

# Indo-European Mythology and Poetics

Instructor: Riccardo Ginevra

Indo-European  
Mythology and Poetics

**Merisms**

# Merisms

- What is a merism?

“A bipartite noun phrase consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation (A and B), two nouns which share most of their semantic features, and together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C.”

(Watkins 1995:45)

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase
- consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation
- two nouns which share several semantic features
- together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN]

[MEN – CATTLE]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- **consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:**

**A and B: [GODS and MEN]**

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- **consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:**

A and B: [GODS and MEN]

[MEN and CATTLE]



# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- **NOT** two nouns in a **NON-copulative** relation:

A of B: [~~GODS of MEN~~], [~~MEN of GODS~~]

[~~MEN of CATTLE~~], [~~CATTLE of MEN~~]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- **consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:**

**A and B: [GODS and MEN]**

**[MEN and CATTLE]**

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:

A and B: [GODS and MEN], [MEN and CATTLE]

- **two nouns which share several semantic features:**

A( $X_1$ ) and B( $X_2$ ):

A( $X_1$ ): [GODS (IMMORTAL, UNAGEING, CELESTIAL – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED B.S)

B( $X_2$ ): and MEN (MORTAL, AGEING, EARTHLY – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:

A – B: [GODS – MEN], [MEN – CATTLE]

- consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:

A and B: [GODS and MEN], [MEN and CATTLE]

- **two nouns which share several semantic features:**

A( $X_1$ ) and B( $X_2$ ):

A( $X_1$ ): [GODS (IMMORTAL, UNAGEING, CELESTIAL – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED B.S)

B( $X_2$ ): and MEN (MORTAL, AGEING, EARTHLY – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)]

A( $X_1$ ): [MEN = SLAVES (TWO-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)

B( $X_2$ ): and CATTLE (FOUR-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase
  - consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation
  - two nouns which share several semantic features
- **together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C (HYPERONYM):**

$A(X_1)$  and  $B(X_2) = C(X)$ :

$A(X_1)$ : [GODS (IMMORTAL, UNAGEING, CELESTIAL – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED B.S)

$B(X_2)$ : + MEN (MORTAL, AGEING, EARTHLY – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)]

$C(X)$ : = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]

# Merisms

What is a **merism**?

- A bipartite noun phrase:
- consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:
- two nouns which share several semantic features:
- **together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C (HYPERONYM):**

$A(X_1)$  and  $B(X_2) = C(X)$ :

$A(X_1)$ : [GODS (IMMORTAL, UNAGEING, CELESTIAL – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)

$B(X_2)$ : and MEN (MORTAL, AGEING, EARTHLY – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)]

$C(X)$ : = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]

$A(X_1)$ : [MEN = SLAVES (TWO-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)

$B(X_2)$ : and CATTLE (FOUR-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)]

$C(X)$ : = [MOVEABLE WEALTH]

# Merisms

What is a merism?

- A bipartite noun phrase:
- consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation:
- two nouns which share several semantic features:
- together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C:

$A(X_1)$  and  $B(X_2) = C(X)$ :

$A(X_1)$ : [GODS (IMMORTAL, UNAGEING, CELESTIAL – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)

$B(X_2)$ : and MEN (MORTAL, AGEING, EARTHLY – INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS)]

$C(X)$ : = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]

$A(X_1)$ : [MEN = SLAVES (TWO-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)

$B(X_2)$ : and CATTLE (FOUR-FOOTED – MOVEABLE WEALTH)]

$C(X)$ : = [MOVEABLE WEALTH]

**Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical***

- What is an *index* (pl. *indices*) or *indexical sign*?



**Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical***

- What is an *index* (pl. *indices*) or *indexical sign*?

In semiotics (the scientific study of signs) an *index* is a specific type of sign.

## Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is an *index* (pl. *indices*) or *indexical sign*?

In semiotics (the scientific study of signs) an *index* is a specific type of sign.

- What is a **sign**? (F. de Saussure)

## Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is an *index* (pl. *indices*) or *indexical sign*?

A specific type of sign.

- What is a **sign**? (F. de Saussure)

The indissoluble **unity** of a **signifier** (*signifiant*) and a **signified** (*signifié*).

## Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is a **sign**? (F. de Saussure)

The indissoluble **unity** of a **signifier** (*signifiant*) and a **signified** (*signifié*).

Signifier: < p >;

Signified: / p /;

**Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical***

• What is a **sign**? (F. de Saussure)

The indissoluble **unity** of a **signifier** (*signifiant*) and a **signified** (*signifié*).

Signifier: < p >; [GODS and MEN];

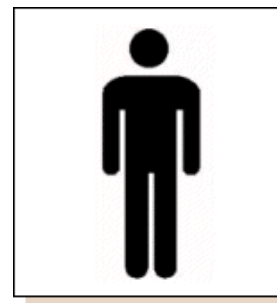
Signified: / p /; [INT. ANIM. B.S];

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is a sign? (F. de Saussure)

The indissoluble unity of a signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified (*signifié*).

Signifier: < p >; [GODS and MEN];



Signified: / p /; [INT. ANIM. B.S]; [MALE]

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is a sign? (F. de Saussure)

The indissoluble unity of a signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified (*signifié*).

Signifier: < p >; [GODS and MEN];



Signified: / p /; [INT. ANIM. B.S]; [MALE]; [BUY]

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

- What is a sign? (F. de Saussure)

The **indissoluble unity** of a signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified (*signifié*).


Signifier: < p >; [GODS and MEN];    
Signified: / p /; [INT. ANIM. B.S]; [MALE]; [BUY]

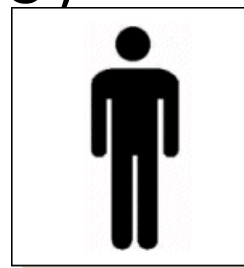
Diagram illustrating the relationship between signifier and signified. Red double-headed arrows connect the signifier and signified for each element: the phonetic form < p > to the phonetic form / p /, the phonetic form [GODS and MEN] to the phonetic form [INT. ANIM. B.S], the icon of a person to the phonetic form [MALE], and the icon of a shopping cart to the phonetic form [BUY].



# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

•



MALE

•



BUY

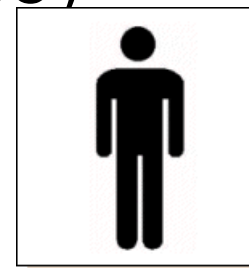
•

< p >    / p /

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

- ICONS: signifier resembles signified



MALE



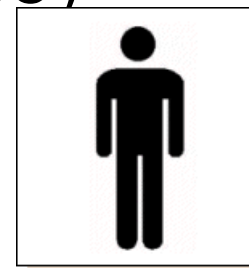
BUY

< p > / p /

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

- **ICONS:** signifier resembles signified



MALE

- **INDEXES:** signifier has a real connection with signified



BUY

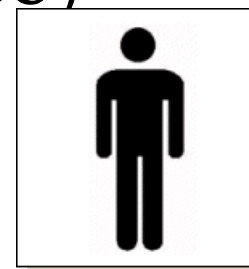
- 

< p > / p /

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

- **ICONS:** signifier resembles signified



MALE

- **INDEXES:** signifier has a real connection with signified



BUY

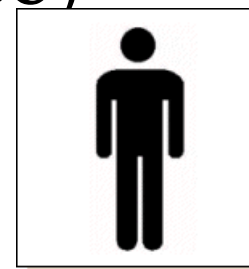
- **SYMBOLS:** signifier has no real connection with signified:

< p >    / p /

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

- **ICONS**: signifier resembles signified



MALE

- **INDEXES**: signifier has a real connection with signified



BUY

- **SYMBOLS**: signifier has no real connection with signified:  
the connection must be learned.

< p > / p /

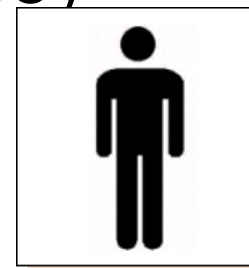
< π > / p /

< ϑ > / p /

# Terminology: *index*, vb. *to index*, adj. *indexical*

Three different types of signs: (Charles Peirce)

- **ICONS**: signifier resembles signified



MALE

- **INDEXES**: signifier has a real connection with signified



BUY

- **SYMBOLS**: signifier has no real connection with signified:

< p > / p /

## What about [GODS and MEN] ?

# Merisms as signs

- A merism is a sign, an indissoluble unity of signifier and signified.

- The merism [GODS and MEN] is a sign, the indissoluble unity of a

a signifier and a signified:

[GODS and MEN] = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]









Signifier:

Signified:

[GODS+MEN] = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]

- ICON (signifier resembles signified) ? NO!

- SYMBOL

(signifier has no real connection with signified, the connection must be learned)?

NO!

[GODS+MEN] = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS]

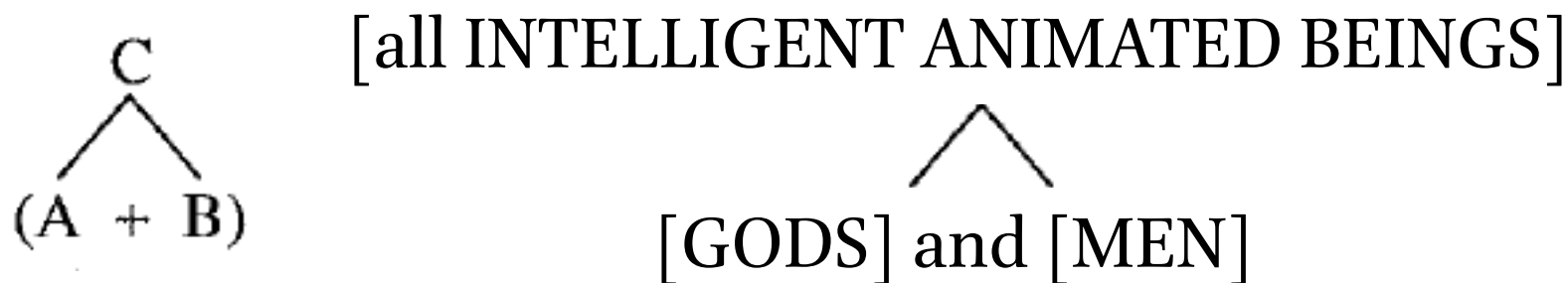
intuitive for any Indo-European, and still for us!



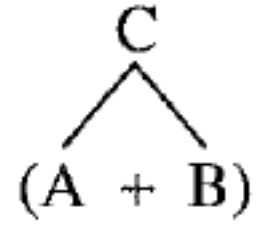
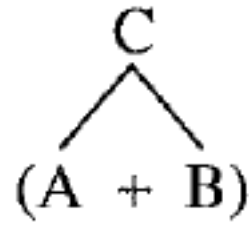
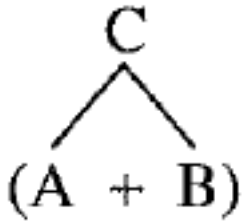


# What type of sign is a merism?

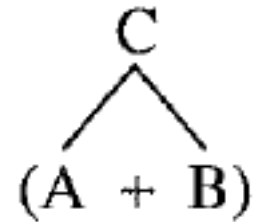
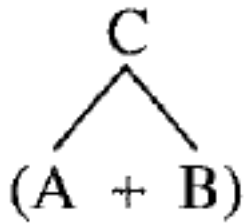
- The phrase [GODS and MEN] (**signifier**)
- **indexes** / **indexically** refers to
- higher concept/hyperonym [all INTELLIGENT ANIMATED BEINGS] (**signified**)



- The **MERISM** is the **unity of signifier** [A and B] + **signified** [C]: it is an **INDEXICAL SIGN** or **INDEX**, a poetic figure with **INDEXICAL** function.



# FUN WITH MERISMS



# [GODS and MEN] = [INTELLIGENT ANIMATED B.S.]

(also [IMMORTAL and MORTAL], etc.)

- Greek: *ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε*  
“of men and gods”
- Latin: *deum hominumque*  
“of gods and men”
- Vedic: *amṛtam mārtiyaṃ ca*  
“the immortal and the mortal”
- Avestan: *daēvāišcā mašyāišcā*  
“to gods and mortals”
- Old Norse: *goðanna ok manna*  
“of gods and men”



# [MEN and LIVESTOCK] = [MOVEABLE WEALTH]

- Latin *pastores pecuaque*  
“shepherds and cattle”
- Umbrian *ueiro pequo*  
“men and cattle”
- Avestan *pasu.vīra*  
“cattle and men”
- Vedic *púruṣaṃ páśum*  
“man and cattle”

# [MEN and LIVESTOCK] = [MOVEABLE WEALTH]

(also [the TWO-FOOTED and the FOUR-FOOTED])

• Latin *pastores pecuaque*

“shepherds and cattle”

• Umbrian *ueiro pequo* = *dupursus peturpursus*

“men and cattle” = “2-footed and 4-footed”

• Avestan *pasu.vīra*

“cattle and men”

• Vedic *púruṣaṃ páśum* = *dvipáde ca cátuspace ca*

“man and cattle” = “2-footed and 4-footed”

# (1) First merism

RV 1.89.5:            *tám íśānaṃ jágatas tasthúṣas pátim*  
                          *dhiyaṃjinvám ávase hūmahe vayám*  
                          *pūṣā no yáthā védasām ásad vṛdhé*  
                          *rakṣitá pāyúr ádabdhaḥ suastáye*

“The one who holds sway, the lord of the moving and the still, who quickens insight, do we call upon for help, so that Pūṣan will be (ready) to increase our possessions, will be a guardian, an undeceivable protector for our well-being.”

RV 1.32.15:            *índro yāto ávasitasya rájā*  
                          *śámasya ca śṛṅgíṇo vájrabāhuḥ*  
                          *séd u rájā kṣayati carṣaṇīnām*  
                          *arān ná nemíḥ pári tá babhūva*

“Bearing the mace in his arms, Indra is the king of him who travels and of him who is settled, of the horned and the hornless. And just he alone as king rules over the different peoples: like a rim the spokes of a wheel, he encompasses those.

# [THE MOVING and THE STILL] !

RV 1.89.5ab: *tám ísānaṃ jāgatas tasthúṣas pátim  
dhiyaṃjinvám ávase hūmahe vayám*

“The one who holds sway, the lord of the moving and the still, who quickens insight, do we call upon for help.”

RV 1.32.15: *índro yātó ávasitasya rájā  
śámasya ca śṛṅgíṇo vájrabāhuḥ*

“Bearing the mace in his arms, Indra is the king of him who travels and of him who is settled, of the horned and the hornless.”

# [THE MOVING and THE STILL] = [ALL THINGS]

RV 1.89.5ab: *tám íśānaṃ jágatas tasthúṣas pátim  
dhiyaṃjinvám ávase hūmahe vayám*

“The one who holds sway, the lord of the moving  
and the still, who quickens insight, do we call upon  
for help.”

RV 1.32.15: *índro yātó ávasitasya rájā  
śámasya ca śṛṅgiṇo vájrabāhuḥ*

“Bearing the mace in his arms, Indra is the king of  
him who travels and of him who is settled, of the  
horned and the hornless.

## (2) Second merism

- KUB 26.77 i 5,8:      *n[u ħ]alkieš GEŠTIN<sup>HI.A</sup>-ešš=a ħarki[r]*  
“grains and vines perished”
  
- *Il.* 9.705–6                      σίτου καὶ οἴνοιο: τὸ γὰρ μένος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀλκή  
“with grain and wine, for these are the strength and  
courage within us.”
  
- Cato, *De agri cultura* 141.1ff (prayer for fertility)  
*fruges frumenta*                                      *uineta uirgultaque*  
“grains (and) corn      and vineyards (and) shrubwork”

# [GRAIN(S) and WINE/VINES/VINEYARDS]!

- KUB 26.77 i 5,8: *n[u ħ]alkieš GEŠTIN<sup>HI.A</sup>-ešš=a ħarki[r]*  
“grains and vines perished”
- *Il.* 9.705–6 *σίτου καὶ οἴνοιο: τὸ γὰρ μένος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀλκή*  
“with grain and wine, for these are the strength and courage within us.”
- Cato, *De agri cultura* 141.1ff (prayer for fertility)  
*fruges frumenta* *uineta uirgultaque*  
“grains (and) corn and vineyards (and) shrubwork”

# [GRAIN and WINE] = [AGRICULTURAL FOOD]

- KUB 26.77 i 5,8:      *n[u ħ]alkieš GEŠTIN<sup>HI.A</sup>-ešš=a ħarki[r]*  
“grains and vines perished”
- *Il.* 9.705–6              σίτου καὶ οἴνοιο: τὸ γὰρ μένος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀλκή  
“with grain and wine, for these are the strength and  
courage within us.”
- Cato, *De agri cultura* 141.1ff (prayer for fertility)  
*fruges frumenta*                      *uineta uirgultaque*  
“grains (and) corn      and vineyards (and) shrubwork”



## (3) Third merism

- Oscan curse tablet: *stenim . kalauuiúm . trí | aginss . urinss . úlleis  
fakinss . fangvam | biass . biútam aftiúm .*  
“Stenius Calavius thrice | the actions, the talks,  
the activities, the tongue, | the strength, the life, the spirit,
- Ennius, *Annals* 37-8: *Euridica prognata, pater quam noster amavit,  
vires vitaque corpus meum nunc deserit omne.*  
“O daughter of Eurydica, you whom our father loved,  
now strength and life too leave all my body.”
- *Odyssey* 18.3ff: ἀζηχῆς φαγέμεν καὶ πιέμεν: οὐδέ οἱ ἦν ἴς  
οὐδὲ βίη, εἶδος δὲ μάλα μέγας ἦν ὀράασθαι.  
“eating and drinking without end. No strength had he  
nor might, but in bulk was big indeed to look upon.”

# [STRENGTH and LIFE/MIGHT] !

- Oscan curse tablet: *stenim . kalauuiúm . trí | aginss . urinss . úlleis  
fakinss . fangvam | biass . biútam aftiúm .*  
“Stenius Calavius thrice | the actions, the talks,  
the activities, the tongue, | the **strength**, the **life**, the spirit,
- Ennius, *Annals* 37-8: *Euridica prognata, pater quam noster amavit,  
vires vitaque corpus meum nunc deserit omne.*  
“O daughter of Eurydica, you whom our father loved,  
now **strength and life** too leave all my body.”
- *Odyssey* 18.3ff: ἀζηχῆς φαγόμεν καὶ πιέμεν: οὐδέ οἱ ἦν ἴς  
οὐδὲ βίη, εἶδος δὲ μάλα μέγας ἦν ὀράασθαι.  
“eating and drinking without end. **No strength** had he  
**nor might**, but in bulk was big indeed to look upon.”

# [STRENGTH and LIFE/MIGHT] = [VITAL FORCE]

- Oscan curse tablet: *stenim . kalauuiúm . trí | aginss . urinss . úlleis  
fakinss . fangvam | biass . biútam aftiúm .*  
“Stenius Calavius thrice | the actions, the talks,  
the activities, the tongue, | the **strength**, the **life**, the spirit,
- Ennius, *Annals* 37-8: *Euridica prognata, pater quam noster amavit,  
vires vitaque corpus meum nunc deserit omne.*  
“O daughter of Eurydica, you whom our father loved,  
now **strength and life** too leave all my body.”
- *Odyssey* 18.3ff: ἀζηχῆς φαγόμεν καὶ πιέμεν: οὐδέ οἱ ἦν ἴς  
οὐδὲ βίη, εἶδος δὲ μάλα μέγας ἦν ὄρασθαι.  
“eating and drinking without end. **No strength** had he  
**nor might**, but in bulk was big indeed to look upon.”

## (4) Fourth merism

CTH 345.I.2.90: *nu=šši nepi[š d]aganzipašš=a [kattan] arkušk[an]zi*  
“Heaven and Earth answered her”

Y. 44.4: *kasnā dərətā zqmčā adē nabāscā | avapastōiš*  
“Who holds the earth below and the heavens from falling?”

DNa 1 (= DSe 1): *hya imām būmim adā, hya avam asmānam adā*  
“who created this earth, who created that sky”

Hes. *Th.* 702: [...] ὥς εἰ Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὑπερθε / πίλνατο [...]  
“as if Earth and wide Heaven above had clashed”

Wessobrunner 2: *dat ero niuuas noh ufhimil,*  
“then there was neither earth nor heaven above”

# [HEAVEN and EARTH] !

- CTH 345.I.2.90: *nu=šši nepi[š d]aganzipašš=a [kattan] arkušk[an]zi*  
“Heaven and Earth answered her”
- Y. 44.4: *kasnā dərətā zqmcā adē nabāscā | avapastōiš*  
”Who holds the earth below and the heavens from falling?”
- DNa 1 (= DSe 1): *hya imām būmim adā, hya avam asmānam adā*  
”who created this earth, who created that sky”
- Hes. *Th.* 702: [...] ὡς εἰ Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὑπερθε / πίλνατο [...]  
“as if Earth and wide Heaven above had clashed”
- Wessobrunner* 2: *dat ero niuwas noh ufhimil,*  
“then there was neither earth nor heaven above”

# [HEAVEN and EARTH] = ?

CTH 345.I.2.90: *nu=šši nepi[š d]aganzipašš=a [kattan] arkušk[an]zi*  
“Heaven and Earth answered her”

Y. 44.4: *kasnā dərətā zqmcā adā nabāscā | avapastōiš*  
“Who holds the earth below and the heavens from falling?”

DNa 1 (= DSe 1): *hya imām būmim adā, hya avam asmānam adā*  
“who created this earth, who created that sky”

Hes. Th. 702: [...] ὡς εἰ Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὑπερθε / πίλνατο [...]  
“as if Earth and wide Heaven above had clashed”

Wessobrunner 2: *dat ero niuvas noh ufhimil,*  
“then there was neither earth nor heaven above”

[HEAVEN and EARTH] = [WORLD]

- Wait for the next lesson!