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Stuart Elden, “Foucault and Dumézil on Antiquity”

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This article explores the intellectual relations between Michel Foucault and the comparative mythologist and philologist Georges Dumézil. Foucault was explicit about his indebtedness to Dumézil at several points in his career, and each of these indications are provided here.

Something of Dumézil’s approach is found in Foucault’s own writings, which is indicated here, but the article’s focus is more specific than a broader claim of influence. It discusses in detail several moments in Foucault’s lectures in which he engages with Dumézil – not generally in theoretical outline, but in terms of specific readings and points. This is when he takes insights from Dumézil’s books and makes use of them in his own analyses.

The first part of the article surveys Foucault’s engagements with Dumézil’s work, particularly looking at some early indications. The following four parts explore in detail specific instances of Foucault’s use of Dumézil’s writings in his analysis of antiquity: some lectures on structuralism and history in 1970; some comments on sovereignty, monstrosity and the politics of truth in the 1970s and 1981; and then in more detail in Foucault’s two final courses at the Collège de France. One of these shows how Dumézil’s reading of a hymn to Apollo informs Foucault’s reading of Euripides play *Ion*, and the other is their analysis of the death of Socrates. The claim here is not that Dumézil is a subterranean presence in Foucault’s work, but often a very explicit one, whose impact is found throughout Foucault’s engagement with antiquity throughout his career.

From Biography to Intellectual History

The biographical connections between Foucault and Dumézil have long been known. The most detailed discussions come in Didier Eribon’s biography of Foucault, and his important

untranslated book *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*.¹ In brief, Foucault was introduced to Dumézil by the archaeologist Raoul Curiel in 1954, when the University of Uppsala was looking for a lecturer in French, and asked Dumézil, who had held that post twenty years before, for advice.² Dumézil recommended Foucault to Uppsala, and Foucault took up the position in 1955. This began a lifelong friendship, with Dumézil also playing a crucial role in Foucault's election to the Collège de France. Dumézil had retired by this time, and Foucault's proposer was his former colleague at Clermont-Ferrand, Jules Vuillemin. Dumézil's role was to petition some skeptical colleagues.³ But Foucault's election coincided with his most politically active period, such that one of the other professors (apparently Vuillemin himself) said to Dumézil: "My god, what have we done?" And Dumézil replied: "We have done very well".⁴ Dumézil also pays tribute after Foucault's 1984 death, having previously expected that the much younger Foucault would write his obituary.⁵

The intellectual connections have not been explored in as much detail. Eribon indicates that Foucault knew Dumézil's work as a student in the 1940s, and that he was "a profound admirer" of his work before they met.⁶ However, even with the availability of much previously unpublished material from the early 1950s, David Macey's claim that there "is no textual

¹ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Flammarion, 3rd edition, 2011); *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains* (Paris: Fayard, 1994) Part II, Chs. 1-4. With the biography, the English translation is of an earlier edition: *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Faber, 1991). References are to the French and then, when relevant, the English pages.

² Georges Dumézil, *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 214.

³ Dumézil, *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, 217; Didier Eribon, *Faut-il brûler Dumézil? Mythologie, science et politique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992) 279-80.

⁴ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 402/255. The identification of Vuillemin only comes in the French third edition, and Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*, 131.

⁵ Georges Dumézil, "Un homme heureux", *Le nouvel observateur*, 29 June 1984, 42. Some of Foucault's letters to Dumézil are in the Fonds Georges Dumézil, Collège de France, DMZ 75.25; a few from Dumézil are in Fonds Michel Foucault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF28803 (5), folder 1; others are in the private collection of Didier Eribon, to whom I am grateful for access.

⁶ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 35/16, 130/75.

evidence to suggest that Foucault had read anything by Dumézil before his departure for Sweden” remains accurate.⁷ The earliest trace, aside from correspondence about the Uppsala post, is that Dumézil dedicated a copy of one of his books to Foucault on a visit to Uppsala in October 1956.⁸ While a gift is of course no guarantee it was read, Eribon indicates it was around this time that Foucault began a sustained reading of Dumézil’s work.⁹ The first surviving reference comes in the text of a lecture delivered on Sender Freies Berlin [Radio Free Berlin] on 25 June 1957.¹⁰ Foucault’s lecture was on anthropology, as part of a series on modern French research, organized by the classicist Jean Bollack. The German translation of Foucault’s text, read on air by the producer of the series, survives in Bollack’s papers at the Archives littéraires suisses.¹¹ Foucault’s focus is on both the common understanding of anthropology as ethnology, but also his interest in philosophical anthropology, understood as the science of man or the human, on which he had lectured in Lille and Paris earlier in the decade.¹² Towards the end of the lecture Foucault suggests:

Georges Dumézil recreates the grand architecture of Indo-European myths and has therefore developed an œuvre whose contribution to anthropology is much more

⁷ David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Verso, 2019 [1993]) 78.

⁸ Georges Dumézil, *Déesses latines et mythes védiques* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1956), Michel Foucault Library of Presentation Copies, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, BEIN 604.

⁹ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 130/-: “il va parfaire sa connaissance de celle-ci en lisant avec un attention systématique les ouvrages que Dumézil a multipliés dans la période récente”.

¹⁰ Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*, 134; see Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 130/- (added to 3rd edition).

¹¹ Fonds Jean Bollack, Archives littéraires suisses, D-6-a-FOU, Michel Foucault, “IV: Die französische Anthropologie”.

¹² Michel Foucault, *La Question anthropologique: Cours 1954-1955*, ed. Arianna Sforzini (Paris: EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil, 2022).

considerable than Merleau-Ponty's speculations on the physiology and psychology of the reflex.¹³

Given the importance of Merleau-Ponty as a teacher to the early Foucault, this is an important marker of a break in his work, a step on the path that would take him to *History of Madness*. It further reinforces Foucault's claim in 1968 that it was Roman Jakobson's work on linguistics and Dumézil's work on "the history of religions and mythologies" which allowed him and his generation in the first half of the 1950s to escape from phenomenology and existentialism – which he explicitly relates to Merleau-Ponty, more than Husserl or Sartre.¹⁴

For a French audience the most explicit indication of an interest and debt comes in the original 1961 preface to the *History of Madness*, and in an interview with *Le Monde* when the book was published.¹⁵ The interviewer finds this difficult to understand, asking Foucault "how could a historian of religions inspire work on the history of madness?" Foucault's reply is interesting, though he would later come to distance himself from the language: "Through his idea of structure. Just as Dumézil does with myths, I have tried to discover the structured forms of experience whose schema can be found, with modifications, at different levels..."¹⁶

¹³ "Georges Dumézil stellt die grosse Architektur der indo-europäischen Mythen wieder her und hat so ein Werk geschaffen, das für die Anthropologie eine gewichtigere Entscheidung erbracht hat als alle Spekulationen von Merleau-Ponty über die Physiologie und die Psychologie des Reflexes": Foucault, "IV: Die französische Anthropologie", 16.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, Four Volumes, 1994) I:667; *Foucault Live: Interviews 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e]) 1996, 55.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961), x; *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (London: Routledge, 2006), xxxv-xxxvi.

¹⁶ "Comment un historien des religions a-t-il pu inspirer un travail sur l'histoire de la folie?" "Par son idée de structure. Comme Dumézil le fait pour les mythes, j'ai essayé de découvrir des formes structures d'expérience dont le schema puisse se retrouver, avec des modifications, à des niveaux divers..." Foucault, *Dits et écrits* I:168; *Foucault Live*, 8.

Some initial reviewers picked up on the relation.¹⁷ Michel Serres, for example, indicates “how the problems of language and logic are reflected in the understanding of history in Foucault’s work” and suggests this is why “he salutes the method of Georges Dumézil”.¹⁸ Robert Mandrou’s *Annales* review describes Foucault as “a faithful disciple of Georges Dumézil”.¹⁹ Mandrou indicates the book’s line about “the obscure memory which accompanies madness”, and the claim that “Unreason would be the great memory of peoples, their greatest fidelity to the past”, though he omits the closing clause “where history is always indefinitely contemporary”.²⁰ Equally, some of Foucault’s earliest anglophone commentators, including Martin Jay and James Bernauer, identified the importance of Dumézil’s ideas.²¹ But such references have become uncommon.

The 1961 preface is one of the rare explicit references to Dumézil in Foucault’s books, alongside a brief mention in *Les Mots et les choses*, translated as *The Order of Things*.²² In late 1960s interviews Foucault makes explicit the parallel role played by Dumézil to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan.²³ He also stresses the importance of Dumézil’s 1966 study *Archaic Roman*

¹⁷ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 202/117; 204/118.

¹⁸ Michel Serres, “Géométrie de la folie”, *Mercure de France* 1188 (1962): 682-96, 689; “The Geometry of the Incommunicable: Madness”, trans. Felicia McCarren, in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 36-56, 40.

¹⁹ “fidèle disciple de Georges Dumézil”: Robert Mandrou, “Trois clefs pour comprendre la folie à l’époque classique”, in *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique de Michel Foucault: Regards critiques 1961–2011*, ed. Philippe Artières et al. (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2011), 67-85, 71.

²⁰ “La déraison serait la grande mémoire des peuples, leur plus grande fidélité au passé; en elle, l’histoire leur serait indéfiniment contemporaine”: Foucault, *Folie et déraison*, 131; *History of Madness*, 105; part-cited in Mandrou, “Trois clefs”, 71.

²¹ Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), 521-22; James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault’s Force of Flight: Towards an Ethic for Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990), 96.

²² Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, Gallimard/Tel, 1966), 370-71; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970), 358-60.

²³ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, I:516; “Interview with Madeleine Chapsal”, trans. Mark G.E. Kelly, *The Journal of Continental Philosophy* 1 (2020): 29-35, 31-32; *Dits et écrits*, I:585; *Essential Works*, ed. Paul Rabinow and James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (London: Allen Lane, Three Volumes, 1997-2000), II:279.

Religion,²⁴ and the relation of his research on mythology to contemporary developments in linguistics.²⁵ Foucault's partner Daniel Defert reports that Foucault was reading Dumézil while working on *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and while absent from the final book, Dumézil is briefly mentioned in some of the draft materials for the text.²⁶

In his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France Foucault praises Dumézil, suggesting that he influenced his research practice: "it was he who encouraged me to work at an age when I still believed that writing was a pleasure". He suggests that his approach was significant too, as he taught him how "to analyze the internal economy of a discourse in a manner entirely different from the methods of traditional exegesis or linguistic formalism... to identify [*repérer*], through the play of comparisons, systems of functional correlations from one discourse to the next... how to describe the transformations of a discourse and its relationships to an institution".²⁷ He hopes he will be forgiven for the way he has "stretched [*éloigné*] the meaning of his texts... or departed [*détourné*] from their rigor", and recognizes that his utilization of these approaches in different areas has been influenced by historians of science, notably Georges Canguilhem.²⁸

The relation between Dumézil's work on the history of ideas and the development of the historical approach Foucault called archaeology has been discussed briefly in some recent

²⁴ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, I:584. Georges Dumézil, *La Religion romaine archaïque* (Paris: Payot, 1966); *Archaic Roman Religion*, trans. Philip Krapp (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, two volumes, 1996 [1970]).

²⁵ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, I:667, 822.

²⁶ Daniel Defert, "Chronologie", in Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, I:13-64, 30; Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28284 (1), 70v; NAF28730 (58), folder 2, 78.

²⁷ "c'est lui qui m'a incité au travail à un âge où je croyais encore qu'écrire est un plaisir... à analyser l'économie interne d'un discours tout autrement que par les méthodes de l'exégèse traditionnelle ou par celles du formalisme linguistique... à repérer d'un discours à l'autre, par le jeu des comparaisons, le système des corrélations fonctionnelles... comment décrire les transformations d'un discours et les rapports à l'institution": Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 73-74; "The Order of Discourse", trans. Thomas Scott-Railton in *Archives of Infamy: Foucault on State Power in the Lives of Ordinary Citizens*, ed. Nancy Luxon, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 141-73, 169-70.

²⁸ "éloigné de leur sens ou détourné de leur rigueur ces textes": Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, 73; "The Order of Discourse", 169.

texts.²⁹ In part this is picking up on Dumézil's 1949 suggestion that the study of Indo-European civilization requires analysis of all of its traces.

While there are few material remains, there is abundant documentation in words, myths, institutions, and so on. We are therefore obliged to develop, alongside an archaeology of objects and sites, an archaeology of representations and behaviors.³⁰

Such a claim naturally has parallels to Foucault's own use of the term archaeology. In the same passage from the *History of Madness* partly quoted by Mandrou, Foucault talks of the "spontaneous archaeology of cultures" and elsewhere about an "archaeology of silence".³¹ In a note dated 24 March 1963, Foucault indicates this text by Dumézil, and begins to sketch out how this might inform his "analysis of culture" in a way which is neither that of Oswald Spengler nor a psychology, nor even a history of ideas in the then-current sense, but an analysis of systems of thought.³² He had made this distinction in a striking notebook entry two days before: "To make a history not of philosophy, not of ideas but of thought. Signs of thought".³³ In 1977, Dumézil

²⁹ Matías Abeijón. "Historia, estructura y experiencia. Relaciones metodológicas entre Michel Foucault y Georges Dumézil", *Ideas y Valores* 68 (2019): 153-179;; Troels Krarup, "Archaeological Methodology: Foucault and the History of Systems of Thought", *Theory, Culture and Society* 38 (2021): 3-24; Stuart Elden, *The Early Foucault*, Cambridge: Polity, 2021; *The Archaeology of Foucault*, Cambridge: Polity, 2023.

³⁰ "Mais, alors que les vestiges matériels sont peu nombreux, on a au contraire une abondante documentation dans les mots, les mythes, les institutions, etc. On est par conséquent obligé de mettre au point, à côté de l'archéologie des objets et des sites, une archéologie des représentations et des comportements": Georges Dumézil, *L'héritage indo-européen à Rome* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 43.

³¹ "l'archéologie spontanée des cultures"; "l'archéologie de ce silence": Foucault, *Folie et déraison*, 131, ii; *History of Madness*, 105, xxviii.

³² Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (91), cahier 3, [v21-22].

³³ "Faire une histoire non de la ϕ ie [philosophie], non des idées, mais de la pensée. Des signes de la pensée": Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (91), cahier 3, [v19], 22.3.[1963]. See Philippe Sabot, "Dans les «Archives» de l'Archéologie: Relire *Les Mots et les choses* aujourd'hui", *Revista de Filosofia Aurora* 28 (2016): 747-66, 759-60.

dedicated a copy of *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* to Foucault, describing it as an “archaeology of the imagination”.³⁴

While the theoretical approach is indeed interesting, there are some specific instances where Foucault makes use of Dumézil’s analyses in his lectures, and there has been little said of how this might have shaped Foucault’s work. What comes through in all these examples is Foucault’s use of quite specific points from Dumézil’s work. The focus here is on some lectures on structuralism and history in 1970, some indicative comments in lectures in the 1970s and 1981, and then in more detail the use of Dumézil’s work in each of Foucault’s two final courses at the Collège de France.

1970: *Horace et les Curiaces*

In September 1970, at the Institut national des sciences et techniques nucléaires de Saclay, about 20 km southwest of Paris, an interdisciplinary seminar on structuralism was organised by the mathematician André Lichnerowicz, the literary scholar Gilbert Gadoffre and the economist François Perroux. The event was a joint venture between the Institut collégial européen, led by Gadoffre, and the Collège de France, where Lichnerowicz and Perroux were professors. About thirty, mainly French and German, scholars attended, including Foucault, Suzanne Bachelard, Pierre Bourdieu, Georges Canguilhem, André Martinet, Jacques Monod, Clémence Ramnoux, Michel Serres, Gilbert Simondon and René Thom. It was a genuinely interdisciplinary event, with participants including mathematicians, physicists and biologists through to social scientists and humanities scholars. A report on the seminar was published in *Le Monde* in October.³⁵ The

³⁴ “archéologie de l’imaginaire”: Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), Michel Foucault Library, BEIN 605.

³⁵ Gilbert Gadoffre, “Des divers usages du structuralisme”, *Le Monde*, 29 October 1970, 12.

conference was used to launch a series of conversations on this theme, some papers of which were published in an edited volume on *Structure et dynamique des systèmes* in 1976.³⁶

In that volume, André Malan provides a summary of the 1970 conference.³⁷ He notes that in his presentation Foucault suggested that Dumézil's analysis of the Horatii and Curiatii myth was "the first historical example of the structuralist approach in the human sciences".³⁸ Foucault then set out a series of operations employed by Dumézil, in contrast to more traditional historians.

1. Give oneself a corpus (a set [*ensemble*]);
2. Establish all the variations;
3. Relate elements of these narratives to elements of similar sets in a one-to-one relationship;
4. Highlight relevant and irrelevant variations;
5. Put the texts in series.³⁹

Malan reports an exchange where Foucault suggested that "a true structural analysis must be both diachronic and explanatory [*explicative*]", and Martinet responded that he agreed Dumézil was explanatory, but that the "diachronic character" needed to be discussed.⁴⁰ One interesting

³⁶ André Lichnerowicz and Gilbert Gadoffre, "Avant-Propos: Genèse et objectifs des séminaires interdisciplinaires", in *Structure et dynamique des systèmes*, ed. A. Lichnerowicz, F. Perroux and G. Gadoffre (Paris: Maloine, 1976), 5-8, 7. Subsequent volumes were edited by the same team, and included *L'idée de régulation dans les sciences: Séminaires interdisciplinaires du Collège de France* (Paris: Maloine, 1977); *Analogie et connaissance Tome I: Aspects historiques* and *Analogie et connaissance Tome II: De la poésie à la science* (Paris: Maloine, 1981).

³⁷ Most of the Institut collégial européen seminars were reported in their annual *Bulletin*, though one for the 1970 year does not appear to have been published. On the project as a whole, see Gilbert Gadoffre, *un humaniste révolutionnaire: Entretiens avec Alice Gadoffre-Staath* (Grâne/Paris: Créaphis, 2002) 144-49.

³⁸ "le premier exemple historique de la démarche structuraliste dans les sciences humaines": André Malan, "Colloque de Saclay", in *Structure et dynamique des systèmes*, 165-90, 177.

³⁹ "A la différence des historiens traditionnels, Dumézil a effectué la série des opérations suivantes : 1. Se donner un corpus (un ensemble) ; 2. Établir toutes les variations ; 3. Mettre en relation biunivoque des éléments de ces récits avec des éléments d'ensembles analogues ; 4. Mettre en évidence les variations pertinentes et non pertinentes ; 5. Mettre les textes en série" : Malan, "Colloque de Saclay", 177.

⁴⁰ "Une véritable analyse structural doit être à la fois diachronique et explicative": Malan, "Colloque de Saclay", 177.

issue here is Foucault's insistence that structuralism is not ahistorical, but a particular way of thinking about historical change. Foucault is also reported as saying this was an advance on work in the nineteenth century, as Dumézil was not seeking simply to establish identities. Rather, the "comparativism of Dumézil and his successors seeks to establish, on the basis of techniques of tracing identities, the system of differences and transformations that make it possible to pass from one text to another".⁴¹

Dumézil's 1942 book *Horace et les Curiaces* is an examination of the legend of the fight between the three Horatii and the three Curiatii and its parallels in different mythic traditions.⁴² The classical legend, outlined in Livy and extended in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, is one where in place of a full war between Rome and Alba Longa, three triplet warriors from each side fight. In the initial clash, two of the Roman Horatii are killed. The Curiatii all survive but with various degrees of injury. Instead of trying to fight all three at once, the surviving Horatius, Publius, runs, not to escape, but to fight each in turn. In the chase the Curiatii become distanced from each other, so Publius can fight the least injured and quickest first; followed by the second who is slower. Then he can face the remaining, most injured Curiatii, and defeats him too, thus winning the battle on behalf of Rome. Publius's sister was betrothed to one of the Curiatii, but when he returns and she mourns his death, Publius kills her saying no Roman should mourn an enemy. He was condemned to death, but he and his father appealed to a popular assembly, with the sentence commuted, requiring atonement through

⁴¹ "le comparatisme de Dumézil et de ses successeurs veut établir à partir de techniques de repérage d'identités le système des différences et des transformations permettant de passer d'un texte à l'autre": Malan, "Colloque de Saclay", 178. For Canguilhem's Conclusions, see Malan, "Colloque de Saclay", 188-89, Stuart Elden, "Canguilhem, Dumézil, Hyppolite: Georges Canguilhem and his Contemporaries", *Revue internationale de philosophie*, forthcoming 2024.

⁴² Georges Dumézil, *Horace et les curiaces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).

sacrifices by the family both in the present and for future generations.⁴³ What is striking in Dumézil’s book is not just his detailed discussion of this story, and its classical sources. Rather, he is concerned with related stories in different mythological traditions, not just for their similarities but also their differences.

Horace et les Curiaces was a book Foucault used elsewhere to illustrate the structural approach to history. The best-preserved text is a lecture given at Keio University in Tokyo on 9 October 1970, published first in Japanese and included in *Dits et écrits* on the basis of a transcript corrected by Foucault.⁴⁴ From the month after the Saclay event, it is not surprising that there are several points of connection between the record of the French seminar and the Tokyo text. Foucault describes Dumézil’s discussion of the Horatii in a slightly more restrictive way than Saclay as “the first structural analysis of an Indo-European legend”.⁴⁵ Beyond Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Foucault is interested in Dumézil’s reading of the “isomorphic versions” of the story in different traditions, particularly Ireland with the tale of Cú Chulainn.⁴⁶ As Foucault presents it, Cú Chulainn is a child, gifted by the gods with a magical, “extraordinary strength”. He goes out to face the enemy, and kills three adversaries in sequence. Returning home inflamed by his strength and the victories, he is seen as a threat to his own people. He is sent a woman to try to “quell this burning and seething force”, but since this is his uncle’s wife it would go against the laws of incest. So instead, he is plunged into a cold bath, but his heat causes

⁴³ Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, I, 24-26; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, III.14-22.

⁴⁴ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:268-81; *Essential Works*, II:419-32. There is a manuscript of lecture notes, very close to the content and structure of this lecture, in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (70), folder 2.

⁴⁵ “la première analyse structurale d’une légende indo-européenne”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:273; *Essential Works*, II:423.

⁴⁶ *The Táin*, trans. Ciaran Carson (London: Penguin, 2008).

the water to boil, and he has a sequence of seven baths before he returns to a regular temperature, and can return home safely.⁴⁷

Foucault is less interested in the details than the process of Dumézil's analysis. Previous work in comparative mythology had "merely showed the resemblances between one myth and another". In contrast, Dumézil "compares these two narratives only in order to establish the differences". For Foucault, "this is what makes his analysis structural".⁴⁸ Publius Horatius is an adult, has strength and cunning but no magic, and on his return to Rome identifies an internal enemy, his sister. Cú Chulainn is a child, has magical power, and is a danger to his home himself. While in Ireland, the danger is resolved using the baths, in Rome the danger is resolved by "a juridical ritual, not a magical or religious one... a trial, then an appeals procedure, then an acquittal, before the hero can regain his place among his contemporaries".⁴⁹

Foucault underscores several aspects of Dumézil's analysis. It is "not the analysis of a resemblance, but of a difference and an interplay [*jeu*] of differences. In addition, Dumézil's analysis is not content with drawing up a table of differences; it establishes the system of differences, with their hierarchies and their subordination".⁵⁰ He recognizes that the Roman version introduces the two brothers to balance things – necessary as Publius has strength and cunning, but not magical powers. "The Roman narrative made the Irish hero's exploit a natural

⁴⁷ "une force extraordinaire...cette force brûlante et bouillonnante": Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:273; *Essential Works*, II:424.

⁴⁸ "on se contentait de montrer les ressemblances qu'il y avait entre tel et tel mythe... et c'est en cela que son analyse est structurale – , ne rapproche ces deux récits que pour établir exactement quelles sont les différences entre le premier et le second": Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:274; *Essential Works*, II:424.

⁴⁹ "un rituel, non plus magique ou religieux, mais juridique... un procès, puis une procédure d'appel, puis un acquittement, pour que le héros retrouve sa place au milieu de ses contemporains": Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:274; *Essential Works*, II:425.

⁵⁰ "l'analyse non pas d'une ressemblance, mais d'une différence et d'un jeu de différences. En outre, l'analyse de Dumézil ne se contente pas de faire le tableau des différences, l'analyse de Dumézil établit le système des différences, avec leur hiérarchie et leur subordination": Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:274; *Essential Works*, II:425.

one”. The transformation in one aspect – magical power to that of a normal man – required a shift in another, the balance of forces. “So one has not just the table of differences, but the connection of differences with one another. Finally Dumézil’s structuralist analysis consists in showing what the conditions of such a transformation are”.⁵¹

The Irish tale is of a society of heroes, endowed with “magical and religious power”, whereas in Rome, it is “a society in which military power is a collective power”.⁵² Although more detail is necessarily provided by Dumézil to make this point, Foucault suggests that “the Roman transformation of the old Indo-European myth is a result of the transformation of a society essentially made up, at least as concerns its military stratum, of aristocratic individualities, into a society whose military organization is collective and to a certain extent democratic”. His analysis opens a perspective on Rome’s history, which is why for Foucault this structuralist approach is a way of making historical analysis. “On the basis of this example, it could be said that an analysis is structural when it studies a transformable system and the conditions under which its transformations are carried out”.⁵³ One of the most striking examples in his own work can be found in his 1971-72 lecture course *Penal Theories and Institutions*. As Claude-Olivier Doron

⁵¹ “Le récit romain a rendu naturel l’exploit du héros irlandais... On a donc non seulement le tableau des différences, mais l’enchaînement des différences les unes avec les autres. Enfin, l’analyse structuraliste de Dumézil consiste à montrer quelles sont les conditions d’une pareille transformation”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:274-75; *Essential Works*, II:425.

⁵² “pouvoir magique et religieux... une société dans laquelle le pouvoir militaire est un pouvoir collectif”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:275; *Essential Works*, II:426.

⁵³ “la transformation romaine du vieux mythe indo-européen est le résultat de la transformation d’une société essentiellement constituée, au moins pour sa couche militaire, d’individualités aristocratiques en une société dont l’organisation militaire est collective et jusqu’à un certain point démocratique... À partir de cet exemple, on pourrait dire : une analyse structurale quand elle étudie un système transformable et les conditions dans lesquelles ses transformations s’effectuent”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:275-76; *Essential Works*, II:426.

has indicated, Foucault's comparison of the feudal repressive system and the state repressive system is a good instance of his employing the approach he identifies in Dumézil.⁵⁴

In the Tokyo lecture, Foucault also takes examples from the *Annales* school, particularly Huguette and Pierre Chaunu's ambitious *Séville et l'Atlantique*, suggesting that it helps to understand duration, discontinuities and transformations.⁵⁵ He suggests that this too helps to "to give a rigorous form to the analysis of change".⁵⁶ Without wishing to equate their work, he suggests that there are some points of contact between a structuralist analysis of change and "historical analyses of types of events and types of duration".⁵⁷

Foucault was often strongly critical of any attempt to relate his work to structuralism. Two of the most striking examples are the preface to the English translation of *The Order of Things*, and a comment towards the end of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. In the first, Foucault complains that "in France, certain jesters [*bateleurs*] persist in grouping me with the category 'structuralists'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the concepts or key terms that characterize structural analyses".⁵⁸ In the inaugural lecture, having outlined his project, Foucault ends with the biting comment: "And now let those with limited

⁵⁴ Claude-Olivier Doron, "Foucault et les historiens: Le débat sur les «soulèvements populaires»", Michel Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales: Cours au Collège de France (1971–1972)*, ed. Bernard E. Harcourt, notes and critical apparatus by Claude-Olivier Doron (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2015), 291-307, 304; "Foucault and the Historians: The Debate on 'Popular Uprisings'", *Penal Theories and Institutions: Lectures at the Collège de France 1971-1972*, trans. Graham Burchell, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 285-301, 294.

⁵⁵ Huguette and Pierre Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique, 1504–1650* (Paris: Armand Colin, 12 volumes, 1955–1960).

⁵⁶ "une forme rigoureuse à l'analyse des changements": Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:273; *Essential Works*, II:423.

⁵⁷ "les analyses historiques des types d'événements et des types de durée...": Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:280; *Essential Works*, II:430.

⁵⁸ The published English text is a translation of an unpublished French original. The version in *Dits et écrits* is a translation back into French. I have followed the original, found in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (31), folder 0, 8: "Les bateleurs, en France, ont l'habitude de me ranger dans la catégorie 'structuralistes'. Il ne m'a pas été possible de faire rentrer dans leur menue cervelle qui je n'usais d'aucune des méthodes, que je ne mettais en jeu aucun des concepts, que je n'avais recours à aucun des termes de base qui caractérisent les analyses structurales".

vocabularies, the aphasiacs of theory, say – if they prefer its sound to its meaning – that this is structuralism”.⁵⁹

Foucault is being unfair, as the above indications, a reading of the *History of Madness*, and especially its 1961 preface, or the original edition of *Naissance de la clinique* clearly demonstrate. In the 1963 version of its preface, Foucault describes *Naissance de la clinique* as “a structural study that attempts to decipher in the depth of the historical the conditions of history itself”.⁶⁰ This was one of the many claims he rewrote for the later 1972 edition, in which he made an attempt to remove most of the overtly structuralist language.⁶¹ Reading Foucault’s work in relation to Dumézil and a range of texts which have become available only recently helps to clarify what the relation was. Some of these texts were posthumously published materials, but there were equally some revealing lectures and interviews given outside of France, often published in his lifetime, which were unavailable in French until after his death.

A few key themes are becoming clearer. First, that while Foucault was interested in linguistics, that was really only a specific focus for him in the 1960s, even if some of the lessons he took from that work continue to be important into the 1970s. Second, as the Tokyo lecture makes clear, Foucault was always interested in history, and specifically in how structuralism might help

⁵⁹ “Et maintenant que ceux qui ont des lacunes de vocabulaire, que les aphasiques de la théorie disent – si cela leur chante mieux que cela ne leur parle – que c’est là du structuralisme”: Michel Foucault, *Leçon inaugurale faite le Mercredi 2 Décembre 1970*, Paris: Collège de France, 1971, 32. The published version omits “the aphasiacs of theory” (*L’ordre du discours*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, 72).

⁶⁰ “une étude structurale qui essaie de déchiffrer dans l’épaisseur de l’historique les conditions de l’histoire elle-même”: Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: Une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), xv.

⁶¹ In 1972: “a study that attempts to decipher in the depth of discourse the conditions of its history [*une étude qui essaie de dégager dans l’épaisseur du discours les conditions de son histoire*]”. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: Une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), 18. The existing English translation blends the two editions into a sentence Foucault never wrote: “It is a structural study that sets out to disentangle the conditions of its history from the density of discourse”. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), xxii.

to make sense of historical change. He opens the lecture with the comment that structuralism was initially concerned with giving “a more precise and rigorous method to historical investigations”.⁶² And returning to this theme, at the end of the lecture he concludes:

I think that structuralism and history make it possible to abandon this great biological mythology of history and duration. Structuralism, by defining transformations, and history, by describing types of events and different types of duration [*durée*], make possible both the appearance of discontinuities in history and the appearance of regular, coherent transformations. Structuralism and contemporary history are theoretical instruments by means of which one can – contrary to the old idea of continuity – really grasp both the discontinuity of events and the transformation of societies.⁶³

The final point on structuralism is that if one French thinker influenced his approach and use of structural language it was Dumézil, far more than, for example, Roland Barthes or Lévi-Strauss. This was recognized by contemporaries such as the philosopher Gérard Deledalle, who was Foucault’s colleague in Tunisia.⁶⁴ Indeed, when asked about the links, Lévi-Strauss claimed that he, Benveniste and Dumézil were the only “three authentic structuralists in France”, and that “Foucault was quite right to reject the association” with his own work.⁶⁵

⁶² “une méthode plus précise et plus rigoureuse aux recherches historiques”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:268; *Essential Works*, II:419.

⁶³ “Je crois que le structuralisme et l’histoire permettent d’abandonner cette grande mythologie biologique de l’histoire et de la durée. Le structuralisme, en définissant des transformations, l’histoire, en décrivant des types d’événements et des types de durée différents, rendent possible à la fois l’apparition de discontinuités dans l’histoire et l’apparition de transformations réglées et cohérentes. Le structuralisme et l’histoire contemporaine sont des instruments théoriques grâce auxquels on peut, contre la vieille idée de la continuité, penser réellement et la discontinuité des événements et la transformation des sociétés”: Foucault, *Dits et écrits* II:280-81; *Essential Works*, II:430-31.

⁶⁴ Gérard Deledalle, “Michel Foucault le Tournant Tunisien: Du structuralisme à l’analyse pragmatique”, *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* 182, 2002, 45-51, 47-48.

⁶⁵ “il y a en France trois structuralistes authentiques”: Claude Lévi-Strauss to Catherine Backés-Clément, 30 May 1970, in Catherine Backés-Clément, *Lévi-Strauss; ou, La structure et le malheur* (Paris: Seghera,

1970-81: Sovereignty, Monstrosity and the Politics of Truth

The discussion of *Horace et les Curiaces* is Foucault's most explicit discussion of a theoretical debt to Dumézil, seeing the value of his historical and structural approach, a comparison of resemblance and differences, transformations and their conditions. There are many other examples in Foucault's lectures where he takes more thematic points from Dumézil's work.

In his first Collège de France course, published as *Lectures on the Will to Know*, Foucault briefly indicates the importance of an analysis of royal power, ceremony and Indo-European ritual. Here he indicates the twofold nature of royal power, as "both political and magical-religious structure".⁶⁶ In Dumézil's famous trifunctional analysis, gods, social groups, and ideological structures are divided into sovereigns, warriors and producers.⁶⁷ The Horatii and Cú Chulainn are indicative figures of the second function, but here Foucault is referring to the first. In Dumézil's analysis the first function is split into two contrasting and complementary roles, a juridical, contractual political form, and a magical, powerful form, often found as pairs of gods such as the Vedic figures of Mitra and Varuna.⁶⁸

There is a much more sustained use of Dumézil's analysis of sovereignty in Foucault's 1975-76 course *Society Must be Defended*, in which Foucault uses Dumézil's work to establish the basis

1970), 195-96, 196; "Foucault a eu tout à fait raison de rejeter l'assimilation", Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *De près et de loin* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001), 107; *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, trans. Paula Wissing, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 72.

⁶⁶ "à la fois politique et magico-religieuse": Michel Foucault, *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir: Cours au Collège de France, 1970-1971*, suivi de *Le savoir d'Œdipe*, ed. Daniel Defert (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2011), 106; *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France 1970-71*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 111.

⁶⁷ This is found throughout his work, but see, in particular, Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée I II III* (Paris: Gallimard Quarto, 1995), originally published in three volumes in 1968, 1971, 1973.

⁶⁸ Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: Essai sur deux représentations indo-européennes de la Souveraineté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940, Paris: Gallimard, second edition 1948); *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, ed. Stuart Elden, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: HAU books, 2023).

for a nuanced understanding of traditional power, which his own analyses of discipline, bio-power and governmentality seek to go beyond.⁶⁹ What is significant is that, following Dumézil, Foucault analyses sovereignty as divided, rather than just one aspect of the trifunctional schema. Foucault describes these two aspects of the first function in a powerful formulation: “binding and dazzling, subjugating by imposing obligations and intensifying the lustre of force [*l'éclat de la force*]”.⁷⁰ In the secondary literature’s concentration on Foucault’s analysis of other forms of power, his sophisticated understanding of sovereignty is sometimes missed.⁷¹

In his 1974-75 lecture course *Les Anormaux*, Foucault discusses the ways in which political leaders were often characterized as having monstrous, bestial or grotesque characteristics.⁷² One of Foucault’s notebooks has some further sketches of an analysis of the “monstrosity of the prince”, “the economy of power” and “the economy of cruelty”. Though the notebook is undated, some indications suggest that it was used in Brazil in November 1974. While Machiavelli is briefly mentioned, there are also some abbreviated indications of how Dumézil’s analyses, especially in *Mitra-Varuna*, might have informed such work. Foucault highlights *Mitra-Varuna*’s discussions of one-eyed and one-handed gods and heroes, sacrifice and bestial

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, «*Il faut défendre la société*»: *Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1997), 58-59; “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 66-68.

⁷⁰ “Lier et éblouir, subjuguer en faisant valoir des obligations et en intensifiant l’éclat de la force”: Foucault, «*Il faut défendre la société*», 59; “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 67.

⁷¹ For a fuller analysis, see Stuart Elden, “The Yoke of Law and the Lustre of Glory: Foucault and Dumézil on Sovereignty”, in Martina Tazzioli and William Walters (eds.), *Handbook on Governmentality*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2023.

⁷² Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomani (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999); trans. *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* (London: Verso, 2003).

cults.⁷³ A sustained study by Foucault of political monstrosity would have been a fascinating addition to his work, but it sadly numbers among many abandoned projects of the mid-1970s.

Elsewhere in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, Foucault had suggested that “there is no judicial discourse in which the truth is not lurking”, and he argued we had to endorse the closing pages of Dumézil’s 1943 book, *Servius et la Fortune*.⁷⁴ Foucault presents two passages separated by about half a page, though he slightly misquotes Dumézil. The original reads:

As far back as we go in the behavior of our species, ‘truthful speech [*la parole vraie*]’ has been a force few could resist... Very early, Truth was one of man’s most effective verbal weapons, one of the most prolific seeds of power [*puissance*], one of the most solid foundations for their institutions.⁷⁵

The question of the politics of truth was a major theme throughout Foucault’s work in the 1970s and 1980s. Foucault mentions a forthcoming book entitled *Pouvoir de la vérité* [The Power of Truth] in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, though no book of that title was ever published.⁷⁶ However, much of his late work would be taken up with the question of confession, and the idea of speaking the truth, often to those in power, culminating in his final lectures around the idea of *parrēsia*. The recently published manuscript *Confessions of the Flesh* as the

⁷³ Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (93), cahier 25. There are 12 unnumbered sides of notes here. The quotations “La monstrosité du prince... l’économie du pouvoir” and “L’économie de la cruauté” are on 2r and 2v; the indications of Dumézil’s work on 6r-6v.

⁷⁴ Foucault, *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 82; *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 84.

⁷⁵ “aussi haut qu’on remonte dans les comportements de notre espèce, la ‘parole vraie’ est au contraire une force à laquelle peu de forces résistent... la Vérité est très tôt apparue aux hommes comme une des armes verbales les plus efficaces, un des germes de puissance les plus prolifiques, une des plus solides fondements pour leurs institutions”: Georges Dumézil, *Servius et la Fortune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 243-44. Foucault’s notes on this page are in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (32), folder 1.

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, 79 n. 1. The forthcoming work is not mentioned in the English translation *History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1978), 59 n. 2.

fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* is only the most explicit instance of this long-standing project.⁷⁷

In that ongoing interest, Foucault's *Wrong Doing, Truth Telling* lectures delivered in Louvain 1981 are a significant moment. Strikingly, Foucault returns to the quote from *Servius et la fortune* a decade after its use in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, and suggests it could have served as epigraph [*exergue*] to the lectures, explaining that his project was to explore the relation between Dumézil's "truthful speech", or veridiction, "and that other form of speech one might call speech of justice [*parole de justice*], which consists in short of saying what is just and what must be done for justice to be established or restored".⁷⁸ The relation between veridiction and jurisdiction would be a major theme of Foucault's final years, especially as his work took him back to antiquity. Interestingly, his focus was on Dumézil's then very recent books which, relatively unusually for Dumézil, discussed Ancient Greece. Dumézil had worked on Greece in some of his earliest writings, but while he retained an abiding interest, he also recognized that his trifunctional analysis did not work so well there.⁷⁹

1983: Veridiction, *Ion* and *Apollon Sonore*

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *Les Aveux de la chair: Histoire de la sexualité IV*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018); *Confessions of the Flesh: The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 2021).

⁷⁸ "les rapports entre la veridiction et cette autre parole que l'on pourrait appeler la parole de justice et qui consiste en somme à dire ce qui est juste et ce qu'il faut faire pour que la justice soit instaurée ou restaurée": Michel Foucault, *Mal Faire, Dire Vrai: Fonction de l'aveu en justice*, ed. Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2012), 17-18; *Wrong-Doing Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, trans. Steven W. Sawyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 28.

⁷⁹ Foucault recognises this in a text included in *Folie, langage, littérature*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud, Daniele Lorenzini and Judith Revel (Paris: Vrin, 2019), 201, also noting Dumézil's protests against use of his work to analyse Bantu people or Japan. Of his earlier work using Greek examples, see for example, Georges Dumézil, *Ouranos-Varuna: Étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1934).

One exception to this relatively abbreviated treatment of Greece is found in Dumézil's collection of short sketches, *esquisses*, entitled *Apollon Sonore*.⁸⁰ This was the first of four volumes, the first published when he was 84, and the last of which was published posthumously. In each, Dumézil included twenty-five sketches, often with reading suggestions appended for others to take up and develop themes. He was explicit about their purpose:

After a half-century of research, I have resigned myself to publishing in the form of sketches projects and files which undoubtedly deserve better, but to which I can no longer devote the months or years that would be necessary. Other scholars will perhaps be inspired by them, or at least put them to the test.⁸¹

In *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault can be seen as partly responding to his mentor's invitation. In this course he discusses several plays by Euripides, including *The Phoenician Women*, *Hippolytus*, and *The Bacchae*, but particularly *Ion*. *Ion* is the son of Apollo, who had raped Ion's mother Creusa. Creusa had exposed the child to the elements, and years later, assuming him dead, had gone to consult the oracle at Delphi to see if she and her new husband would be able to have children. *Ion*, who had been saved by Hermes on behalf of Apollo, is now a servant at the temple, but neither he nor his mother knows who the other is. Foucault relates this play to his regular focus on Sophocles' *Oedipus*, which he says is another play "about parents who expose their children, in which a child disappears, is taken for dead, and then

⁸⁰ Georges Dumézil, *Apollon sonore et autres essais: Vingt-cinq esquisses de mythologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

⁸¹ "Après un demi-siècle de recherches, je me résigne à publier en forme d'esquisses des projets, des dossiers qui méritent mieux sans doute, mais auxquels je ne puis plus consacrer le mois, les années qu'il faudrait. D'autres écoliers s'en inspireront peut-être, ou du moins les mettront à l'épreuve" : Dumézil, *Apollon sonore*, 7.

reappears”. It is another play about “truth-telling, of the unveiling [*dévoilement*] of the truth, of the dramatics of truth-telling, or, if you like, of *alēthourgia*”.⁸²

While his overall analysis of the play is very substantial, and will not be discussed here, Foucault takes a detour in his reading of *Ion* to look at what Dumézil says about the god Apollo.⁸³ In the second study in *Apollon sonore*, Dumézil explores a passage from a very early hymn to Apollo, included in collections of the Homeric Hymns.⁸⁴ In the course manuscript, Foucault gives the reference as “Hymne homérique – l’Apollon de Delos/p. 26-27”,⁸⁵ indicating the pages of *Apollon sonore* where Dumézil reproduces part of the Greek and translates it into French. Foucault’s reading is based entirely on what Dumézil presents and discusses, rather than returning to the hymn itself.

This section of the hymn is about Apollo as a child, born in Delos before his move to Delphi. He calls for specific objects, says he will reveal the oracles of Zeus, and goes off into the world, as the island of Delos becomes covered with gold. Foucault indicates that Dumézil stresses three things about the god: his call “for his lyre and his bow”; that he is “clearly indicated as the one who reveals the will of Zeus through the oracle: he tells the truth”; and that “as he sets foot on Delos it is covered with a mantle of gold and the forest blooms”. Dumézil relates these to “the

⁸² “il est question de parents qui exposent leurs enfants... où il est question d’un enfant qui disparaît, passe our mort et réapparaît... une pièce du dire-vrai, du dévoilement de la vérité, de la dramaturgie du dire-vrai, ou, si vous voulez, de l’alēthurgie”: Michel Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres: Cours au Collège de France 1982-1983*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2008), 78; *The Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-83*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2010), 83.

⁸³ Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*. 113-16; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 122-25.

⁸⁴ Dumézil, *Apollon sonore*, 25-35; “Hymn 3: To Apollo”, in *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. Michael Crudden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-42, 27.

⁸⁵ Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (XII), 179-85.

three Indo-European functions”. The bow relates to the second, warrior function; the gold is “linked to the [third] function of fertilization, of wealth”.⁸⁶

As for the two other elements (the lyre and the oracle), together they represent, or fall within the province of the [first] magical-political function, or as Dumézil says, administration of the sacred... the oracle is the form of the voice which tells the truth and through which the god addresses men, while the song is the form of the voice through which men address the gods in order to sing their praises.⁸⁷

Foucault goes on to outline how in the first *esquisse* of *Apollon sonore*, Dumézil links these functions to a Vedic hymn (found in *Rig Veda* X, 125; *Atharva Veda* IV, 30) about the “powers [*pouvoirs*] of the voice”.⁸⁸ Foucault admits he has not read the hymn and is again relying on Dumézil. The hymn also highlight the three functions: the voice means that man eats food (fecundity); the voice makes strong those it loves (magical-political function); it fights for protection of men (warrior function). But, following Dumézil still, Foucault also indicates that the third function of fecundity, “the god who makes the earth flourish and the forest blossom, quickly disappears”. Apollo is not as associated with birth and fecundity, in part, Foucault suggests, because he is associated more with the love of boys than the love of women.⁸⁹ This,

⁸⁶ “sa lyre et son arc.. il est bien marqué comme étant celui qui révèle les volontés de Zeus par l’oracle : il dit vrai... à peine marche-t-il sur la terre de Dèlos que cette terre se couvre d’un manteau d’or et que la forêt fleurit... trois fonctions indo-européennes... rattaché à la fonction de fécondation, à la richesse”: Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 114; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 122.

⁸⁷ “Quant aux deux autres éléments (la lyre et l’oracle), associés l’un à l’autre ils représentent, ils relèvent de la fonction magico-politique, ou, comme dit Dumézil, de la administration du sacré... l’oracle c’est la forme de la voix qui dit vrai et par laquelle le dieu s’adresse aux hommes, le chant étant au contraire ce que par quoi les hommes, pour chanter les louanges des dieux, s’adressent aux dieux”: Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 114; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 122-23. Gold is briefly mentioned again on 120/128.

⁸⁸ “les pouvoirs de la voix”: Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 114; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 123; Dumézil, “Vāc”, *Apollon sonore*, 13-24. Dumézil also indicates his reading in *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 29-37.

⁸⁹ “dieu qui fait prospérer la terre, du dieu à cause de qui la forêt fleurit... très vite, elle va disparaître”: Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 115; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 123-24.

however, is a narrow sense of fecundity to mean reproduction, which neglects Apollo's association with herdsmen in Greek myth.

Following Dumézil's framework, Foucault reads this element of the play as a tension between the magical-political function of the oracle and the third function of fecundity, since childbirth is the very reason for Creusa's consultation. "If you like, what we find is the confrontation between this oracular function of truth-telling and the function of fertilization, and this constitutes the very heart of the play". Here Foucault indicates that the second function of the warrior is only present in a limited form in the play, partly because this is a time of peace in the Peloponnesian War and Delphi has a peace-making role. It is the clash between the first and third function which is at stake between "truth-telling and fertilization", and here he indicates that Apollo is most uncomfortable with the third, his own paternity of Ion. Foucault also indicates how important the voice is to the play, highlighting the theme brought to the fore by Dumézil.⁹⁰ What is interesting about the reading here is that Foucault uses the reading by Dumézil of one classical Greek source – the Homeric hymn to Apollo, alongside a related Vedic source – to shape part of his reading of another Greek text – Euripides' play *Ion*.

Defert also notes Foucault's interest in Dumézil, particularly *Apollon Sonore*, and sees this as part of an ongoing conversation with Greek scholars including Marcel Detienne, Ramnoux and Jean-Pierre Vernant.⁹¹ Foucault's debt to Detienne comes through particularly in *Lectures on the*

⁹⁰ "C'est, si vous voulez, la confrontation de cette fonction oraculaire du dire-vrai et de la fonction de fécondation, c'est cet affrontement que l'on trouve et qui constitue le cœur même de la pièce... dire-vrai et fécondation": Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 116; *The Government of the Self and Others*, 124-25.

⁹¹ Daniel Defert and Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, "Filigranes philosophiques", in *Michel Foucault: Cahier L'Herne*, ed. Philippe Artières et. al. (Paris: L'Herne, 2011), 39-46, 40-41.

Will to Know, as Defert’s apparatus to that course indicates.⁹² As well as attending the Saclay event, Ramnoux had asked Foucault a question after his “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” lecture, and he knew at least her book on Heraclitus.⁹³ Vernant was mentioned by Foucault in the discussion following the ‘Truth and Juridical Forms’ course in Brazil.⁹⁴ When Foucault proposed a course on ancient Greece to SUNY Buffalo in 1972, he asked that as well as classical texts – Homer, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* – and Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, the students should read Detienne and Vernant.⁹⁵ The manuscript has a single reference to Dumézil, the same passage of *Servius et la fortune* he had used in Paris.⁹⁶ In terms of Foucault’s interest in Dumézil’s reading of Greek thought, that comes a decade later.

1984: The Death of Socrates

In his final course, whose start was delayed by his illness, Foucault famously discusses the death of Socrates. He concentrates on Plato’s *Apology* and *Phaedo*, and Socrates’s famous final words to Crito where he tells him “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay the debt and do not forget [ὄρω Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρούνα: ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε; *O Kriton, ephe, tō Asklepiō opheilomen alektruona, alla apodote kai mē amelēsēte*].”⁹⁷ Because

⁹² See especially, Daniel Defert, “Situation du cours” in Foucault, *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 266, 275, 278; “Course Context”, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 269-70, 278, 281. Foucault particularly uses Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (Paris: François Maspero, 1967).

⁹³ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, I:577-78. Clémence Ramnoux, *Héraclite ou l’homme entre les choses et les mots* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1968 [1959]). Notes on this book are in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (32) 32, folder 1.

⁹⁴ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II:635-36.

⁹⁵ The reading is indicated in letters between Foucault and John K. Simon, and a bibliography for the course, all found in University Archives, State University of New York at Buffalo, 16/6/643 Department of Modern Languages Records, 1960–1976, box 18, ‘Michel Foucault’. A copy is in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF29005, Buffalo, folder 1. The course manuscript is in NAF28730 (66) and an audio recording in the Buffalo archives.

⁹⁶ Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (66), folder 2, 119.

⁹⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, 118a. For a brief discussion of Foucault’s reading of Dumézil on Socrates’ death, see Arnold I. Davidson, “Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Michel Foucault* ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115-40, 133-34.

Asclepius was the god of health or cures, (and incidentally, another son of Apollo), paying this debt indicated that Socrates was grateful for a recovery from illness. For millennia this has been understood as Socrates being grateful for being cured of the disease of life, with his death the resolution of which he was not afraid. But even though Nietzsche supported this interpretation in *The Gay Science*, §340, suggesting it meant that “life is a disease”, he indicated that it was problematic, because Socrates did not live a life which suggested it was a sickness.⁹⁸

In his lecture, Foucault makes use of an essay by Dumézil in which a different interpretation is offered.⁹⁹ Dumézil discusses the verbs, which are first person plural – we owe – and then second-person – (you) pay the debt and (you) do not forget.¹⁰⁰ The stress is that Socrates and Crito owe a debt – “we owe a cock to Asclepius”. (Nietzsche, surprisingly, mistakes the person of the injunction: “O Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius [*Oh Kriton, ich bin dem Asklepios eine Hahn schuldig*]”.) This suggests that the sickness cannot be the life of which just Socrates is cured, since Crito continues to live. At least, Crito, or perhaps others along with him, will live long enough to be able to pay the debt and Socrates fears he risks forgetting. It is important to underline that it is a request to pay *the* debt, neither *my* debt or *our* debt. Like Nietzsche, Dumézil also questions the interpretation that it is life that is the sickness, with the argument that “this is contrary to everything he [Socrates] taught, which was directed toward putting life to

⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 15 volumes, 1980), III:569-70; *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 272. Foucault discusses this in *Le courage de la vérité: Le gouvernement des soi et des autres II: Cours au Collège de France*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2008), 90-91; *The Courage of Truth (The Government of the Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-84*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2011), 98-99.

⁹⁹ Georges Dumézil, “«Nous devons un coq à Asklépios»” in «... *Le moyne noir en gris dedans Varennes*» *Sotie Nostradamique suivie d'un Divertissement sur les dernières paroles de Socrate* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 129-70. Dumézil gave a copy of the book to Foucault, archived as Michel Foucault Library, BEIN 609. For the English translation, see “‘We Owe a Cock to Asclepius...’: A Divertissement on the Last Words of Socrates”, *The Riddle of Nostradamus: A Critical Dialogue*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 93-124.

¹⁰⁰ Dumézil, “«Nous devons un coq à Asklépios»”, 140; “‘We Owe a Cock to Asclepius...’, 102.

good use”.¹⁰¹ Instead Dumézil suggests the cure is that both Socrates and Crito have been saved from the common, public opinion. As one of the characters in the dialogue in Dumézil’s book says: “Wrong opinion is to the soul what disease is to the body”,¹⁰² and “The disease that destroys the body is thus the twin sister of the false opinion that corrupts the soul”.¹⁰³

Foucault had alerted his auditors in previous weeks that he would discuss Dumézil’s new book «... *Le moyne noir en gris dedans Varennes*». He suggests that “as it is a difficult text”, his audience might “wish or have the opportunity to read it”, though recognizes that “obviously, there is no obligation, we are not in a closed seminar, you do as you like”.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, when he turns to Dumézil’s reading in the 15 February 1984 lecture, it seems few of his audience had actually read the text.¹⁰⁵

Foucault is explicit. “None of the historians of philosophy or commentators who have pondered this text for two thousand years have managed to explain or interpret it”, but Dumézil “has found the solution”, “resolves the problem”.¹⁰⁶ He outlines Dumézil’s case in some detail.¹⁰⁷ Foucault also rejects the idea that Socrates sees life as a disease, recognizing that Nietzsche identified that there was a problem with the standard interpretation but did not resolve it, and that while Ulrich von Wiliamowitz-Moellendorff dismissed the idea that life was the disease, he implausibly had

¹⁰¹ “Mais cela est contraire à tout son enseignement, tourné vers un bon usage de la vie”: Dumézil, “«Nous devons un coq à Asklépios»”, 144; “We Owe a Cock to Asclepius...”, 105.

¹⁰² “L’opinion erronée est à l’âme ce que la maladie est au corps”: Dumézil, “«Nous devons un coq à Asklépios»”, 148; “We Owe a Cock to Asclepius...”, 108.

¹⁰³ “La maladie qui fait dépérir le corps est donc la sœur jumelle de l’opinion fautive qui corrompt l’âme”: Dumézil, “«Nous devons un coq à Asklépios»”, 151; “We Owe a Cock to Asclepius...”, 110.

¹⁰⁴ “comme c’est un texte difficile... veulent ou ont l’occasion de le lire avant... évidemment aucune obligation, on n’est pas dans un séminaire fermé, vous faites ce que vous voulez”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 30 n.; *The Courage of Truth*, 31 n.; see 65/69, the following week when he reminds them again.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 87; *The Courage of Truth*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ “C’est ce texte qu’aucun des historiens de la philosophie ou des commentateurs qui, depuis deux mille ans se sont penchés [dessus], n’a jamais expliqué ou interprété... a... trouvé la solution... résout le problème”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 67-68, 85; *The Courage of Truth*, 74, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 87-91, 93-95; *The Courage of Truth*, 96-99, 102-3.

to suggest Socrates had previously recovered from an unknown disease which he only now wishes to compensate.¹⁰⁸

Foucault therefore utilizes Dumézil's argument, and also tries to strengthen it against possible objections. Importantly he provides indications of places in the *Phaedo* itself where correcting a false option is seen as a cure.¹⁰⁹ In the words of Foucault's editor Frédéric Gros, Socrates and Crito have been "cured by philosophy of the disease of false discourse, of the contagion of common and dominant opinions, of the epidemic of prejudices".¹¹⁰ More significantly, perhaps, Foucault connects this interpretation to major themes of his final lectures.¹¹¹ Both Socrates and Crito have found a way "to choose, resolve, and make up his mind through opinion founded on the relation of self to truth".¹¹² The question of the politics of truth, and the relation of this to the constitution of the self is a major theme of Foucault's final work, with earlier anticipations of this concern. Another late interest is the question of *parrēsia*, which he here describes as "a truth-telling whose final objective and constant concern was to teach men to take care of themselves".¹¹³ The other, related theme is the care of the self and others, which is illustrated by both Socrates' own health and the service he has done for Crito. Foucault's last two courses both had the title *The Government of the Self and Others*, but this final course also had the subtitle of *The Courage of Truth*. The care of self is necessary as a prelude to the concern for others, as comes through, for example, in Foucault's discussions of Plato's *Alcibiades*. The biographical

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 90-91, 93-94; *The Courage of Truth*, 98-99, 102. The editorial reference is to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon* (Berlin: Weimann, 1920), I:178, II:58.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 97-99; *The Courage of Truth*, 105-8.

¹¹⁰ "guéri de la maladie des faux discours, de la contagion des opinions communes et dominantes, de l'épidémie des préjugés, guéri par la philosophie": Frédéric Gros in Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 320; *The Courage of Truth*, 348.

¹¹¹ Foucault is explicit this is his aim in *Le courage de la vérité*, 85; *The Courage of Truth*, 92.

¹¹² "choisir, se fixer à et se décider par une opinion vraie fondé sur le rapport de soi-même à la vérité": Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 96-97; *The Courage of Truth*, 105.

¹¹³ "un dire-vrai qui avait pour objectif final et préoccupation constante d'apprendre aux hommes à s'occuper d'eux": Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 102; *The Courage of Truth*, 110.

context of Foucault's own life is not lost on him either, recognizing how these lectures have also been therapeutic for him, noting in the following week's lecture: "As a philosophy professor one really must have lectured at least once in one's life on Socrates and the death of Socrates. It's done. *Salvate animam meam*".¹¹⁴

The following week's lecture is also interesting because Foucault returns to Dumézil in a discussion of the etymology of the term *epimeleia* – attention or care – and the root *mel-*. The wider question had concerned him elsewhere in the course, but it is also important in the reading of Socrates' final words, because the phrase "do not forget" is *me amelēsēte* – do not be neglectful, or do not fail to care or pay attention.¹¹⁵ He pairs this along with an analysis of the relation between the Socrates reading and the first part of the book which discusses Nostradamus.¹¹⁶

The relation between Dumézil's two texts had, for Foucault, been neglected in contemporary commentaries, but he is interested in the way that the text on Nostradamus is "a satirical allegorical drama: *Sotie nostradamique*", while the text on Socrates is called a *Divertissement*. Foucault comments: "So these are two texts of diversion [*amusement*], but which do not at all have the same status".¹¹⁷ More interestingly, and a parallel to his enduring interest in Dumézil's work, is that he sees both texts as putting "to work a particular form of textual analysis, a certain form of analysis of words, a method of cross-checking different kinds of information found in

¹¹⁴ "Il faut bien, comme professeur de philosophie, avoir fait au moins une fois dans sa vie un cours sur Socrate et la mort de Socrate. C'est fait. *Salvate animam meam*": Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 143; *The Courage of Truth*, 153. The Latin means I have saved my soul, used in the Catholic confessional, but also by Marx at the end of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

¹¹⁵ Foucault had stressed this in *Le courage de la vérité*, 104; *The Courage of Truth*, 112-13.

¹¹⁶ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 109-13; *The Courage of Truth*, 117-21. He had said that we wanted to discuss this relation the previous week Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 85; *The Courage of Truth*, 92.

¹¹⁷ "Ce sont donc deux textes d'amusement, mais qui n'ont pas tout à fait le même statut": Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 111; *The Courage of Truth*, 119.

the text, a sort of crossword method which is entirely in line with that employed by Dumézil in his different works of analysis of Indo-European mythologies”.¹¹⁸ He sees these two analyses as tests of the approach, with quite different texts – a “prophetic, obscure text” and one at the heart of Western philosophy – which show the breadth of possible applications “for the practice of a certain method, the both philosophical and structural method of analysis that he has employed”.¹¹⁹

He specifies that he had requested Dumézil’s guidance on the etymology in conversation, and that Dumézil followed up with a “short note [*petit mot*]”.¹²⁰ Eribon specifies that the first was a telephone conversation between Foucault and Dumézil in winter 1984, in which Foucault also said he thought he had AIDS, recounted to Eribon by Dumézil after Foucault’s funeral.¹²¹

Foucault’s question to Dumézil concerned the meaning of “this probably Indo-European root (*mel*)”:¹²² a question he tells his auditors he posed because he was himself “completely incompetent in this order of things [*ordre de choses*]”.¹²³ Dumézil said initially that the meaning was unknown, but speculated it could be “*melos*, that is to say the word found in *melōdia* which

¹¹⁸ “mettent en jeu une certaine forme d’analyse de texte, une certaine forme d’analyse de mots, une méthode de recoupement des différentes indications que l’on peut trouver dans le texte, une sorte de méthode de mots croisés qui [est] tout à fait homogène à celle employée par Dumézil lui-même dans ses différents ouvrages d’analyse des mythologies indo-européennes”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 111; *The Courage of Truth*, 119-20.

¹¹⁹ “Texte prophétique, texte obscur... l’exercice d’une certaine méthode, la méthode de l’analyse à la fois philosophique et structurale qu’il a utilisée”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 111-12; *The Courage of Truth*, 120-21. In *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, 216, Dumézil has to be persuaded that Foucault’s engagement was serious.

¹²⁰ Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 110; *The Courage of Truth*, 118.

¹²¹ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 530/-, 624 n. 19/-; the English does not link the telephone call to this discussion, see -/325.

¹²² “cette racine, vraisemblablement indo-européenne (*mel*)”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 109-10; *The Courage of Truth*, 118.

¹²³ “tout à fait incompetent dans cet ordre des choses”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 109; *The Courage of Truth*, 118. Given the play on the title of one of Foucault’s books, in both its English translation and his preferred original choice for the French, I have kept the literal sense, rather than Burchell’s “domain”.

signifies: song, rhythmic singing, music”, before dismissing this interpretation.¹²⁴ But in the follow-up note, Dumézil says that Pierre Chantraine’s dictionary of Greek roots indicates there “there is no plausible etymology”, but adds he has reconsidered his rejection of *melos*, and wonders if the French term *ça ma chante* perhaps captures this sense. This means it sings to me, that I like something, which Graham Burchell felicitously renders as “it appeals to me” – both in the sense of liking something, but also it calls to me.¹²⁵

In the editorial note Gros adds that Chantraine describes the hypothesized link with *melos* as “very doubtful”.¹²⁶ But Foucault had also spoken to Paul Veyne about the idea. Veyne had said that “certainly, it is quite conceivable”, also giving a different example. *Melos* is also the *chant d’appel*, the call, perhaps of a shepherd “calling back his flock or calling out to other shepherds, it is the song signal”.¹²⁷ Foucault also gets a laugh from his audience – perhaps because of the allusion to Althusser? – by saying “In our dreadful modern terminology we would say: it says something to me [*ça m’interpelle!*]”¹²⁸ This discussion of etymology is interesting for at least two reasons. One is simply that Foucault is interested in etymologies to shed light on concepts, even if he recognizes his own limitations. Fortunately, he had illustrious friends and colleagues to drawn upon.¹²⁹ Another is that the manuscript of this lecture begins with the discussion of

¹²⁴ “*melos*, c’est-à-dire ce mot que l’on trouvait dans *melôdia* qui signifie : le chant, le chant rythmé, la musique”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 110; *The Courage of Truth*, 118.

¹²⁵ “pas d’étymologie plausible”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 110; *The Courage of Truth*, 118.

¹²⁶ “très douteux”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 129 n. 1; *The Courage of Truth*, 139 n. 1; Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 683.

¹²⁷ “Mais bien sûr, on peut très bien concevoir ça... rappelle son troupeau ou appelle d’autres bergers, c’est le chant-signal”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 110; *The Courage of Truth*, 119.

¹²⁸ “Nous dirions dans notre affreux vocabulaire contemporaine : ça m’interpelle”: Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, 110-11; *The Courage of Truth*, 119.

¹²⁹ This was not the first time he had done so. A letter from Veyne with Greek and secondary references to the idea of the shepherd-king, followed by a page of notes by Dumézil (on Rüdiger Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in Indogermanischer Zeit* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967]) can be found in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (22), folder 11.

Plato's *Laches*, which in the published text follows the discussion of the link between the two parts of Dumézil's book. This suggests that the entire first part of the lecture was improvised, or at least if there was a written text it has not survived. The note from Dumézil was a letter sent on 19 February 1984, read by Foucault in the class.¹³⁰

Dumézil returns to this question in a brief interview from June 1985, one year after Foucault's death, in an article by Eliane Allo, in which she first summarizes Foucault's lecture.¹³¹ Dumézil had listened to a recording, and it is this etymology that he focuses on. He indicates that while *mel-* is "certainly Indo-European", it "has no assured etymology". *Melos*, is the "simplest noun derived from it", and has a sense of "member [*membre*]", which "properly designates, originally, a thing not as isolated, autonomous, autarkic, but as part of a whole, articulated to a whole".¹³²

He elaborates:

When I say *meleî moi*, it can be, for example, something that, until now, I have looked at from the outside, as a spectator, and that I suddenly discover in relation to me, or in relation to my problem of the moment, and that consequently incorporates itself into it and takes on a role in me. In short, it becomes a part of my physical or moral "me", and a part that, naturally, I take care of. *Epimeleia* must be, or originally have been, that. More care [*soin*] than concern [*souci*]. "Concern" seems to me to be a secondary precision that gives the concept the painful colouring that becomes dominant in other derivatives of the root such as *meledôn*, *meledones*, "the concern, the concerns". This precision is

¹³⁰ The letter is part-quoted by Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*, 127 n. 5.

¹³¹ Eliane Allo, "Les dernières paroles du philosophe: Dialogue entre Georges Dumézil et Michel Foucault à propos du souci de l'âme", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 61, 1986, 83-88.

¹³² "Mon impression personnelle est que le substantif le plus simple qui en soit dérivé, *mélos*, celui qu'on traduit généralement par «membre», désigne proprement, originellement, une chose non pas comme isolée, autonome, autarcique, mais comme faisant partie d'un tout, articulée à un ensemble": Dumézil in Allo, "Les dernières paroles du philosophe", 86.

secondary but quite natural when one takes attentive care of something, the concern comes easily. One does not need to be a Buddhist to feel the weight of annoyances in life. As for the compounds, *epimeleia*, *epimelesthai*, I think it's basically this: you admit among your “members”, you incorporate something which, from now on, will not only no longer be indifferent to you, but will be a demanding part of yourself.¹³³

Dumézil’s interpretation hinges on the French distinction between *soin* and *souci*, suggesting that the first, *care*, can become the second, *concern* or *worry*. Foucault of course used *souci* in the title of his final book *Le souci de soi*, translated into English as *The Care of the Self*. Dumézil is suggesting that *soin*, *care*, does not necessarily have the same negative association.

Conclusion

Eribon is therefore correct to suggest that “Dumézil was undoubtedly of major importance in the development of Foucault’s thought, and Foucault never kept his debt a secret”.¹³⁴ Arnold Davidson also recognizes that Dumézil was one of the figures writing on ancient thought, along with Veyne and Pierre Hadot, “with whom Foucault was engaged in intense, if sometimes submerged, intellectual exchange”.¹³⁵

¹³³ “Quand je dis *melei moi*, il peut s'agir, par exemple, d'une chose que, jusqu'à présent, j'ai regardée de l'extérieur, en spectateur, et que soudain je découvre en rapport avec moi, ou en rapport avec mon problème du moment, et qui par suite s'y incorpore et prend en moi un rôle. Bref, devient une partie de mon «moi» physique ou moral, et une partie dont, naturellement, je prends soin. *Epiméleia*, ce doit être, ou avoir été originellement, cela. Plutôt *soin* que *souci*. «*Souci*» me semble être une précision seconde qui donne au concept la coloration pénible qui devient dominante dans d'autres dérivés de la racine tels que *meledôn*, *meledones*, «le, les soucis». Cette précision est seconde mais bien naturelle quand on prend un soin attentif de quelque chose, le *souci* vient facilement. Il n'est pas besoin d'être bouddhiste pour ressentir le poids des contrariétés dans la vie. Quant aux composés, *epiméleia*, *epimelesthai*, je crois que c'est fondamentalement ceci: vous admettez parmi vos «membres», vous vous incorporez une chose qui, dorénavant, non seulement ne vous sera plus indifférente, mais sera une partie exigeante de vous-même”: Dumézil in Allo, “Les dernières paroles du philosophe”, 86.

¹³⁴ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 130/75; see *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*, 247; *Faut-il brûler Dumézil?* 333-4.

¹³⁵ Davidson, “Ethics as Ascetics”, 116.

The purpose here has not been to suggest that Dumézil is the hidden key to unlock Foucault's work, nor to claim that his influence on Foucault is of a similar kind to major philosophical figures such as Kant, Nietzsche or Heidegger. Rather, it is to show how Foucault explicitly used the work of one of his contemporaries, not in the sense of setting his work up in opposition, but of building upon quite specific insights in his own analyses. In his work on antiquity, Foucault's reading and dialogue with Peter Brown, Hadot, Vernant, Veyne and others has long been noted, even if Foucault rarely mentions them or their work by name.¹³⁶ With Dumézil, in contrast, he is often very explicit, indicating books and analyses he has found useful. With others, the exchange was both ways, with Foucault making use of their work, but his writings also being important for them. With Dumézil, again in contrast, the exchange is almost all one way: Dumézil does not explicitly engage with Foucault in his work. Beyond writing his obituary, the one exception is Dumézil's return to the material on the root *-mel* discussed above after Foucault's death. Dumézil does, however, dedicate one of the essays added to *Du mythe au roman* in 1970 to Foucault, and shortly before his death, agreed that his *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon* should be dedicated "to the memory of Michel Foucault".¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Foucault thanks Brown, Hadot and Veyne in his Introduction to *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'Usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 15; *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1985), 8. The literature here is extensive. For good recent discussions, especially of the Foucault-Hadot relation, see Marta Faustino and Gianfranco Ferraro (eds.), *The Late Foucault: Ethical and Political Questions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) and Paul Allen Miller (ed.), *Foucault's Seminars on Antiquity: Learning to Speak the Truth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). On the Foucault-Brown relation in the light of newly available archival sources, and Brown's own testimony, see Niki Kasumi Clements, "Foucault and Brown: Disciplinary Intersections", *Foucault Studies* 32, 2022, 1-27.

¹³⁷ Georges Dumézil, *Du mythe au roman: La Saga de Hadingus et autres essais* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 147; *From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 155; *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, 7. In *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains*, 132-33, Eribon says he suggested the dedication to Dumézil, who agreed, initially thinking of changing "À la mémoire de Michel Foucault" to "À l'ombre de Michel Foucault", before changing it back again.

In 1997, Davidson wrote that “both personally and intellectually, Dumézil accompanied Foucault from the beginning until the end of his career”.¹³⁸ This is indeed the case, and the examples given here illustrate some of these moments. This is the final point of contrast between Foucault’s treatment of Dumézil and that of other classicists. Foucault’s use of Dumézil’s work dates back to the 1950s, rather than being confined to the final years of his life. Beyond Foucault’s specific uses of Dumézil’s work, the broadest impact is undoubtedly on how he made historical analyses and the use of language around structure, which has often unproblematically been used to relate Foucault, and indeed Dumézil, to ‘structuralism’.

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¹³⁸ Davidson, “Structures and Strategies of Discourse: Remarks Towards a History of Foucault’s Philosophy of Language”, in Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, 1-17, 16.