

PELOPS, THE HAZEL-WITCH AND THE PRE-EATEN IBEX: ON AN ANCIENT
CIRCUMPONTIC SYMBOLIC CLUSTER.

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0. Introduction. According to a legend preserved in several Greek sources, Pelops, the legendary ancestor of the House of Atreus, was killed by his own father, Tantalos, who cut up, boiled and served his son's flesh as a meal to the gods. None of the gods tasted the meal, save one, who took a piece from the shoulder. The gods gathered up the fragments of Pelops's body, threw them into a cauldron, and added a shoulderblade of ivory to replace the one that had been eaten. Pelops emerged hale and hearty from the cauldron, with the addition of the ivory shoulderblade which was subsequently to be a mark of his lineage.

The comparative folklorists W. Mannhardt (1858: 38-75) and C. W. von Sydow (1910) located similar themes of consumption, resuscitation and prosthesis in Eurasian folklore, and more recently L. Schmidt (1963) proposed that the European variants of the "Pelops motif" diffused westward from the Caucasus region. In the course of the past two years I have re-examined the Pelops dossier, in the light of recent ethnographic and linguistic work on the cultures of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The prosthesis motif has been selected as the pivotal element in the comparison undertaken here because of its limited distribution, restricted to the regions of Eurasia to be discussed in this paper. It is my belief that the motif of a creature, human or animal, which is eaten and subsequently brought back to life with an artificial bone inserted in its body, is but one component of a complex of beliefs and symbols associated with hunting, game animals and the deities who watch over them. The resemblances between these symbolic clusters as found among the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus, on the one hand, and among the Burushos and their Indo-Aryan-speaking neighbours in the Hindu-Kush/Karakorum region of northern Pakistan, on the other hand, are sufficiently close to warrant a hypothesis of historical links between the two areas (Tuite, 1995a). These facts, supported by linguistic similarities, both lexical and structural, between the isolate Burushaski and the Northeast Caucasian languages, further lead me to postulate that the ancestors of the Burushos once lived in the vicinity of the Caucasus, until approximately the 4th millennium BCE (Tuite, 1995b).

In this paper, after summarizing the principal elements of the European and Caucaso-Karakorum prosthesis complexes, I will turn once again to the Greek myth of Pelops. I will attempt to show that

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the goddess Thetis, who is credited with the revival of Pelops in one version of the myth, shares several features with the Caucasian divinity Dæl, protector of game animals in the high mountains. This is evidence that the similarities between the prosthesis myths of Greece and the Caucasus are imbedded in a more extensive matrix of shared cultural properties, pointing to prehistoric contacts between the two regions.

1. The prosthesis motif in Europe. Ethnographers have described a “Pelops motif” in the folklore of Austria, the Italian Tyrol, Slovenia, Hungary, etc. (Mannhardt, 1858: 66; von Sydow, 1910; Schmidt, 1963; Matičetov, 1959). In almost all of the variants reported from the Alpine region, the protagonist is female, and the missing bone is a rib. Here is the outline of a story typical of the genre, from the South Tyrol: A village girl attends a witches’ banquet. The witches kill her, cut up her body, cook it and eat it. A young man watching the scene grabs a rib bone and hides it. The witches gather up the bones, replacing the missing rib with a hazel branch, and reanimate the girl, who returns to the village. Shortly afterwards the boy announces to the villagers that “there is a hazel-witch (*Haselhexe*) among us.” The girl falls dead on hearing these words (Schmidt, 1963: 147). The other versions follow the same basic story line, except that other species of trees provide the wood for the prosthesis. In the Slovenian variants, for example, linden, poplar and elder wood are mentioned; the local semantic associations of these trees remain to be investigated.

The similarities with the Pelops myth are quite striking, despite the symbolic inversion substituting witches for deities (the resemblances are even closer in the case of a Slovenian text specifying a boy, and a Croatian version in which a shoulderblade, rather than a rib, is replaced (Matičetov, 1959)). A young person is served as food to supernatural beings, who restore him or her to life after the meal. Because a bone has been lost or damaged, an artificial replacement is inserted into the body, which comes to be a significant ‘marker’ for the revived person: Pelops’s ivory shoulderblade was somehow genetically transmitted, by a process Lysenko might have understood, to his descendants; as for the hazel-witch, the mere mention of her prosthesis is enough to cause her death. One important difference is the role of the boy in the Alpine tale, for whom there is no evident counterpart in the Pelops myth. Unlike Dêmêtêr, he only steals the bone, without tasting of it, and it is his denunciation that brings about the death of the revived girl. His role is in fact parallel to that of the hunter in the Caucasian and Central Asian myths to be discussed in section 2.

There is also one Western European narrative according to which a sorcerer is alleged to have inserted a wooden bone into the body of an animal. A woman tried by the Milanese Inquisition in 1390 was accused, among other things, of reviving farm animals. Should a bone be missing, an elder-wood prosthesis was substituted (*et si quod ex ossibus defficit ponunt loco eius de ligno sambuci* (Bertolotti, 1979: 486)). The animals killed and resuscitated by the witches are emaciated and no

longer capable of labour, and, as was noted in connection with another Italian witch trial in 1520, “i buoi resuscitati dalla *domina cursus* muoiono nel giro di tre giorni, *quasi macie in horas exsiccentur ex toto*” (Bertolotti, 1979: 490). In other respects, the stories of witches reviving cattle are typical of what might be considered a subgenre of medieval hagiography: The *Acta Sanctorum* and similar compendia contain numerous accounts of Celtic or Gallic saints bringing animals, almost always farm animals, back to life. Many such legends specifically mention the care taken to assemble all of the bones, and place them in the skin, before the resuscitation can be effected. In a few cases one bone is mislaid or damaged, as in the prosthesis complex, though not replaced by an artificial implant. The theme of a revived animal which limps because of a missing or damaged bone is attested in Scandinavian mythology (Thor’s goats) and elsewhere in medieval Europe (von Sydow, 1910; Schmidt, 1963). One version of the life of the 7th-century Norman St. Opportune relates how she resuscitated dead geese from their bones. Because one bone was missing, however, the revived geese limped: *Pour un os qui fut faillant || Vont les jantes dun pied clochant ...* (Grange, 1983: 146). In a variant from Gasconne mentioned by von Sydow (1910: 94), God restored the calf of a poor herdsman, of which only the bones remained. Before doing so, God took aside one of the bones. When the calf was restored to life, this bone was hanging as the clapper in the bell around its neck.

2. The Caucasian and Central Asian myths of resuscitated game animals. Many peoples of the Caucasus region (the Abkhazians, Georgians, Ossetes, Chechens, etc.) have variants of the following myth: Supernatural beings (gods or demons) capture, kill and eat an ibex. They then gather up the bones and wrap them in the skin, but discover that one bone has been lost; in some versions it was stolen by a hunter who happened across the feast. They replace the missing bone with a piece of wood, and set it with the others. The gods/demons strike the skin with a stick, or pronounce an invocation, and the animal returns to life. The next day a hunter kills the revived ibex, and discovers the wooden bone in its corpse. Nearly identical tales of resuscitation and prosthesis have been recorded among the Shinas, Burushos and Kalashas of Dardistan in the Hindu-Kush and Karakorum mountains: A hunter is invited by fairy-like supernaturals [*parí*, also known as *rāchi* “protectors”] to share a meal of ibex meat. The hunter hides a rib-bone. After the meal the fairies gather up the bones, and fashion a replacement from juniper wood for the one that is missing. They revive the animal. The human who observed the feast later kills the revived animal and discovers the wooden bone. (For the Caucasian variants see: Dirr, 1925; Dzidziguri, 1971; Virsaladze, 1976; Salakaia, 1987; Mak’alattia, 1985; Tsanava, 1990. A Turkish legend closely resembling the Caucasian versions has been described by Boratav, 1976, 1992. The variants from the Hindu-Kush/Karakorum region known to me are cited in: Lièvre & Loude, 1990: 65-6; D. Lorimer, 1981: XX; Jettmar, 1975 : 247; Tiffou, 1992).

The European *Hasel-hexe* stories and the Caucaso-Karakorum wooden-bone myths share several key plot elements, though with substitutions between animal and human protagonists. :

[a] **Initial sequence.**

Animal	□	□	deities	□	□	animals
	□	<i>eaten by</i>	□	□	<i>who are transformations of</i>	□
Human	□	□	witches	□	□	humans

The witches of European folklore are said to pass as ordinary humans. The Caucasian and Central Asian divine patrons of ibex and deer can take the form of the beasts they watch over, sometimes with a special mark to indicate the transformation: golden horns, unusual coloration or beauty, etc. (Virsaladze, 1976: 33; Jettmar, 1975: 223).

The creature which undergoes consumption and resuscitation differs in correlation with other factors. Mountain goddesses revive game animals (deer and ibex), while demons, witches and Catholic saints perform the same service for domestic livestock (cows, bulls, even geese). In almost all of the variants attested to the west of the Bosphorus where the implantation of a prosthesis is mentioned, a human is eaten and resuscitated, rather than an animal. Lévi-Strauss has often noted (e.g. 1973: 223; 1991: 129-130) that the elements of a myth may undergo inversion or other transformation when transmitted across a linguistic and/or cultural frontier. One wonders if the transposition of a game-animal resuscitation myth “en clé de sorcière” was correlated with a prehistoric border crossing of this type. One possible parallel for such a key-change is the following account by Jettmar (1980: 61-62) involving a reciprocal symbolic relation between animals and humans in Karakorum belief: If a hunter dreams that he has been presented with the head of a person by a rāchi, that is a sign that he will kill an ibex the next day; whereas if a warrior dreams that he has been presented with the head of an ibex by a rāchi, that is a sign that he will kill a human enemy the next day.

[b] **Incorporation and implantation.**

	□	incorporation of flesh [active]	□	
<i>Ibex/human</i>	□	implantation of wooden bone	□	<i>deities/witches</i>

Among the peoples of the Caucasus and Hindu-Kush/Karakorum regions it was believed that the divine patrons of game animals exploit them for food in a manner parallel to the animal husbandry practiced by Caucasian villagers: The deities lead their herds of ibex and deer to high mountain pastures, watch over them like shepherds, milk them, and kill them for meat. This latter activity is not only for the benefit of the gods. Sources in both regions indicate specifically that hunters can kill

only those animals which have been previously eaten, then resuscitated, by their divine patrons. The latter are thought to “rob the essence” from game animals by eating them, thus leaving them vulnerable to the hunters’ arrows or bullets (Salakaia, 1987: 49-50; Tsanava, 1990: 55-6; Danelia & Tsanava, 1991: 345-347; Jettmar, 1975: 221-224; Snoy, 1976: 115). The cows revived by the Italian witches seem to have lost some of their “essence” too, in that they sicken and die soon thereafter.

The significance of the implanted wooden bone will be discussed in the final section of this paper. One can note in passing that, at least at a Lévi-Straussian level of analysis, the insertion of new flesh and an artificial bone into the outer shell of an animal or person represents the passive transformation of the active incorporation, by eating, of flesh into the stomachs of the deities/witches.

[c] **Concluding sequence.**

<i>Revived</i>	□ animal	□	<i>killed by</i>	□ hunter	□	<i>who witnessed resuscitation</i>
	□ human	□		□ villager	□	

In traditional Caucaso-Karakorum religious ideology, broadly speaking, the hunter was one of several types of intermediary between the impure/domestic and pure/alpine spatial realms. In these societies the primary division of space is between the domestic, ‘civilized’ realm, centered around the village, and the savage, exterior realm. The latter has numerous component spaces which will not enter into discussion here, save for the high mountains where the game animals and their divine patrons dwell. The latter zone is considered especially pure, by comparison with the village and other lowland spaces. The primary sources of pollution are kept within the village or close by: women (especially during menstruation or childbirth), and — most clearly among the Kalash, but also attested in the Caucasus — bovines and the dead. Men, rather than women, and caprids rather than bovines, function as intermediaries between the domestic and alpine realms. The mediating role of goats, sheep and their wild congeners is facilitated, no doubt, by the simple fact that these animals are far more mobile on mountainous terrain than larger livestock, and can be led to high-altitude pastures that would be inaccessible to bovines. Whatever the ultimate reason might be, the purity of the blood and flesh of caprids has been described in both the Caucasus and Hindu-Kush. In Dardistan the blood of sacrificed goats has special purifying powers (Parkes, 1987), and the Caucasian Svans take special care to keep ibex meat away from polluting animals such as pigs (Gabliani, n.d.: 18). The exclusion of women from the mountain pastures has been noted among the Kalash (Parkes, 1987), and the Adyghe and Kabardian peoples of the Northwest Caucasus are said to have observed a similar prohibition in pre-Soviet times (Topuria, 1970). Some examples of this ‘mediation’ are listed in the table. In each case the activity of the man is set in parallel with activities attributed to the mountain deities, and contrasted to those of women and bovines in the village below:

<i>SPACE</i>	<i>GENDER STATUS</i>	<i>ANIMALS</i>	<i>FOOD</i>
high mountains [savage space, antagonistic to pollution]	protectress of game animals [extreme of purity]	game animals (ibex, deer) herded by goddess	deities milk game animals and eat their flesh
□ INTERMEDIARY [men and caprids] □	favoured hunter chosen as lover of goddess	herdsman, leads goats/sheep to alpine pastures	hunter kills ibex pre- eaten & revived by deities
village, household [domestic space, source of pollution]	woman [impure]	bovines tended near village by women	cow milk (pollutes game goddess, sometimes hunter)

1. The female deities/demons who watch over the game animals of the Caucasus and Karakorum (e.g. the goddess *Dæl* of the Svans of northwest Georgia, and the so-called ‘fairies’ of the Shinas and Burushos) are said to be extraordinarily beautiful, with golden hair and radiant white skin. They often seduce human hunters, who thereupon enjoy great success as long as they observe a series of taboos imposed by the goddess, who is extremely sensitive to any kind of impurity. A man must be absolutely certain that he, and everyone in his household, is ‘pure’ before he goes into the mountains to hunt. The most serious occasions of impurity are death, adultery, and women’s blood flow (i.e. menstruation and childbirth). The slightest violation, even if unintentional, of a taboo is thought to have fatal consequences for a hunter (Gabliani, 1925: 36, 140; Virsaladze, 1976; Jettmar, 1975: 228-229, 248). Note that this is a sexual relation with the usual roles and valuations inverted: the goddess is pure, unlike a human female, and she makes the decision to initiate, and terminate, the love affair.

2. The herdsman tending his goats and sheep in the alpine pastures, mirroring the goddess tending her flock of ibexes and mountain goats, and contrasted with the womenfolk looking after the cattle. In the Hindu-Kush, this parallelism between wild and domestic caprids contributes to the prestige of the latter, especially with regard to bovines. One important correlate of the caprid/bovine opposition is the relative valuation of their milk. A Georgian ballad analyzed by Virsaladze (1976: 177; for text see Virsaladze, 1978: 343-345) attributes special purifying powers to deer’s milk (*irmis rdze*). On the other hand, the power of the Mingrelian *t’q’ašmapa* (“queen of the forest”), a beautiful and potentially dangerous goddess of wild animals, can be neutralized by bathing her hair in milk from a black cow (Virsaladze, 1976: 177; Danelia & Tsanova, 1991: 361-366). A Shina hunter, in order not to offend the fairies, must avoid any contact with cows or their milk (Jettmar, 1975: 228-229, 248). In

general, milking cows is women's work, whereas, at least in some regions of the Caucasus, sheep are milked by men (e.g. Kosven et al, 1960: 488 on the Laks).

3. The hunter killing game animals which have been already slaughtered and eaten, then revived, by the deities. His exploitation of the ibex for food parallels its consumption by the gods themselves, and contrasts with the economic activities assigned to women, e.g. milking cows, and in some areas agriculture (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 1989).

3. The Pelops myth revisited. The version of the Pelops legend usually taken as a point of reference is that recounted by Pindaros in the First Olympian Ode, the outline of which was given at the beginning of this paper. Pindaros states that only Dêmêtêr, distracted by the loss of her daughter in Hades, ate of the meal prepared by Tantalos. But there is lack of unanimity on this point: μόνην δὲ Διμητραν τῶν κρεῶν ἀγνοῖα μεταλαβεῖν λέγουσι, τινὲς δὲ, τὴν Θέτιδα (“They say that Dêmêtêr unwittingly partook of the meat; some however {say} Thetis {ate the meat}”; Heyne, 1807, *Schol. Olymp.* I: 37). Some commentators prefer to read ‘Themis’ [τὴν Θέμιν] in place of ‘Thetis’ (Drachmann, 1969: *Olymp.* I, 40a; p 30), and Lorimer (1936:32) agrees with Drachmann that the Nereid Thetis “certainly seems out of place” compared to Themis, goddess of law and order. The evidence to be presented below will, I hope, demonstrate that Thetis does in fact have a place in a tale of resuscitation. Finally, Ares takes the blame in at least one ancient source (Roscher, 1965: 1870; Gerber, 1982: 58).

The commentator Servius Grammaticus attributes the specification of Dêmêtêr to her symbolic association with the earth, decomposer of human remains (... *sola Ceres dicitur comesse, quia ipsa est terra, quae corpus resolvit*; Scholion to *Aeneid* vi. 603). Be that as it may, on at least one other occasion Dêmêtêr was implicated in a story of cooking — in the more general sense of heat-treating — human flesh. One of the *Homeric Hymns* dedicated to Dêmêtêr contains the account of how she attempted to render a child named Dêmophoôn immortal by exposing him to fire: νύκτας δὲ κρύπτεσκε πυρὸς μένει ἵντε δαλὸν λάθρα φίλων γονέων (“But at night she would hide him like a brand in the heart of the fire, unknown to his dear parents”; *Homeric Hymn* II, 239-240, tr. Evelyn-White). One night the child's mother catches sight of this operation, and begins to wail in distress. Her behaviour angers the goddess, who thereupon takes her leave of the family, leaving Demophoôn still mortal, though the treatment he had undergone until then caused him to “grow like an immortal being”, and destined him for “unfailing honour”. This incident is particularly pertinent to our argument because the motif of a goddess attempting — in the end, unsuccessfully — to immortalize an infant by either holding it over a fire or cooking it in boiling water is attested elsewhere in the Greek mythological corpus.

The celebrated story of how the hero Akhilleus was held by the foot while being bathed in the river Styx, and rendered almost totally invulnerable, is attested relatively late, in a 1st-century AD text (Gantz, 1993: 231). According to the earlier sources, the sea-goddess Thetis, divine mother of Akhilleus by the mortal Peleus, sought to scorch the mortal elements out of her children by the application of intense heat. As recounted by Apollodoros, “when Thetis had got a babe by Peleus, she wished to make it immortal, and unknown to Peleus she used to hide it in the fire by night in order to destroy the mortal element which the child had inherited from its father [κρύφα Πηλέως εἰς τὸ πῦρ εγκρύβουσα τῆς νυκτὸς ἔφθειρεν ὃ ἦν αὐτῷ θνητὸν πατρῶον], but by day she anointed him with ambrosia” (*Library* III.xiii.6, tr. J. G. Frazer). Akhilleus, the youngest of Thetis’s children, was in the process of being immortalized over the fire by his mother, when Peleus entered and snatched the child out of her hands. Thetis, angered by the interruption, returned to her underwater home, leaving the infant Akhilleus in the care of his father (Scholia to Aristophanes *Clouds*, line 1068).

(According to one version, only Akhilleus’ ankle-bone had been burnt away; to replace this missing part, Kheiron removed the ankle from the exhumed skeleton of the giant Damysos, the fleetest of all the giants, and set it into the foot of his son (see Frazer’s notes to Apollodoros *Library* III.xiii.6; *RE* Band IV, p. 2082, s.v. “Damysos”). Bob Fisher (personal communication) has called my attention to a curious miracle attributed to SS. Cosmas and Damian, twin brothers who were martyred for the faith in the 4th century (*Acta sanctorum*, 27 Sept, p 432 §187). A pious man whose leg was eaten away by cancer spent the night in a Roman church consecrated to Cosmas and Damian. While he slept the saints appeared and set to work on his leg. One brother asked his twin how they would replace the decayed flesh, to which the latter replied: *In cimiterio sancti Petri ad Vincula hodie Æthiops recens sepultus est: de illo ergo affer, ut huic supleamus*. They removed the thighbone (*cossa*) from the Moor’s corpse, set it into the patient’s body, and treated it with unguents. When the man awakened, his body was whole. Fisher points to some intriguing parallels with the Greek god of medicine Asklēpios, over whose temple the church of Cosmas and Damian was built, and to a passage from the *Rg Veda* [Book I, 116: 15], describing miracle-working twin brothers, the Ashvins, fitting an iron leg onto a horse which had been wounded in a race. The strange motif of a transplant from a cadaver, rather than an artificial implant, finds its closest — and, to my knowledge, only — parallel in the variant of the Akhilleus legend mentioned above. It is also to be noted that according to Ptolemaios Hêphaistos, Akhilleus was overtaken and killed by Apollo after his transplanted ankle fell out, a fate resembling to an extent that of the ibex which, shortly after it receives the wooden bone implant, is shot and killed by the hunter. The matter merits separate treatment, and will not be taken up here).

Scholars have noted the similarities between the unsuccessful attempts by Thetis and Dêmêtêr to render a child immortal, and the ancient, pre-Euripidian account of Mèdeia “pleine de bonne volonté, faisant périr ses enfants dans le temple d’Héra alors qu’elle désirait les rendre immortels à l’aide d’agissements magiques (κατα-κρύπτειν), difficiles à saisir” (Bonnechère, 1994: 72). Like Thetis and Dêmêtêr, Mèdeia was surprised in the act by a parent of the children (Jason), and the attempt did not succeed (Pausanias ii, 3, 11). Bonnechère points out that the parallels extend even to the choice of verb to describe the actions undertaken to effect the desired transformation. The Mèdeia, Thetis and Dêmêtêr stories all employ the verb κρύπτειν «cacher, dissimuler», perhaps even «ensevelir» (loc. cit., footnote 260); in Bonnechère’s opinion “terme aux connotations initiatiques certaines” (ibid, 209). Some authors see in these texts the reflections of ancient rites of initiation, a ritual representation of death and rebirth, through which adolescents attain adult status (ibid: 164-180). This accords well with one theory concerning the pre-Pindarian interpretation of Pelops’s murder and rebirth, as “a ceremony of New Birth, of mock death and resurrection, and also, in some sense, of initiation” (Cornford, 1962: 249).

As for Ares, his involvement in the Pelops myth would appear totally unmotivated, at least on the basis of what has come down to us concerning him, save for one curious detail, recounted in Book 5 of the Iliad. The sons of Aloëos, for no clear reason, capture, bind and imprison the god of war in a bronze jar for thirteen months (παῖδες Ἄλωϊος δῆσαν κρατερῶ ἐνὶ δεσμῶ· χαλκῆφ δ’ ἐν κεράμῳ δέδετο τρεῖς καὶ δέκα μῆνας. *Il.* 5, 385-7), until Hermes rescues him. According to Bonnechère (1994: 139, fn 586), “la jarre est significative : elle rappelle les chaudrons régénérateurs de Médée, de Pélopos et de Lycaon ...” (the specification of thirteen months might be significant as well, as the same length of time is mentioned in what is evidently a female initiation myth in Bakkhylides, *Epinicies* 11, as read by Bonnechère, *loc. cit.*).

The initiation hypothesis is attractive, accounting, as Bonnechère documents, for a number of Greek myths in which the motifs of human sacrifice and rebirth figure. It also opens the possibility to comparison with Central Asian narratives detailing the initiation of candidate shamans, who experience in a vision the cutting up of their bodies, the cooking away of their flesh in a large cauldron, and rebirth with new flesh covering their skeletons (for comparisons of the Greek and Siberian motifs see Eliade, 1968: 68-69; Burkert, 1962: 134; Burkert, 1983; Uhsadel-Gülke, 1972). But the initiation interpretation leaves unexplained the recurring motif of disruption, of an attempted immortalization or revival left unaccomplished, to say nothing of the prosthesis itself.

4. Thetis and Akhilleus, and Dæl and Amiran. The Akhilleus motif, as presented in the stories of Dêmêtêr, Thetis and Mèdeia, consists of a goddess’s attempted immortalization of a mortal child through treatment by fire or boiling water, interrupted by the intrusion of an unwitting parent. The

child is either the goddess's own offspring (Akhilleus; the children of Mêdeia), or an infant entrusted to her care (Dêmophoôn). He grows up to be a renowned warrior, but remains mortal and ultimately doomed. The attribution of near-invulnerability to Akhilleus is to be interpreted against the background of the peculiar destiny of his mother, who is to bear a child greater than his father. We read the following in a scholion to Aiskhylos's *Prometheus Bound*, 167 (ed. Dindorf, 1962): "It is said that Zeus desired Thetis. Thus loving her he pursued her on the Caucasus mountain (εν τῷ Καυκάσῳ ὄρει), so as to have intercourse with her (ὅπως συγγένηται αὐτῇ). He was stopped by Promêtheus, who told him that [any child] to be born from her will be much stronger than his father. Zeus, fearing for his dominion, kept away from contact with Thetis." Zeus and Poseidôn, both of whom lust after the sea goddess in question, decide the more prudent course is to marry her off to a mortal. Peleus, a renowned hunter and warrior, is selected to be Thetis's mate (on Peleus's hunting prowess, as well as an echo of the hunter's avoidance of bovine impurity [Peleus's sword hidden in cow dung], s.v. "Thetis" *Real-Encyclopädie*, II. Reihe, 11te Halbband, p 213). The goddess initially resists his advances, seeking to put him off by a sequence of shape transformations, successively turning into fire, water, wind, bird, tree, tiger, lion, serpent, cuttle-fish (Apollodoros *Library* iii, 13) before accepting to couple with Peleus.

The theme of attempted revival or immortalization by a divinity, disrupted by a human intruder, is common to the Central European *Haselhexe* stories (hidden boyfriend steals bone from remains of witch, later denounces her, causing her death); the Caucaso-Karakorum hunting cycle (hidden hunter steals bone from ibex, later kills revived animal); and the Greek accounts just discussed (immortalization of child disrupted, and thwarted, by parent watching in secret, or happening across the scene). The case of Thetis and Akhilleus contains a variant of the theme as well: the destiny of Thetis to bear a child capable of overthrowing the Olympian pantheon is thwarted by Zeus's decision to marry her to a mortal, rather than sleep with her himself. This second variant is strikingly similar to the Caucasian legend of a hero who was chained to pillar on a mountain peak for having dared to challenge the supreme deity to single combat. The Svanetian versions of the story name the hero Amiran. Despite the obvious similarities to the Greek myths of Promêtheus, who was likewise chained to a mountain for having defied the gods (see the detailed comparison of the two traditions by Charachidzé, 1986), the legend of Amiran, and in particular the story of his birth, can be compared to that of Akhilleus.

A man wandering in the mountains, either a hunter, a shepherd or a blacksmith, depending on the text, comes across the goddess Dæl, protector of game animals and seducer of hunters. She invites him to stay with her. The man's wife discovers the pair sleeping together, and she cuts the goddess's golden braids off (or ties her to the bedposts by her hair), and sneaks away. Dæl awakens, aware that

they have been found out, and announces to her lover that she is pregnant. She demands that he open her belly with his knife (*čamubq̄w jaq'wš*) which he is naturally reluctant to do, but in the end she persuades him to carry out the operation, explaining that, “My child will be a hero. Were he to be carried to term in my belly, he would become one who could stand up to God himself. But now he will be somewhat less than that” (cited in Charachidzé, 1986: 57). As it turns out, when Amiran has bested all human and demonic challengers, and seeks to measure his strength against the only worthy opponent remaining, God defeats him with surprising ease and binds him to a pillar. Dæl, like Thetis, is fated to bear a son capable of overthrowing the supreme deity. Yet this destiny is never realized, either because the chief god took precautions not to mate with the goddess, or because she herself insured that the child would not develop to his full capacity. (Setting Zeus’s pursuit of Thetis “on the Caucasus mountain” might well be a faint reflection of the Caucasian origin of the myth, if it is not simply a choice of scene motivated by the presence of Promêtheus).

The Greek dossier corresponding to the Dæl and Amiran myth is for the most part associated with Promêtheus, of course. As pointed out by Charachidzé in the work cited above, the Dæl and Amiran myth corresponds in certain respects with the association between Promêtheus and the shape-changing Titan goddess Mêtis (Μῆτις “wisdom, cunning, craft”). An oracle declared that if she were to give birth to a son, he would be strong enough to depose Zeus. Zeus swallowed her to prevent this from happening. His head began to hurt terribly, and when Hêphaistos — or Promêtheus — opened his skull, a daughter, Athênê, sprung out. It does not seem unlikely that elements of what was once a coherent myth cycle attached themselves to two different pairs of characters, Mêtis and Promêtheus, on the one hand, and Thetis and Akhilleus on the other. (Note as well that both goddesses are specifically credited with the ability to assume the form of wild animals, a characteristic shared with the Caucaso-Karakorum mountain goddess).

The Thetis and Dæl plots boil down to something like this:

A goddess, capable of transforming herself into wild animals, is destined to bear a son capable of overthrowing the supreme deity. The goddess mates with a mortal hunter in a cavern in an exterior space proper to her (the mountains in the case of Dæl, the sea-coast in the case of Thetis). Fate is somehow forestalled: the child born from the union, though a redoubtable warrior, is not powerful enough to unseat the supreme god.

Here once again, in a slightly changed wording, is the Caucaso-Karakorum prosthesis motif:

The goddess who watches over the game animals of the high mountain (ibex, deer), and who can assume their shape, kills and feasts on an animal from her herd, with the intention of reviving it. A hidden hunter thwarts the process by stealing a bone. The goddess substitutes a prosthesis made of wood, and revives the animal, which the hunter kills shortly afterwards.

The supernatural being featured in the two myths appears to be of the same type (shape-changing goddess of the wild spaces), and in both cases the operation she undertakes ends in apparent failure: the child she bears falls short of invincibility; the ibex is revived only to be killed again. To form an idea of what doctrine might lie behind the motif of not-quite-immortality, let us return once again to the text with which we began, the story of Pelops and his ivory shoulderblade.

5. Gods, non-gods, the prosthesis and continuity. A word of caution first: It is the establishment of parallels at the substantive level, and the contextualization of the central motif in similar paradigmatic and syntagmatic complexes of symbols, which are of primary importance in a demonstration of historical links between cultures. To go beyond a comparison of this sort, which limits itself to a methodology similar to that of historical linguistics, and form hypotheses concerning the ideological content of the prosthesis complex, is a risky albeit entertaining undertaking. To what degree the same doctrine was conveyed to the Greeks of 2500 years ago by the tales of Pelops and Thetis, to 19th-century Svanetian mountaineers by the adventures of Dæl and Amiran, or for that matter, to Austrians and Slovenians by the accounts of witches with hazel ribs, may never be known. Each time a story is transmitted across a cultural boundary, it undergoes some degree of accommodation to its new context. Even where the text does not noticeably change, it is not necessarily the case that it is told for the same reason, or heard in the same way, as it was in its culture, or epoch, of origin. The hazel-witch stories in particular show the effects of considerable restructuring.

That being said, let us look again at the Greek and Caucasian prosthesis complexes, and I will hazard a hypothesis concerning their ideological content. According to legend, the artificial bone inserted into Pelops's shoulder was passed on to future generations (οἱ ἀπὸ Πέλοπος καταγόμενοι τοιοῦτον εἶχον τὸν ὤμον "those descended from Pelops have such a shoulder" Heyne, 1807: *Schol. Olymp.* 1, 38). It would seem, indeed, that continuing the traits of the ancestors is a hallmark of the House of Atreus; even the gruesome act of teknophagy to which Tantalos subjected Pelops was repeated two generations later (Atreus killing the children of Thyestes and feeding their flesh to their father). There is likewise a notion of continuity attached to the game animals shepherded by the mountain deities. They are believed to be a renewable resource, and as long as the hunters who kill them for their meat treat the remains with proper respect, and do not exceed a reasonable quota, they will be assured of a continual renewal of the stocks (see Chikovani, 1972: 227-230, on Svanetian beliefs concerning responsible hunting, and the consequences of overkilling). The belief is widespread throughout Eurasia and native North America that game animals are reborn from their bones, which the hunter must take care to preserve intact and return to their proper place. This can be done by throwing them into the water, a practice observed among the Svans (Mak'alatia, 1985), and

the Tsimshians of British Columbia (Boas, 1916/1970: 773-4), or by burying or burning them, as in many indigenous cultures of northern Eurasia and Siberia (Paulson, 1959, 1965).

The hypothesis I wish to put forth for discussion is the following: The two mythological frames presented above are concerned in different ways with the unbridgeable divide between the immortal gods and the mortal non-gods, human and animal. The core doctrine of the prosthesis complex is a coin with two sides: Humans and game animals are close to the gods in certain respects, and humans in particular cannot escape the longing to be like them. But the longing must always remain unfulfilled; any attempt on the part of a human to defeat the gods, or to become immortal and invulnerable as they are, is in vain. But even though humans and animals are condemned to mortality, another sort of continuity is guaranteed them, through their lineages. The artificial bone signals continuity, through death and rebirth. Pelops's ivory shoulderblade is passed on to his descendants, and the hunter who witnessed the resuscitation of the ibex later kills it and discovers the wooden bone. At the same time the artificial bone is a portion of the divinity residing within its mortal bearer, made from material appropriate to its supernatural makers (ivory in the case of Pelops (Lorimer, 1936), or wood; in the Karakorum the prosthesis is made from a branch of the juniper tree, which is used in rituals of purification and shamanic contact with the "fairies" (Lièvre & Loude, 1990: 50; Jettmar, 1975: 277).

This simple doctrine does not, obviously, exhaust the symbolic content of the Greek and Svanetian myth cycles discussed here. As Charachidzé (1986) demonstrates, the adventures and punishment of Amiran and his equivalents among the Abkhazians, Armenians and Circassians, served as a problem-space within which were worked out the tensions between the sexes, the obligations of marriage, the contrast between the hunter in the savage space of the mountains, and the peasant in the domesticated space of the village. The prosthesis complex is but one fragment of the rich content of these mythological corpora, though an ancient and fundamental one.

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