Volk Vseslavjevich changes shape.

He has a voice of thunder.

Baltic

Perkūnas is the storm god.

2. Stony wombNWC

Sosruquo is born aflame from a rock.

Hurr

Ubelluri, a substrate from which heaven and earth arise, bears a chthonic monster, Ullikumi (ulli-kumi striker-(of.)kumi, where Teshub lives;

[for Ubell-uri, *cf.*, Gk *omphalos*, Eng. *navel* – Gilles Gauthier, p.c.)]

3. Born aflame (from a rock), heroic heatNWC

Sosruquo is born aflame.

Abkhazian Ts'fits'f /č'°əč'°/ lies in the hearth in his childhood and youth.

India

*Tapas*, acquired by sadhus through austerities.

### Iranian

Ossetian Batradz turns red hot as he dances upon his pyre.

### Russian

Ilja Murometz sits on a stove for 33 years so that he can perform heroic deeds.

### Norse

Starkadr lies about the hearth in the ashes.  
Ref lies about in the kitchen (contains the hearth).

### Ireland

Lug turns red hot with rage when he accuses the sons of Turan of killing his father, Cian.  
Cú Chulainn must be dunked in three vats of water to cool him of his battle frenzy when he returns from his first exploits.

### Greece

Thetis tries to roast the mortality out of her demi-god son, Achilles.

Demeter tries to roast the mortality out of Demophoön.

### Baltic

Lith. Perkūnas, Latv. P ērkōns has a fiery red face

## 4. God of the forge, the Great Smith

### NWC

Satanaya, Sosruquo's mother, is assisted in her delivery by Tlepsh, the god of the forge.

Aynar is the god of the forge in Abkhazian

( /a-yn-ar/ the-great-gerund, 'the great one')

Sosruquo is rendered lame by Totrash's mother, who is outraged at the death of her son.

Smiths are usually lame, so this links Sosruquo with the smithy.

### Ireland

Cú Chulainn is linked with the forge through Culann.

### Greece

The three original Cyclopes forge Zeus's thunderbolts.

## 5. Tempering though quenching

### NWC

Flaming baby Sosruquo is quenched and tempered by Tlepsh, who holds him with tongs by the thighs.

Sosruquo is dark and invulnerable except in his thighs.

### German

Siegfried bathes in the hot blood of the dragon, Fafnir.

His skin is hardened, so that he is invulnerable except in one spot on his back, where a leaf fell while he was bathing.

### Ireland

Cú Chulainn is dunked in seven vats to cool him off.

### Armenia

Mher is dunked in vats (7 or 9) to cool him off.

### Greece

Thetis dunks Akhilleus in a stream while holding him by his heel.

Akhilleus is invulnerable everywhere except that heel.

6. Khthonic womb, helper made of earth.

NWC

Sosruquo born from a rock.

He is buried under a mountain why he “dies.”

(Sosruquo is thrown to the earth/must plow the earth.)

Hitt

The dragon, Illuyanka, lives underground with his sons.

Hurr

Kumarbi sires Ullikumi (who is stony) on Ubelluri (amorphous base of heaven and earth)

Norse

Hrungnir fashions Mistcalf of clay to help him fight Thor.



## 7. Mother of the warband

### NWC

Satanaya is “mother of one hundred,” “mother of all the Narts.”

Also West Circassian /še-q<sup>o</sup>ə-ne/ 100-son-mother

### Ireland

Queen Madb honors all the heroes, the three warbands (of Leoghaire, Conall, andf Cú Chulainn).

The three Madbs or Brigits appear to be transfunctional (relate to three groups of warriors).

### Iran

Anāhitā is the transfunctional goddess.

### Greece

Athena (clearly substratal in origin) is transfunctional.

## 8. Marginality of Mother (old exogamy)

### NWC

Satanaya is from another ethnic group.

Satanaya is raped by a crude shepherd, Gorgonizh, Argwan, Yergwan, all names meaning 'rapist.'

/g°e-r-g°e-n-əž/ vagina-loc-stuff-inf-evil,

/e-r-g°e-n/ the-loc-stuff-inf,

/y-e-r-g°e-n/ dir-dative-stuff-inf,

### Russian

Mother of Volkh Vseslavjevich is raped by a serpent. She is a foreigner.

### Greece

Aphrodite is foreign.

### Ireland

Gwenwhyver (Irish Findabair) is brought to Arthur's court from another kingdom.

## 9. Marginality of the young storm god

### NWC

Sosruquo is the result of a rape.

Other Narts remain hostile to Sosruquo because he is a bastard.

### Hitt

Tarhunnash becomes marginal after his first defeat, and must marry a lowly mortal woman.

### Hurr

Teshub is shunned by the gods after his first defeat.

### India

Indra is abandoned by other gods during his fight with Vrtra.

### Greece

Achilles spend most of the Iliad aloof from the other Achaeans.

### Russian

Heroes (Ilja Muromets, Dobrynja Nikitich) are marginal, non-noble.

## 10. Two disembodied eyes/One-eyed

### NWC

To-str < 1st wave “para-Tokharian” or “Twastrian” for ‘Two-Eyes’, both floating in a dark (storm) cloud or mass.

### Hitt

Tarhunnash loses his 2 eyes (plus his heart)

### Norse

Odin yields up an eye.

### Greek

Cyclopes, lightning fashioning primordial smiths

### Ireland

Cú Chulainn’s war tremors yield a temporary state of being one-eyed.

Fomoirean Balor with his single, evil eye

### Rome

Horatius Cocles with his evil eye.

11. Plowing the skyNWC

Sosruquo plows the sky like a cotton ball, a cloud image.

Hurr

Ea, wise god, sunders heaven from earth by plowing.

12. Painful shoulderNWC

Sosruquo's shoulder hurts from plowing.

Hurr

Ubelluri complains of his shoulder hurting when Ea sunders Ullikumi from it.

13. Serpent enemy, cousin, fatherNWC

Lightning is Circassian, /š<sup>ˈ</sup>əbλe/, which also means 'poisonous snake.'

Hitt

Illuyanka is a dragon.

Inra ties him up with a cord.

India

Indra, a Deva, fights his cousin Vrtra, an Asura in the form of a giant snake, to release the waters of the world.

Iran

Aži Dahāka (Zohhak) is a three-headed monster, with two heads being serpentine.

Norse

Thor fishes for the Midgard serpent

Jormungand, and by snagging him/her almost releases the ocean surrounding the earth.

Thor fights Jormungand at Ragnarök.

Odin penetrates Hnitbjorg Mountain as a snake and seduces Suttung's daughter, Gunnloð, perhaps while still a snake.

Sigurd (Siegfried) slays the dragon, Fafnir.

Russian

Perun slays a horned serpent atop a mountain to bring rain to the earth.

Volkh Vseslavjevich's mother is raped by a serpent.

Greece

Zeus loses his sinews to Typhon in their first battle (*cf.*, the cord used by Inara in Hittite).

14. Two (aerial) duelsNWC

Two battles with Totrash, Sosruquo loses first, and wins second

Pataraz jumps into the air to fight.

Hitt

Two battles with Illuyanka, a dragon, atop a mountain..

Tarhunnash loses first and wins second.

Hurr.

Two battles, the first, in the air, goes badly for Teshub.

India

Indra fights Vrtra, who is atop a mountain, from the air.

There are two duels.

Indra is wounded in the first and takes his leave so as to have his mouth replaced.

Then he returns to resume the battle.

Greek

Zeus has two duels with Typhon (with snakes for limbs), losing the first.

15. Helping woman, perhaps of lowly statusNWC

Sosruquo helped by mother, Satanaya.

Satanay also helped by Aynar the smith (Abkhaz)

She-Bartinuquo helped by a lowly woman, Radem, "Wheel."

Hitt

Tarhunnash helped by wife, Zaliyanu (a mountain), and by Inara/Inra/Inar, his daughter,



whose mortal husband, Hupasya, makes Illuyanka drunk.

### India

Indra is helped by an eagle who brings him mead stolen from Tvastr, Indra's father.

### Norse

Loki borrows Freyr's eagle suite to save Idunn from Thjasi, so the eagle may be feminine.

## 16. Loss of kinship ties, Mother's Milk

### NWC

Sosruquo is forced by Totrash to vomit up all the mother's milk he has ever drunk.

Shared mother's milk (symbolic suckling) was until recently the basis for fictive kinship.

### Hitt

Tarhunnash son marries the daughter of Illuyanka and must swear allegiance to the dragon.

## 17. Trickery and murder

### NWC

Sosruquo kills Totrash by trickery.

### Hitt

Tarhunnash retrieves his eyes and heart by making his son ask Illuyanka for them as a “bride price.”

### India

Indra is tricky. Uses trickery to kill the demon Namuci.

Indra kills his fathert, Tvastr, who has mead hidden in a mountain.

### Norse

Odin kills Suttung who hides mead in Hnitbjorg mountain.

(Compare Norse *Hnit-* with Greek island of *Knidos* in *The Odyssey*.)

## 18. Outrage at murder of kin

### NWC

Sosruquo kills Totrash and Satanaya becomes furious.

Eight brothers of Totrash have already been killed.

Totrash's mother is furious at Sosruquo and wounds him so that he is lame.

### Sumerian

Bilgames kills Huwawa, the woodland monster, and infuriates the gods, even though the sun god knew he was to do so.

He and Huwawa "should have been kin."

[This episode is absent from the Akkadian, with the battle of Gilgamesh with Humbaba.]

### India

Indra flees in horror after killing Vrtra.

He staggers backward, then turns and runs.

Vrtra is his cousin, but earlier may Vrtra is his cousin.

Indra killed his father, who is assumed to have been Tvastr.

Norse

Thor staggers backward (and dies) after slaying  
Jörmungand, the great serpent.

Staggering backward is how a god dies in Norse.

Russian

Dobrynja Nikitich is horrified when he has  
killed the squid-like dragon.

He and the dragon are blood-siblings.

19. FilicideHitt

Tarhunnash must kill his own son, who insists  
that he do so, so that he may die with the honor  
of his word.

India

Indra confronts his son.

Iran

Rustam kills his son, Sohrab

Ireland

Find mac Cumhail allows Diarmaid, a young Fiana, to die.

Cú Chulainn is led to kill Con(d)lae, because of Conlae's geasa,  
(Conlae cannot reveal his identity to an opponent).

German

Hildebrand kills his son Hadubrand.

20. Wound to the mouthNWC

Sosruquo's moustaches are dirtied and he snots like plowing oxen.

Totrash rips out the jaws of his horse.

Hitt

Tarhunnash is wounded.

Hurr

Teshub is wounded.

India

Indra looses his jaws to Vrtra.

Ireland

As part of Cú Chulainn's war tremors his mouth pulled back to his ears and his liver could be seen flapping in it.

21. Golden mouthNWC

She Batinuquo can be seen from afar because of his golden moustache that glitters.

India

Indra receives prosthetic golden jaws after his wound from Vrtra.

22. Helping eagle from a mountainNWC

Pataraz has a bird fly over his head during his mountain battle.

Hitt: Zaskhapuna and his wife, Zaliyanu, are mountains.

(Tarhunnash does not appear to be anything but an aerial god.)

### India

An eagle escapes from a mountain and brings *soma*.

An eagle brings mead to Indra in his battle with Vrtra.

### Iran

The Simorgh (female giant bird) helps Zāl.

### Norse

Odin, as an eagle, steals the Mead of Inspiration from a mountain, Hnitbjorg.

## 23. Intoxication

### NWC

Sosruquo brings *sana* back from a mountaintop.

### Hitt

Inara makes Illuyanka and his sons drunk so that her father, Zaskhapuna/Tarhunnash can slay them.

## India

Indra is aided by mead in his fight with Vrtra, but it is not clear who drinks it.

### **E. The Proto-Myth (c. 5,000 years old)**

1. There are two storm deities, one benevolent and humanoid, from one clan of gods, the other malevolent and draconian or serpentine, from an opposing clan.

2. The humanoid one has a marginal mother from a foreign land.

3. Her status remains marginal because she is transfunctional and supports all the original warbands (moieties, later Dumézilian functions).

4. The benevolent storm god is young, wields a thunderbolt, and has a voice like thunder (his battle cry).

5. The malevolent storm god is older, monstrous, but also has all the accoutrements of a storm



god, hail, lightning bolts, etc., but also venom. He (she?) bears horns (IE distortive sacred pun kernu-/kornu- ‘horn’ ~ \*perkuno- ‘strike, blow’).

6. The myth has celestial aspects, linking the glowing eyes of one with the morning and evening stars.

7. The good storm god is a bastard, his transfunctional mother having been raped by a shepherd, earlier a serpent.

8. He is linked to the god of the forge, who befriends his mother.

9. He is born aflame and spends most of his gestation in a rock womb.

10. He is quenched and hardened, but retains a spot of vulnerability.

11. The good storm god starts his life aloof from his peers, and resented by them.

12. He lives with the smith, and only gains integration as head of the warband after his triumph.

13. These two gods engage in two duels, with the benevolent god losing the first.

14. This quarrel may be over the good storm god's eyes, the Morning and Evening Stars.

15. In either the first or second duel the enemy storm god fashions an khthonic helper to mimic the stony origin of the good storm god. This helper proves useless because it lacks holy heat/fire.

16. The benevolent god is injured in the mouth and receives a golden mouth, face.

17. The defeated god was made to plow the sky like a cloud, and the earth like an ox.

18. The malevolent god called upon a chthonic figure to assist him.

19. The defeated god asks for a reprieve and is granted one, to resume the duel on another day.

20. The defeated god is forced to yield up his eyes and heart to the victorious, malevolent god. This leaves the benevolent god crippled (*cf.*, Zeus' loss of his tendons to Typhon in his first duel).

21. The defeated god becomes an outcast, marginal to the gods.

22. While lowly he receives the aid of a woman, perhaps lowly or younger, whom he eventually marries or is the offspring of his marriage.

23. Either he, his daughter, or the god of the forge are called 'the great one,' which is borrowed from the NWC \*/yən-re/, big-gerund, 'the great one', whence Indo-Aryan Indra, Avestan indara, Hittite I-na-ra, as shifted epithets.

24. The son of the benevolent god falls in love with and marries the daughter of the dragon

(Dawn?) and must renounce his kinship bonds because of matrilocal requirements peculiar to the western Caucasus.

25. The benevolent god engages in a ruse, and uses the linking of his family with that of the dragon's to secure his missing eyes and heart.

26. The benevolent god engages in a ruse, and uses the linking of his family with that of the dragon's to regain his missing eyes and heart, but dooming his son in the process.

27. The good storm god arrives to fight on the appointed resumptive date.

28. His woman has advised him to strike first and treacherously.

29. He is aided by an eagle, his daughter, who has stolen mead from a mountain where the god's father dwells, perhaps the same mountain where the battle is taking place.

30. He kills the evil storm god, despite the fact that the latter begs to be granted mercy.

31. He flees in panic at his deed because he has killed kin, his serpent father or later a dragon cousin. (Conflation of two herpatological killings)

32. He has also had to kill his own callow son, who has been crucial to his father's victory, but who will not accept his father's mercy extended to him on the field of battle (a mountaintop)n because of honor.

33. By killing kin, he incurs the wrath of his mother or of a patron god(dess).

34. He becomes pre-eminent and leads the warband through the sky.

## **F. Conclusion**

This is why these numerous, far-flung, and diverse cultures tell some of these myths, though the tellers are oblivious to the older roots behind their tales.

The themes are scattered, reinterpreted, reassigned, and rearranged, but they are there because of the past proto-myth.

The past is very much alive in their songs.

The past shapes the details of all cultural aspects.