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THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES  
OF THE ANCIENT SLAVS

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Historical Theology

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by  
George Dolak  
May 1949

Approved: Dr. G. P. P. P.  
The Hoyer.

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THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES  
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OF THE ANCIENT SLAVS  
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THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTISES  
OF THE ANCIENT SLAVS

1. Sources

The great historian of the Bohemian nation, František Palacký, observes:

"It is true that enough books and essays have already been written concerning the religion of the ancient Slavs, but thus far very little light and certainty have been produced."<sup>1</sup>

One reason for this lack of authentic information on the religious beliefs and practises of ancient Slavs is the regrettable fact that not a single record of these beliefs and practises of the Slavs of antiquity has been preserved. No pagan source for pagan Slavic belief exists,<sup>2</sup> even though some extant data deal with the period immediately preceding the introduction of Christianity among the Slavs, especially the references of Procopius of Caesarea who is said to have been the first one to write on this subject. It must not be forgotten, however, that even at this time changes from primitive Slavic belief had already taken place.<sup>3</sup> The only monuments of Slavic

1. František Palacký, Dějiny národu českého, 1,105.

2. Jaroslav Vlček, Dějiny literatury slovenskej, p. 7.

3. Ján Máchal, "Slavic Mythology" in Mythology of All Nations, 111,7.

myth and ritual are: 1) fragments of a temple in Arkona; 2) an idol, under suspicion, in Galicia; 3) some sculptures preserved in Danzig, of which it is however said that they are neither Slavic nor mythological.<sup>4</sup> Lack of information concerning the religion and life of ancient Slavs may be attributed partly to the fact that the monuments of early Slavic religion were predominantly of wood and hence easily destroyed. The paucity of reports concerning events among ancient Slavs is to be accounted for also by the moral character as well as by the geographical location of Slavic tribes.

Information concerning the religious beliefs and practises of ancient Slavs has been preserved chiefly in the writings of Christian missionaries working among Slavic tribes from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Among these we mention Thietmar, bishop of Merseburg,<sup>5</sup> Adam of Bremen,<sup>6</sup> Helmold,<sup>7</sup> and Saxo Grammaticus.<sup>8</sup> The information given by these missionaries is naturally colored by their views, since they were adherents of either the Western or the Eastern Church.<sup>9</sup> Oftentimes their writings show a spirit of disparagement with regard to ancient Slavic belief, since they naturally viewed

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4. Louis Leger, La mythologie slave, p. 2

5. 976-1018 A.D.

6. 11th century.

7. Helmold, who probably knew Slavic, was born between 1118-1125.

8. A Dane, born ca. 1145-1150 A.D. His work is the only source for the wars of the Danes against the Slavs.

9. M.A. Czaplicka, "Slavs", in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, ed., VI, p. 592.

everything from the standpoint of Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it must be remembered that, generally speaking, the man of the Middle Ages considered practically all heathendom alike. Again, in explaining the lack of certainty concerning information which has come down to us, the question must be weighed: To what extent were the Slavs affected in their religious beliefs and practises by neighboring people? That such an influence was exerted, for instance, by the Greeks and Romans in the south and by the Lithuanians, Finns, and Germans in the north, can hardly be doubted.<sup>11</sup> It is not surprising therefore that Slavic mythology has been called obscure and that Slavic mythologists have despaired of reconstructing a system of ancient Slavic belief.<sup>12</sup> To add to the confusion is the undeniable fact that the information which has been preserved for us on ancient Slavic belief and life is fragmentary, covering chiefly the religion of the Russians and the Slavs living along the Elbe River. Only meager information is available concerning the religion of the ancient Bohemians, Moravians, Slovaks, and Southern Slavs. On the other hand, it is probable that the material preserved for us concerning the religion of certain Slavic tribes is applicable to all Slavic tribes without exception, for it is certain that tribal

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10. Karl Meyer, "Slavic Religion" in Religions of the World, Carl Clemen, ed., part 11, vol. 9, p. 242.

11. Meyer, op. cit., p. 243

12. Ibid., p. 244

and racial differences among the Slavs of ancient times were not nearly so great as they are today, even though one be willing to grant the contention of Meyer that at the time of their conversion the Slavs were no longer a homogeneous people. <sup>13</sup> It is also true that a ray of light is thrown upon the apparently confused situation by the legends and folk-lore current among the common people. These relieve, to a great extent, the dearth of authentic written information concerning the religion of primitive Slavic tribes. By some these legends are considered to be the best source for a study of ancient Slavic belief. <sup>14</sup> The warning, however, is in place that it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction in an attempt to evaluate legend and folk-lore. Erben, in speaking of the historical, symbolical, and philological theories on the origin of myths, is of the opinion that only the second, and to some extent the third, enter into the consideration of Slavic mythology. In their opposition to legend and folk-lore as a reliable source of Slavic belief in ancient times, some have turned altogether to other sources. <sup>15</sup> It would seem that the best results would be obtained in an attempt to reconstruct ancient Slavic belief and practice in religion by taking into account as many factors as possible. Thus Leger lists as

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13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Thus Meyer, in whose opinion the presence or absence of certain linguistic concepts is an excellent source for pagan Slavic belief, op. cit. p. 244.



sources for Slavic mythology: 1) primitive chronicles of pagan Slavs; 2) Latin chronicles of Germans or Danes; 3) Byzantine texts; 4) Arabian texts; 5) actual folk-lore; 6) theological writings of the Middle Ages; 7) language. 16

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16. Leger, op. cit. pp. 3-4.

## 11 The Supreme Slavic God

One of the elements present in the religious beliefs of primitive peoples is the belief in the existence of a supreme being.<sup>17</sup> The early pagan Slavs believed in the existence of many supreme beings, but they also conceived of one of their gods as being over all others, and to this highest god of theirs they referred as "boh bohov", i.e. the god of gods.<sup>18</sup>

The Slavic term for God is "bog", which is considered a loan word from the Iranian. Its antiquity is universally admitted. Its basic meaning is "good", a "communicating".<sup>19</sup> This is indicated also by a number of derivatives of this word in modern Slavic languages.<sup>20</sup> Meyer maintains that originally the word "bog" very probably included three meanings: 1) a person; 2) higher beings, i.e. gods; 3) deity in the absolute sense.<sup>21</sup> Bog then was to primitive Slavs the supreme being who manifested himself as the good one, the one who bestowed blessings.

The chief deity of the early pagan Slavs was worshiped as the creator of lightning, the sole lord of all things, the ruler of the sun and of heaven, from whom all other deities are descended. Procopius of Caesarea, who wrote about one century

17. Samuel M. Zwemer, The Origin of Religion, pp. 175-176.

18. J. Otto, "Slovanské bájeslovi" in Naučný slovník, XXIII, p. 437

19. Karl Brugmann, Kurze vergleichende Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen, pp. 78; 151.

20. In modern Slovak "bohatý" means rich, while "úbohý" is today used in a commiserating sense of poor, wretched, miserable.

21. Meyer, op. cit. p. 245.

after the Slavs are generally believed to have come to their present homeland in Europe, offers the following testimony concerning the highest god in the ancient Slavic pantheon:

"They worshiped one god whom they conceive to be the creator of the thunder and maker of all things and to him they sacrifice cattle and all sort of animals." 22

It is a matter of regret that such an early writer on the religion of the Slavs fails to mention the name of this supreme Slavic deity. To the assertion of Procopius that in the Slavic pantheon was to be found one supreme god is to be added the statement of Helmold concerning the Polabian Slavs:

"They do not deny that one god rules in heaven and that he, preeminent in might, cares only for things celestial...; whereas the rest... have sprung from his blood." 23

In spite of the fact that the name of this supreme Slavic god has not been specifically mentioned, he is nevertheless identified with various Slavic deities. Thus Osuský writes:

"Above all deities stands Prabog, 24 the soothsayer of soothsayers, who sits enthroned in the heaven beyond reach. He is called also Boh and Gospodi." 25

Morfill, on the other hand, is of the opinion that this supreme Slavic deity was Svantovit. He refers ~~to~~ the statement of Procopius quoted above to the greatness of Svantovit's cult and concludes that as a result of it Procopius thought Svantovit

22. Procopius of Caesarea, quoted in J. Máchal, op. cit. p. 277

23. Quoted loc. cit.

24. A compound of "bog"(god) and the prefix "pra" indicating antiquity.

25. Osuský, S.S., De jiny náboženstva, p. 38.

O. Schrader explains the term Gospodi as being derived from "hospes" plus the Aryan "Poti" and "s", and therefore equivalent to "master of the stranger, or lord", in Enc. of Religion and Ethics, Hastings, ed., VI, pp.818-820.

was the only god whom the Slavs knew.<sup>26</sup> Then we have to consider the Chronicle of Nestor which places Perún on a par with the God of the Christians when it writes of a treaty concluded between the Slavs and the Greeks in 945 A.D.:

"May the Christian Russians who violate this treaty be abandoned by the almighty God; may those who have not been baptized get no help from God or Perún."<sup>27</sup>

This would seem to indicate that the name of the supreme Slavic deity was Perún. Among the Russians Perún was indeed worshiped as the supreme god.

Still other names mentioned for the supreme Slavic god are: Vyshni báh,<sup>28</sup> Boh, and Svebog.<sup>29</sup>

The three most important of these names, Svarog, Svantovit, and Perún merit our closer attention.

#### Svarog

There has been much speculation about the meaning of the name Svarog. Most students of Slavic mythology are of the opinion that it is to be derived from "svar" which means light, brilliance, heat, or to weld. In accordance with these derivations the term Svarog would be explained as the regenerating, the bright, the holy sun.<sup>30</sup> Others again relate the term to

26. W.R. Morfill, "Slavic Religion" in Religious Systems of the World, Sheovring-Thies, ed., p. 261.

27. Leger, op. cit. p. 50.

28. Vyshni báh means the high or highest god.

29. Svebog is derived from "sve", all, universal and "boh" and therefore means the universal god, the god of all.

30. J. Kulhánek, Prehľad dejín a vzdelanosti všetkých kultúrnych národov, p. 176.

the heaven or firmament and translate Svarog as the "running or moving heaven", i.e. the cloudy heaven.<sup>31</sup> In explaining the name Svarozic, a patronymic, and derived from the same stem as Svarog, Meyer maintains that this may be a purely Slavic word meaning "a quarrelsome person".<sup>32</sup> Beyond the speculation as to the meaning of his name, practically nothing is known about Svarog and his worship, although he is usually identified with the Greek god Hephaestus, the god of fire and of metal.<sup>33</sup>

#### Svantovit

Svantovit, whom Cross considers to be merely a local variant of Svarog,<sup>34</sup> is also said to be the supreme Slavic deity. Svantovit was supreme in the pantheon of the Polabian Slavs. Inasmuch as the literature on the early religion of the Polabian Slavs, Christianized in the 12th century, is greater than that on the religion of other Slavic tribes, it is possible to glean more information concerning Svantovit. As is the case with the name Svarog, so also much doubt has been cast upon the meaning of the name Svantovit. The first syllable of Svantovit's name, "svant", is universally accepted as meaning "holy", but confusion seems to abound when an analysis of the syllable "vit" is undertaken. Of the various theories advanced about

31. Máchal, Nákres slovenského bájesloví, pp. 32-33.

32. Máchal, op. cit. p. 251. It is highly probable that "svar" in the sense of quarrel is to be derived from the stem "svariti", to boil or weld.

33. J. Máchal, "Slavic Mythology" in Mythology of All Races, III, p. 277.

34. S.H. Cross, Slavic Civilization through the Ages, p. 25.

the derivation of Svantovit's name, we mention the following:

- 1) "vit" is to be connected with "viřazstvo", victory.

According to this theory Svantovit would be the holy and powerful victor. 35

- 2) "vit" is to be taken in the sense of light and Svantovit would therefore mean "holy light". 36

- 3) "vit" is to be related to oracle or word. 37

- 4) "vit" is to be related to "wid" or "ved" and therefore refers to knowledge. 38

- 5) "vit" is to be derived from the stem "vi" or "vâ", to breathe. 35

- 6) "vit" comes from "vit", to battle. 39

- 7) "vit" is to be derived from the name St. Vitus. 40

It is difficult to decide which one of these theories is the most acceptable. Plausible reasons for each one of them are advanced. Regardless of which one of these theories on the derivation of Svantovit's name seems acceptable to us, there is one point which remains undisputed. It is clear that Svantovit's name ascribes supremacy to him. He is called "boh bohov", the god of the gods. Helmold states concerning

35. Thus Dobrowský, quoted in Leger, op. cit. p. 96

36. Kulhánek, op. cit. p. 176. The Slavic stem for light is "svit", and it is difficult to explain how the "s" could have been dropped.

37. I. J. Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft des slavischen Mythos, p. 160

38. Leger, op. cit., p. 94.

39. Ibid. p. 96

40. Ibid. p. 212.

Svantovit that he stands out as the most distinguished among the Slavic deities with which he was acquainted, for

" he is so much more effective in his oracular responses that out of regard for him they (the Elbe Slavs) think of the others as demigods." <sup>41</sup>

The center of Svantovit's worship was at Arkona on the island of Ruegen in the Baltic Sea. Saxo Grammaticus who, together with Helmold, is the chief authority for the cult of Svantovit, gives the following description of the image of Svantovit at Arkona:

" In the temple stood a huge image, far overtopping all human stature, marvellous for its four heads and four necks, two facing the breast and two the back. Moreover, of those in front as well as of those behind, one looked leftwards and the other rightwards. The beards were figured as shaven and the hair as clipped; the skilled workman might be thought to have copied the fashion of the Ruegeners in the dressing of their heads. In the right hand it held a horn wrought of divers metals..... In the left there was a representation of a bow, the arm being drawn back to the side. A tunic was figured reaching to the shanks which were made of different woods, and so secretly joined to the knees that the place of the join could only be detected by narrow scrutiny. The feet were seen close to the earth, their base being hid underground. Not far off a bridle and saddle and many emblems of godhead were visible. Men's marvel at these things was increased by a sword of notable size, whose scabbard and hilt were not only excellently graven, but also graced outside with (mounts of inlaying of) silver." <sup>42</sup>

A beautiful white horse was consecrated to Svantovit and three hundred horsemen were set aside for his service.

41. Leger proves that the very opposite process took place and that the name St. Vitus was substituted for Svantovitus when Christian missionaries labored among the Slavs, op. cit. p. 20.

42. Saxo Grammaticus, "The First Nine Books of the Danish History", in Anglo-Saxon Classics, R.B. Anderson, ed., pp. 564 sqq.

The white horse was also used in divining the future. When the priest entered the temple of Svantovit he was very careful not to breathe lest the air of the temple be polluted by the breath of a mere mortal. Helmold describes the destruction of the image of Svantovit by the Danes in 1168 A.D. under King Valdemar, who had it cut down since it could not be pried up with iron tools, and then had it chopped into firewood. <sup>43</sup>

Rugievit, Porevit, Prove, Porenutius and Gerovit seem to have been nothing more than Latinized forms, introduced by foreigners, or local analogues of the chief Elbe deity, Svantovit. <sup>44</sup> Saxo Grammaticus specifically explains the name Rugievit as meaning "Ruegen's Vitus". The statue of Rugievit at Karentia is described by Saxo Grammaticus as follows:

" An oaken image which they called Rugie-vitus was exposed on every side amid mockery at its hideousness. For the swallows had built their nests beneath its features, and had piled a heap of droppings on its breast. The god was only fit to have his effigy thus hideously befouled by birds. Also in its head were set seven faces, after human likeness, all covered in under a single poll, and the workman had also bound by its side in a single belt seven real swords with their scabbards. The eighth it held in its hand drawn; this was fitted in the wrist and fixed very fast with an iron nail, and the hand must be cut off before it could be wrenched away; which led to the image being mutilated. Its thickness was beyond that of a human body, but it was so long that Absolon, standing a-tip-toe could scarce reach its chin with the little axe he was wont to carry in his hand.... Nothing in this image pleased the eye; its features were hideous with uncouth graving or painting." <sup>45</sup>

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43. Helmold, op. cit. 275; Máchal, Báješloví slovanské, 146

44. J. Máchal, "Slav. Myth." in op. cit. p. 283

45. Saxo Grammaticus, op. cit. p. 577



In the same account Saxo Grammaticus states that the image of Fore-vitus worshiped in the next town was five-headed and without weapons.<sup>46</sup> The status of Forenutius is described by Saxo Grammaticus as having four faces, the fifth being inserted in its bosom, the left hand touching the brow, and the right hand the chin.<sup>47</sup>

#### Triglav

Triglav, the three-headed, was the chief Slavic deity worshiped in the cities of Stettin and Volyn near the Baltic Sea. Scholars are agreed that Triglav was not the real name of the god worshiped in these two cities and that Triglav is to be identified with Svantovit, the chief god of the Arkonites.<sup>48</sup> In confirmation of this assertion we read that Triglav was called "summus deus" by his priests,<sup>49</sup> and that the "cult of Triglav coincides with that of Svantovit."<sup>50</sup> It is true that there is sharp disagreement with the last-mentioned conclusion,<sup>51</sup> but the preponderance of evidence seems to point to the fact that Triglav was the name of one of the images of Svantovit which had only three heads. It is claimed that the three heads of Triglav were to signify the three kingdoms over which Triglav ruled, the heavens, the earth, and the underworld.<sup>52</sup> This

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. J. Máchal, op. cit. p. 285

49. J. Růžička, Slovanské bájesloví, p. 105.

50. Máchal, Bájesloví slovanské, p. 134.

51. Leger, op. cit. p. 143.

52. Ibid. p. 141

again would confirm the claim that Triglav was regarded as the supreme deity, the lord of all. The eyes of Triglav were covered with a golden veil " because the god did not want to see or know the sins of men." <sup>53</sup> A horse played an important part in the worship of Triglav but in contrast to Svantovit's horse, which was white, Triglav's horse was black in color. The sign of Triglav was the triangle. <sup>54</sup> His temple and statue in Stettin were destroyed by Otto of Bamberg. <sup>55</sup>

#### Perún

The chief god worshiped by the pagan Russians was Perún. That the place of primacy was accorded to Perún by the Russians is evident from the fact that in the translation of a certain legend the name Zeus is rendered by Perún. <sup>56</sup> It has therefore been maintained that Perún is none other than Svarog. In the city of Kiev there was a wooden statue of the idol Perún erected by Prince Vladimir in 980 A.D. The image was surrounded by other idols: Chorsu, Dajbogu, Stribogu, Simarglu, and Mokoši. <sup>57</sup> The central position accorded Perún in this collection of images at Kiev bears out the contention that Perún was the chief Russian deity. This wooden image had a silver head, a golden beard, and iron feet. The head was surrounded by flashes

53. Ibid.

54. Osuský, op. cit. p. 40.

55. Leger, op. cit., p. 137

56. Ibid. p. 50.

57. Ibid. p. 53.

of lightning. In the hand of the god was a bolt of lightning.<sup>58</sup> There was a statue of Perún also in Novgorod, erected by Prince Dobrynia.

The word Perún is to be derived from the root "per" which means "to strike", while the suffix "-ún" denotes the agent.<sup>59</sup> Perún is therefore to be translated as the Striker, the Thunderer, the god of thunder. Some derive it directly from the name of the Indian god Brahma.<sup>60</sup> Although Perún was the chief Russian deity, his name and fame spread also to other Slavic tribes. Among the Slovaks, for instance, Perún's name has been retained to this day in the form "Parom" and is commonly used in such expressions as "Parom by ťa vzal"<sup>61</sup> and "Paromova strela".<sup>62</sup> In his collection of folk-songs Ján Kollár has recorded the following verses which mention the name of Perún in its Slovak form:

Buch Parom za oblakami  
a vidí to nahnevaný  
Tres! zahrní jej do čela  
Hneď i s dečkem z kameněla. <sup>63</sup>

58. Rážíčka, op. cit. p. 19

59. J. Máchal, op. cit. p. 294

60. So Ant. and Joz. Jungmann, to whom Hanuš refer on page 94 of "Die Wissenschaft des slavischen Mythus".

61. "May Parom take you." Peter Tvrđý, Slovník frazeologický, p. 404.

62. Parom's arrow or shot. Ibid.

63. The god Parom beyond the clouds  
Looks upon it full of ire,  
Crash, he strikes her in the brow,  
Immediately her child is petrified.

Quoted in Leger, op. cit. p. 60

Also

Za onijch časov  
za starých bohov  
za boha Peroma. 64

Among the Southern Slavs the name of Perún occurs in the names of villages, people, and plants, 65 and among the Poles in topographical names which are traced back to the twelfth century.

The sign of Perún was the recumbent cross, signifying lightning flashing in the clouds, 66 and the oak was the tree sacred to him. The festival of Perún, celebrated in the spring, was called "Hromnice," 67 while "Perendan" was the name given to Thursday, sacred to Perún. 68 The worship of Perún is veiled in obscurity. It is said that in Russia the cult of Elijah was substituted for that of Perún when the Russians were converted to Christianity, for the deeds of Elijah made a deep impression upon the Russians and reminded them of Perún. 69 Perún's image in Kiev was destroyed by Prince Vladimir when he embraced Christianity in 988 A.D. 70

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64. During those times,  
the times of the ancient gods,  
during the time of the god Perom.

Quoted in Leger, op. cit. p. 60.

65. W.M. Petrovitch, Hero Tales and Legends of the Servians,  
p. 15.

66. Osuský, op. cit. p. 38.

67. "The Festival of Thunder". Ibid.

68. Leger, op. cit. p. 62.

69. Ibid. p. 68

70. Ibid. p. 56.

### III High Slavic Gods

It has not been definitely determined exactly how many gods there were in the Slavic pantheon. Estimates of scholars vary from one to as many as fifty-nine deities. It is stated that the list of gods in the pantheon of the Polabians and the Russians is so long that it would take too much time to learn all of them.<sup>71</sup> According to the Chronicle of Nestor, however, there were only seven chief deities among the ancient Slavic tribes,<sup>72</sup> classified by some as high gods, secondary gods, and spirits.<sup>73</sup> By others the gods of the Russians and the Poles near Kiev and Novgorod are divided into the following four classes: 1) gods of men; 2) gods of beasts; 3) gods of nations; 4) gods of inanimate nature.<sup>74</sup> It has been stated that the Russian gods were gods of nature, while the Polabian gods were derived from ancestor worship.<sup>75</sup>

The seven chief gods among the ancient Slavs, according to the testimony of Nestor, were: 1) Perún; 2) Volos; 3) Dažbog; 4) Stribog; 5) Semargla; 6) Khors; 7) Mokoša.<sup>76</sup> The gods listed in the pantheon of the Albe Slavs, on the other hand, were: 1) Svantovit; 2) Dažbog, Svarožic; 3) Černobog; 4) Pripegala; 5) Siva. Let us examine these lists.

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71. E. Lingebach, "Slavs" under "Austria-Hungary" in History of the Nations, H.C. Lodge, ed., XVII, pp. 26-27.

72. Quoted Ibid.

73. M.A. Czaplicka, op. cit. p. 593.

74. "Slavic Mythology" Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, McClintock and Strong, IX, 803

75. Měchal, háj. slov., p. 141

76. Czaplicka, op. cit. 513

Since the chief god of both the eastern and western Slavs has been discussed in the preceding section, the following section will be limited to the other deities mentioned in the two lists said to comprise the Slavic pantheon.

#### Dažbog and Svarožic

Dažbog and Svarožic were worshiped by both the Russians and the Polabians. According to the belief of both divisions of the ancient Slavs, Dažbog and Svarožic were sons of Svarog, the supreme god of heaven. The opinion is also advanced that Dažbog and Svarožic are in reality the same god. Among the Slavs living along the Elbe Svarožic was worshiped by the tribe of the Rhetarii, dwelling between the Elbe and the Oder and belonging to the Lutices.<sup>77</sup> In the heathen temple at Radigast(Radhost) the most important statue was that erected to Svarožic. It was dressed in armor. It was to this god that St. Bruno, the apostle of the Prussians, referred as "Zuarisici diabolus."<sup>78</sup> It seems to be an error to apply the name of the city Radigast also to Svarožic.<sup>79</sup>

Svarožic was worshiped also by the Russians as the god of fire. Since Dažbog was the solar deity of the Russians who referred to him as the "Czar Sun" and the "Son of Svarog", it is probable that the two gods are to be identified.<sup>80</sup> A temple

77. J. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 286

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid. pp. 295-297.

to Svarožic stood in the city of Kiev. An examination of the name Svarožic indicates that the statements made in connection with the deity Svarog are applicable also here. Both words are to be derived from the same stem, while the suffix "ič" shows that Svarožic is a patronymic.<sup>81</sup> The name of Dažbog, on the other hand, is compounded of "daž", to give, and "bog",<sup>11</sup> and is therefore translated as "deus dator".<sup>83</sup> According to ancient Slavic belief, therefore, wealth and success came from Dažbog, the Giving God. In Serbia, for instance, it was believed that Dažbog was the personification of sunshine, life, prosperity, and everything good.<sup>84</sup>

#### Cernobog

Cernobog was the god of evil among the Polabian Slavs. In his Chronicle of the Slavs Helmold writes concerning him:

"The Slavs are given to a peculiar error; for at the time of fermentation they carry about a cup, upon which they pronounce words, I would not say of blessing, but rather of cursing in the name of the god of good and of evil, confessing that fortune depends upon the good god and misfortune upon the evil god. For this reason also in their language they call this god the devil or Cernobog, that is, the bad god."<sup>85</sup>

It has been stated that Cernobog stood in contrast to Belbog, the white god, and that this is evidence of the dualism which permeated ancient Slavic belief. On the other hand, it has

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81. J. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 135.

82. Meyer, op. cit. p. 249

83. H. Máchal, "Dažbog" in J. Otto, op. cit., VII, 104

84. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 16

85. Helmold, op. cit. p. 159.

been maintained that there is no evidence for the oft-repeated assertion that ancient Slavs even used such a term as Belbog.<sup>86</sup> It cannot be denied, however, that the parallel ideas of light and darkness, of good and evil, did exist among the Slavs. But whether the conclusion is justified that all subordinate deities of the primitive Slavs are always to be found in pairs, is not clear.<sup>87</sup> In explanation of the term Černobog it has been maintained that this deity was introduced into the Slav-ic pantheon after the Elbe Slavs had become acquainted with Christianity.<sup>88</sup>

#### Pripegala

Even the very name of the god Pripegala is shrouded in darkness. It is asserted that the form of this word should rather be: Pribyhval. Pripegala has been compared to Priapus and Baal-Peor, although some question the possibility of any contact of the Slavs with these deities. Another theory would derive the name from the very "připěkati", to scorch or to burn.

#### Podaga

An examination of authorities on the word Podaga yields disappointing results. In the first place it is maintained

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86. Leger, *op. cit.* p. 154.

87. It is maintained that the good gods were called "boži" while the evil gods were called "běsi." In modern Slovak the terms "besný" and "zbesnět" are used in the sense of mad, to have an evil spirit.

88. J. Máchal, *op. cit.*, p. 288



that Helmold quotes the name of this god in an incorrect form, giving it as Podaga instead of Pogoda.<sup>89</sup> If the correct form of this goddess' name is really Pogoda, then it seems logical to conclude that she is the goddess of good weather.<sup>90</sup> The confusion existing concerning the functions of this goddess is seen from the fact that she is identified with Triglav, Tier-noglav, and many other Slavic deities.

#### Siva

Siva is another deity of the ancient Slavs concerning the form of whose name there is no absolute certainty. The name Siva does not appear in ancient texts. Siva is frequently written Živa and then, it would seem, is to be connected with the verb "žiti", to live, and would have the meaning of the Living One. Such an explanation of Siva's name appears to be altogether probable.<sup>91</sup> Siva has been identified with Vesna and Lada, the goddesses of spring and fruitfulness.<sup>92</sup>

#### Chors

The derivation of the name of Chors is puzzling and difficult. The name has been derived from such varied sources as the Slavic words "chorošo", good; "chorište", a circle; "chrstnati", to pour out at one time; and the Greek word "chrysos", gold. The most probable theory seems to be that

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89. Helmold, op. cit. note on p. 219.

90. The term "god, hod" appears in modern Slavic languages in the meaning of weather.

91. Leger, op. cit. p. 157.

92. Lingebach, op. cit. p. 27.

Chors is to be derived from "chrysos" since Chors has been identified with the Greek god Apollo and is sometimes referred to as the god of the sun.<sup>93</sup> In support of the same theory it is claimed that Chors was the name of a god to whom a golden or gilt statue had been erected, representing in reality the god Dažbog.<sup>94</sup> Such a theory would be altogether in harmony with the claim that Dažbog and Chors are one and the same god. The opinion of Jagić also deserves mention. According to Jagić the name Dažbog was received by the Russians from Yugoslavia instead of the more foreign sounding name of Chors.<sup>95</sup> Beyond these few statements nothing definite can be stated concerning the worship or functions of Chors. He was considered to be the god of sickness,<sup>96</sup> of libations,<sup>97</sup> of hunting and of war.<sup>98</sup>

#### Stribog

The Russians considered Stribog the demon of the tempest and the god of war. The winds were called the "grandsons of Stribog."<sup>99</sup> A statue to Stribog stood in Kiev.

#### Semargla

The name of Semargla is not only obscure but does not

93. J. Máchal, op. cit. p. 299.

94. Leger, op. cit. p. 118

95. Quoted in Otto, op. cit. 104

96. Also this theory has been propounded that Chors is to be related to the Slavic root "chor-", sick.

97. Czaplicka, op. cit. p. 513.

98. P.R. Radosavljevitch, Who Are the Slavs?, 11, p. 15.

99. Máchal, op. cit. p. 301

even seem to be Slavic in origin. <sup>100</sup> Semargla is said to have had a breath of ice, clothes of hoar-frost, a mantle of snow, and a crown of hailstones. <sup>101</sup>

#### Mokoša

A number of texts attest to the fact that a statue of Mokoša stood in the city of Kiev. <sup>102</sup> The derivation of the name Mokoša has been traced to the Slavic root "mok", wetness, moisture, but acceptance of this theory faces one with the difficult problem of explaining the last syllable of the name, the suffix "oša" or "oši". Jagič suggests that Mokoša is to be derived from the Greek word "malakia", evil, and that this is therefore the deity of impurity. <sup>103</sup> She is reported to have been the goddess of trade, often a gossip, <sup>104</sup> and to have taken care of spinning. Mokoša is said by some to have been a Slavic Venus. <sup>105</sup>

#### Veles, Volos

The name of this Slavic god appears in both of the forms given above. Volos' importance in the list of Russian gods appears from the fact that oaths were made also in the name of Volos as well as of Perún. It has been claimed therefore that the original significance of Veles in ancient Slavic re-

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100. Leger, op. cit. p. 122.  
 101. Morfill, op. cit. p. 267  
 102. Leger, op. cit. p. 123  
 103. Ibid. p. 124  
 104. Čzaplicka, op. cit. p. 513  
 105. Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 15.

ligious belief and practice was that of a god of oaths<sup>106</sup> and that he became a god of cattle at a later period through identification with St. Vlasius, the patron saint of flocks and herds.<sup>107</sup> On the basis of a Lithuanian stem "vel-" and of a Lithuanian word "veles" meaning "images of the dead", it has been proposed that Veles was originally a dead ancestor<sup>108</sup> who later was deified. Leger suggests some relation to the Scandinavian god Volso as probable.<sup>109</sup> The name of Veles has been perpetuated in modern Slavic languages. Slovak and other Slavic tongues have the word "vol", ox. In Serbia there are cities with the name Veless and Velessniza. Veles' memory has been perpetuated also in southern Russia where the custom still obtains of tying the last few sheaves of grain into a bundle and then using one or the other expression: "To braid a beard for Volos"; or "To leave a few sheaves for Volos' beard."<sup>110</sup> Veles, well-known among the ancient Bohemians, has today become for them a synonym for demon or devil.

#### Radegast

While the name of Radegast<sup>111</sup> appears in the writings of Helmold, Adam of Bremen, and Thietmar, scholars of Slavic mythology are not agreed among themselves as to whether there

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106. Cross, op. cit. p. 25

107. Ibid.

108. Meyer, op. cit. p. 247

109. Leger, op. cit. p. 115

110. H. Máchal, "Veles" in Otto, op. cit. XXVI, 508.

111. Various forms in which the name appears are: Radhost, Radigast, Radigost, Radegost.

was a Slavic deity bearing this name. Let us consider the testimony of the three Christian missionaries mentioned above.

Helmold states that among the first and foremost deities of the Slavs are Provo, god of the land of Oldenburg; Siva, the goddess of the Polabi; and Radigast, the god of the land of the Abodrites. To these deities, so Helmold states, are dedicated priests, sacrificial libations, and a variety of religious rites. <sup>112</sup> However, it is significant that in another passage in his Chronicle Helmold makes the statement that Radegast is the name of the capital of the Retarii. <sup>113</sup> He plainly states therefore that Radegast is both the name of a deity and the name of a city.

Adam of Bremen, the second authority speaking in favor of the existence of a god by the name of Radegast, states that Radegast was the chief of demons in Radigast in the country of the Riederorum. <sup>114</sup> Thus Adam bears out the testimony of Helmold and applies the name Radegast to both a deity and a city.

In contrast to the statements of Helmold and Adam of Bremen we have the statement of Thietmar, usually well-informed, <sup>115</sup> that Radegast was merely the name of a city and not the appellation of an ancient Slavic deity. If this is so, then it is

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112. Helmold, op. cit. p. 159.

113. Leger, op. cit. p. 148.

114. Quoted in Šafárik, Slovanské starožitnosti, p. 938.

115. Leger, op. cit. p. 147.

probable that Radegast was merely the Slavic name for the city known to the Germans as Rethra. 116

As a result of the confusion which exists with regard to the very existence of such a god in the ancient Slavic pantheon, we are not surprised to note that a host of speculative theories has arisen on this issue. It is claimed that Radegast was a new god adopted along with others by the Slavs sometime before their conversion to Christianity,<sup>117</sup> and at the same time it is stoutly maintained that Radegast was a god of unquestioned antiquity.<sup>118</sup> It is furthermore thought that Radegast was not even the name of a city but rather the name of the place of a certain cult;<sup>119</sup> that Radegast, together with Perún and Swetowid(Svantovit) may have been manifestations of the same power,<sup>120</sup> or the personification of the air,<sup>121</sup> a national hero, or an eponymic god.<sup>122</sup> It does not seem that the problem can be solved at the present time.

As far as the name of Radegast is concerned, it is maintained that it is to be derived from "raden", to advise, and "host", guest. The general meaning of the name would then be Adviser, the Friend of Guests, the Benefactor.<sup>123</sup> The suffix

116. Op. cit. 150.

117. Meyer, op. cit. 150.

118. Růžicka, op. cit. p. 56.

119. Leger, op. cit. p. 148.

120. Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 16.

121. Hanuš compares Radegast to the Indian god Vishnu. Die Wissenschaft, pp. 110-112.

122. Leger, op. cit. 150.

123. Hanuš, op. cit. p. 110.

"gost" or "host" appears in proper as well as geographical names. Another possibility for the derivation of host is from "radost", joy.

From the information available, therefore, it would seem that if Radegast was an ancient Slavic god, he was the chief god of Rhetra, one of the foremost deities of the Obotrites, with a temple also in Mecklenburg and Vinet,<sup>124</sup> probably a god of war,<sup>125</sup> and a mediator between man and the highest deity.<sup>126</sup>

#### Trojan

Trojan<sup>127</sup> is probably the only example in Slavic mythology of a man deified. Traditions of Trojan are supposed to have come to the Russians through their contacts with Southern Slavs, especially the Bulgarians, who were in touch with the Roumanians and probably even with the Romans themselves. There is much mention of Trojan in Bulgarian geographical names and to some extent also in Serbian and Croatian. The following two theories have been advanced as to the manner in which the Roman emperor Trajan came to be regarded as one of the Slavic gods:

1) The biggest ruins in Southern Slavic lands were attributed to Trajan, or at least bear his name. Popular imagination peopled the ruins with demons and it was natural to regard

124. Růžička, op. cit. p. 110

125. Morfill, op. cit. p. 262.

126. Hanuš, op. cit. p. 112

127. The Roman emperor Trajan.

the person responsible for the ruins as one of these demons.<sup>128</sup>  
 In the course of time, therefore, it was natural for Trajan to be exalted to the position of a god.

2) The deification of Trajan by the ancient Slavs is to be traced to the fact that the Slavs found the idea of divinity already attached to the Roman emperor when they first came into contact with the name.

Both of these theories may be accepted as probable explanations of the apotheosis of Trajan by Slavic tribes of antiquity.<sup>129</sup>

#### Jula

Much speculation about the name Jula has not succeeded in casting any appreciable light upon the meaning of this name. It has been thought that the city of Volyn was known by the name Jula and the possibility therefore arises that Jula was a deity worshiped by the inhabitants of that city. It is also claimed that Julius Caesar was the founder of the city and it is possible that the name Jula is to be connected with him. The inhabitants of Volyn had erected a vast column in the middle of their city to which they had attached a lance. This lance they worshiped in order to perpetuate the memory of Julius Caesar.<sup>130</sup>

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128. In the Balkans he was the "spectre of darkness" and often depicted with wings of wax and an ass's ears, Meyer, op. cit. p. 252.

129. Leger, op. cit. pp. 126-133

130. Ibid., p. 144.



#### IV The Soul

According to the beliefs of the ancient Slavs the soul had an existence entirely separate from the body and was believed to reveal itself in the breath<sup>131</sup> and to have its seat in the breast.<sup>132</sup> Russian folk-lore tells of Koschei, the Deathless One, whose soul resided in the egg of a duck on the top of a high mountain or on a stump floating on the sea, and whose death could be brought about only when the egg was found.<sup>133</sup> The close association existing between the soul and the breath in Slavic belief can be seen from the fact that both the word for soul, "duša", and the word for breath, "dych", are derived from cognate stems. In keeping with the belief that the soul revealed itself through the breath was the belief that the soul left the body through the mouth when death came. The belief in an external soul also led the Slavs to believe that the soul could leave the body even during the life of an individual. Such separation of the soul from the body was thought to occur especially during sleep and in dreams.<sup>134</sup> A number of different reasons are advanced for the soul thus leaving the body. One was that the soul left the body in order to protect the sleeping person's property<sup>135</sup> or to assume various forms in

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131. Hugo Traub, Všeobecný dějepis, 11, 19.

132. H. Máchal, Náskres slov. bájesloví, p. 18.

133. J. Curtin, Myths and Tales of Russians, Western Slavs, and Magyars, p. 121

134. J. Máchal, "Slav. Myth.", op. cit. p. 229.

135. H. Máchal, "Slov. bájesloví" in Otto, op. cit. XXII, 435.

order to trouble sleeping people.<sup>136</sup>

Ancient Slavic belief held that the soul could leave the body in the form of a bird, butterfly, fly, snake, white mouse, or hare, while some souls had the ability to transform themselves into wolves. It was generally held that the soul after leaving the body in the hour of death either remained in its accustomed haunts or went to the sun, moon, woods, or clouds in the form of birds or animals. The belief was quite general that the duration of the soul's stay in its former haunts was of forty days.<sup>137</sup> Souls of the dead might appear, very probably according to a later belief, in order to be punished, as jack-o-lanterns which flickered about in churchyards or morasses, leading people astray in swamps or pools or strangling or stupefying them.<sup>138</sup> On the whole the activity of the soul was not considered to be quite so baneful but it was supposed that the souls of the deceased maintained rather friendly relations with the living.<sup>139</sup> Exceptions to this rule were the souls of those who had been sorcerers or grievous sinners or who had committed suicide or murder or who had not been given a decent burial.<sup>140</sup> When the Slavs buried their dead, therefore, they tried to make adequate provision for the soul.

136. Ibid.

137. J. Machal, op. cit. p. 230

138. Ibid. p. 231.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

A number of terms ought to be considered at this point in our discussion of Slavic belief concerning the soul. These terms are upir, mora, and vlkodlak.

#### Upir

The "upir" or vampire in pagan Slavic belief was the soul of a dead person issuing from the grave in order to inflict injury upon the living.<sup>141</sup> Vampires were deceased people who in their lifetime were thought to be sorcerers, murderers, or bad characters in general and whose bodies were now occupied by an unclean spirit.<sup>142</sup> The buried body of a vampire was said not to decay in the grave, evidence of this being the ruddy color of the face.<sup>143</sup> It is said that in the Orthodox Church it is believed that people who die under the ban of the Church have an incorruptible body which is possessed by an evil spirit.<sup>144</sup> It is natural to inquire whether this alleged belief has not come down to modern times from the pagan religion of the Slavs. Vampires were said to leave their graves at night in any imaginable form and during the course of their wanderings to suck the blood of people in order to satisfy their yearning for acquiring "self-consciousness."<sup>145</sup> In Montenegro a corpse suspected of being a vampire is exhumed, pierced with a stake and burned.<sup>146</sup> The power of a vampire

141. Mansikka, op. cit. IV, 624.

142. J. Máchal, "Slav. Myth.", op. cit. p. 231.

143. Máchal, Mákses, p. 184.

144. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 21.

145. H. Máchal, in Otto, op. cit. XXIII, p. 435.

146. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 21.

to inflict harm was supposed to end at cock-crow.<sup>147</sup>

#### Mora

A mora, in contrast to a vampire, was the soul of a living being which left the body in order to torment others.<sup>148</sup> A person could be born a mora. When the soul forsook the body of one who was a mora, the body became like dead.<sup>149</sup> A number of different charms were recommended to ward off the evil influence of a mora: 1) nailing it to the wall; 2) cutting through it; 3) holding it until three o'clock in the morning; 4) promising it some gift or inviting it to a meal.<sup>150</sup> The term mora appears in modern Slavic languages. In Slovak, for instance, the expression "Mora ho dlávi" is common to describe one's sensations during a nightmare. The term Nočnica (Night Spirit) seems to apply to a mora.

#### Vlkodlak

The term vlkodlak (werewolf) applied to a person who could assume the form of a wolf during his lifetime.<sup>151</sup> The component parts of the word vlkodlak are vlk(wolf) and dlak (hair). A vlkodlak was said to have the power of causing solar and lunar eclipses.<sup>152</sup> In the ancient Russian ballad, "Slovo o pluku Igorově", Prince Veleslav is represented as a vlkodlak. ~~It is alleged that he habitually ran from Kiev to~~

147. J. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 2131

148. Mansikka, op. cit. p. 625

149. J. Máchal, op. cit. p. 228.

150. Máchal, Nákres. p. 178.

151. J. Máchal, Slav. Myth. , p. 228.

152. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 19.

Tmutorakam in the form of a wolf and returned to Kiev by cock-crowing.<sup>153</sup> It was believed that a person could be born a vlkodlak.

#### Death and Burial

An examination of Slavic belief and practice with regard to death and burial of the dead casts additional light upon the conception which the Slavs had of the soul. To the ancient Slavs death meant the departure of the soul from the body, this usually occurring through the mouth, and the soul assuming the form of a bird, often a dove. The idea of death was expressed by the stem mer which has the basic meaning of lassitude, a numbing, a destroying.<sup>154</sup> However, primitive Slavs avoided speaking of death by its own name and referred to it indirectly by the term sumirtu, which may point to a taboo.<sup>155</sup> In earliest times the body of a dead person was disposed of by cremation,<sup>156</sup> although even in prehistoric and historic times it does seem that the Slavs disposed of their dead by both interment and cremation.<sup>157</sup> Burial of the dead as a custom of ancient Slavs is usually attributed to the influence of Christianity. When cremation took place, the ashes and charred remnants of bones were collected in an urn and placed in a burial mound.<sup>158</sup> Such burial mounds have been found in Thuringia,

153. Máchal, Nákres, p. 180.

154. Leger, op. cit. p. 801.

155. Meyer, op. cit. p. 245.

156. Cross, op. cit. p. 24.

157. O. Schrader, "Death and Disposal of the Dead" in Enc. of Rel. and Ethics, Hastings, ed., IV, 508.

158. Máchal, Slavic Mythology, p. 232.

Russia, and in regions north of the Black Sea.<sup>159</sup> The ancient Slavs do not seem to have had any special burying places, for Cosmas of Prague states that they buried their dead in forests and fields.<sup>160</sup> According to some writers the dead were buried under the thresholds of the houses.<sup>161</sup> Many things were placed into the burial mound with the ashes of the deceased, including weapons, jewels, articles which were especially dear to the deceased, such as his horse, and which were therefore thought necessary for his future existence. When burial of the dead was practised, similar rites were observed and care was taken to provide the deceased with articles considered necessary for the future life.<sup>162</sup> At the grave a certain kind of ritual was followed. Burial rites were usually of a martial nature and were known by the term tryzna.<sup>163</sup> These obsequies were followed by a noisy banquet which was called strava or kar.<sup>164</sup> Croatsians still call the funeral banquet karmina, a word which appears in modern Slovak as kar. The significance of the funeral feast seems to have been that "the deceased still takes part in the meal."<sup>165</sup> Therefore a vacant place was left for the dead person at the banquet and an invitation was issued to him to partake of the meal.<sup>166</sup> The

159. Ibid.  
 160. Leger, op. cit. p. 205  
 161. Morfill, op. cit. p. 274.  
 162. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 230.  
 163. Máchal, Háj. slov., p. 24.  
 164. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 234.  
 165. Schrader, op. cit. p. 509.  
 166. Ibid.

deceased person's favorite dishes were prepared and eaten. Wine and honey were given the dead person to drink by pouring them upon the grave, and food was put into the coffin and grave.<sup>167</sup> Behind these funeral ceremonies lay the purpose of securing the good will and favor of the deceased.<sup>168</sup>

In connection with these ceremonies at the grave of the dead the ancient Bohemians played certain kinds of games according to their pagan rites. These rites usually took place at night where two roads crossed and on this occasion "profane jokes" (*ioci profani*) were customarily practised by masked men and "devilish songs" are said to have been sung.<sup>169</sup>

The memory of the dead was held in great honor by the pagan Slavs. Frequent ceremonies were held in honor of the dead. It was generally believed by the Slavs that the soul of the deceased remained in its accustomed places for forty days. During the first year after a person's death household ceremonies were therefore held on the third, seventh, twentieth, and fortieth days after the funeral. Likewise half a year later and again a full year later members of the family held ceremonial rites in honor of the dead. The final ceremonies were said to be the most touching of all. In addition to these occasions commemorating the dead, general festivities were held in their honor. The days for these were fixed and occurred as

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167. Ibid.

168. Joz. Koreň, Dejepis (pre 6. a 7. ročník ľudovej školy slovenskej), p. 31.

169. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 26.

frequently as three or four times a year.<sup>170</sup> Among the Bulgarians these ceremonies over the graves of the dead were called "zádušnice."<sup>171</sup> At the feasts connected with these rites food was provided for the dead. The term "zádušnica" seems to bear out the contention that prayers were offered for the dead by the pagan Slavs.<sup>172</sup>

#### Life Beyond the Grave

Although little is known about the beliefs of ancient Slavs concerning life beyond the grave, it is clear that the burial customs and rituals already described furnish strong proof that the Slavs did believe there was an existence beyond the grave,<sup>173</sup> and that in spite of the writings of Thietaar who maintained that the Slavs "believe that everything ends with death."<sup>174</sup> The state of the dead in the view of pagan Slavs was apparently of a sensuous character.<sup>175</sup> The soul could suffer hunger and thirst,<sup>176</sup> it could make use of various articles used by the deceased during his life-time, and married people continued living together.<sup>177</sup>

Slavic languages give only rather vague indications as to what the Slavs actually believed concerning life after

170J. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 235

171. The term may be explained as a ceremony in behalf of the soul of the departed.

172. Máchal, Bál. slov. p. 28.

173. Leger, op. cit. p. 201

174. Quoted in Máchal, Hákras, p. 18

175. J.A. McCullough "Abode of the Blessed" (Slavonic) in Hastings, op. cit. 11, 706

176. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 230.

177. McCullough, op. cit. p. 706.



death. 178 Three words especially are to be considered in a discussion of the abode of the dead: nav; raj; peklo. 179

Nav, derived from the stem "nav" with the meaning of lassitude, death, 180 seems to be the abode of the dead in general. It is the home of shadows, pictured as a region of green fields and groves. 181

Raj, the original term for the pagan paradise of the Slavs, 182 has been taken over into Christian terminology. Raj was the place of spirits disembodied and of spirits not yet embodied. 183 It was regarded as the eastern home of the sun, beyond the ocean. It was a belief universally accepted by the Slavs that there was a happy eastern region of perpetual warmth and light beyond the ocean in a place whence the sun came. 184

The Isle of Buyan is a synonym of raj, the pagan paradise. 185 It seems to have been thought of as a kind of fairy hill to which no geographical location could be ascribed. Buyan is very likely a Slavic translation of the Old Slavic Ru-yan (Ruegen) 186 and is therefore reminiscent of the oft-mentioned Isle of Ruegen, and Buyan is called the "folks-tale

178. Leger, op. cit. p. 41.

179. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 706.

180. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 71.

181. Lingebach, op. cit. p. 27.

182. Leger, op. cit. p. 42.

183. McCulloch, op. cit. 706.

184. Ibid.

185. Mansikka, op. cit. p. 623.

186. Afanasev-Magnus, Russian Folk-Tales, p. 341.

shadow" of the wind-swept isle, the old place of pagan pilgrimage.<sup>187</sup>

Peklo, from a stem meaning pitch,<sup>188</sup> was originally the subterranean place of warath.<sup>189</sup> It is not certain whether "peklo", which in Christian terminology means hell, was associated in the pagan Slavic mind with the idea of punishment<sup>190</sup> although it is described in these terms: "the nether lake of fire and smoke", in a special sense the home of the evil spirits.<sup>191</sup> For punishment a soul was often condemned to wandering.

The soul was regarded as appearing before the Sudice, and then being handed over to the gods of the lower world, among whom are to be mentioned especially Nia, goddess of the underworld, Pekelnik, god of hell, and Flins, who awakens the dead.<sup>193</sup>

The Slavs also pictured to themselves a mountain abode of the dead, a heavenly paradise reached by a mountain of glass or iron, and very difficult to climb.<sup>194</sup>

It was thought that sacrifices could be made for the repose of the soul.<sup>195</sup>

187. Ibid.

188. Meyer, op. cit., p. 246.

189. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 707.

190. Meyer, loc. cit.

191. Mansikka, "Demons and Spirits"(Slavic) in Hastings, op. cit. p. 623.

192. The Fates

193. Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, pp. 410-411.

194. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 707.

195. Cosmas of Prague, quoted in Leger, op. cit., pp.199-201.

## V Minor deities and genii

### Household gods

The worship of household gods developed very naturally from the reverence in which the dead were held by the ancient Slavs. It is admitted that it would be very difficult to deny that such was the development.<sup>196</sup> The very terms applied to the domestic gods, děd, děduška, which mean old man, indicate that this was the manner in which worship of household gods developed.<sup>197</sup> Special attention would be paid to a chieftain or head of a family who before long would then be regarded as an attendant spirit. The forefathers were thought to be deeply concerned about the family and its affairs and willing and able to help it. Thus ancestor worship became firmly established and widespread among the Slavs.<sup>198</sup> Helmold testifies to the fact that the country of the Polabian Slavs abounded in groves and household gods.<sup>199</sup> Another report, speaking of the veneration in which household gods were held by the ancient Slavs, is that concerning Czech, the leader of the tribe which still bears his name. When Czech and his band came to the banks of the river Ríp, he is said to have declared:

" Rise, good friends, and make an offering to your penates, for it is their help that has brought you to this new country destined for you by Fate years ago." <sup>200</sup>

196. Meyer, op. cit. p. 247.

197. Czaplícká, op. cit. p. 595.

198. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 239.

199. Helmold, op. cit. p. 159.

200. Máchal, op. cit. p. 241.

In addition to the names of the household gods already mentioned other names were also used: domovej,<sup>201</sup> šet or šotek,<sup>202</sup> hospodářiček,<sup>203</sup> škriatok,<sup>204</sup> bucžik,<sup>205</sup> ubožete,<sup>206</sup> and others. Thietaar makes mention of a household god by the name of Henil.<sup>207</sup> Since ancestor worship among the Slavs was closely associated with myths and dwarfs, therefore also the term ludci<sup>208</sup> was applied to household gods. The point arises here whether this term did not have its origin in the small statues which the ancient Slavs made of their household gods. These statuettes were given a very prominent place in the house, near the door, on the mantel, or above the hearth.

Various symbols were used to designate the household gods. Thus hospodářiček was symbolized by a snake, škriatok by a drenched chicken, while šet was pictured by a small boy and děd as an old man.

Every household had its own protecting spirit, which though usually invisible, could on occasion assume various forms. It was the duty of the household god to watch over the

201. An adjective becomes a substantive, meaning: belonging to the home.

202. šet or šotek means old man, although usually represented by a small boy.

203. The diminutive form of hospodář, householder.

204. Hamuš derives škriatok from "skryť", to hide, and states that škriatok personifies evil activity of darkness and was confounded with household spirits, Die Wissenschaft, p. 301.

205. Bucžik is the diminutive of "boh", god.

206. Ubožete is derived from the stem boh, god.

207. Legar derives Henil from "honiti", to drive, and classifies him as a god of the flocks, op. cit. p. 158.

208. Ludci is a plural diminutive form of lud, people.

household, the members of the family and their property. As a rule, therefore, only the favorable side of the household god's nature is mentioned and the evil side is rarely spoken of. In their solicitousness for the household under their protection the penates would often engage in battle with the gods of other households and defend their own mightily. When the family moved from one house to another the household gods were taken along and then installed in the new home amid elaborate ceremonies which the members of the household carefully observed.<sup>209</sup>

#### The Destinies

According to Procopius of Caesarea the ancient Slavs did not believe in fate or that it could have any power over them. When, however, a person was saved from death, he, nevertheless, even according to Procopius' testimony, offered a sacrifice to the god to whom he had appealed for help.<sup>210</sup> The evidence seem to support the conclusion that if the ancient Slavs did not know the abstract idea of fate, they nevertheless did know personages who presided over the birth and destiny of man.<sup>211</sup> The reference of the Slavic leader, Czech, to the new country destined for his migrating tribe by Fate years ago may be offered in proof. However, it does seem well established that the Slavs did not believe in a blind fate. They were no fatal-

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209. J. Máchal, Slav. Myth., pp. 241-247.

210. Quoted in Leger, op. cit. pp. 162-163.

211. Op. cit. p. 164.

ists. In their belief one's destiny could be influenced by gifts and sacrifices to the personified fates.<sup>212</sup>

The Fates, usually three in number, and pictured by the Slavs as either beautiful young girls or good-natured old women, were known by the name of Rod, Rožanice,<sup>213</sup> Ludičky,<sup>214</sup> Dolya,<sup>215</sup> Sreča,<sup>216</sup> and Sudice.<sup>217</sup> The names rod and rožanice indicate that according to Slavic belief one's destiny depended primarily upon his birth, that is, upon his ancestors and his mother in particular.<sup>218</sup> In explaining the development of the term "rod" as related to the Eastinies, Meyer offers the explanation that the oldest meaning of "rod" was fruit in the botanical sense. He therefore concludes that the Fates were originally fertility demons. Since fertility and abundance were synonymous in the Slavic mind with fortune and fate, the term came to be applied to personified fate.<sup>219</sup>

It was generally believed by the Slavs that the fate of an individual was decided at his birth. This decision affected the duration of his life, whether he would be rich or poor, as well as the position he would occupy in life.<sup>220</sup> After a deep sleep had been sent upon the woman lying in child-birth,

212. H. Máchal, "Slov. báj." in Otto, op. cit. XXIII, 436.

213. The terms rod and rožanice may be translated freely as birth, ancestry, and the personages of birth and ancestry.

214. Ludičky- a feminine diminutive form of lud, people.

215. Dolya- a Russian term equivalent to destiny. Leger, op. cit., p. 166

216. Sreča- a Serbian term meaning fortune. Ibid.

217. Sudice, a Slovak term, feminine, meaning judge.

218. H. Máchal, "Slov. báj." in Otto, op. cit. p. 436

219. Op. cit. p. 248.

220. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 58.

the Destinies were pictured as placing the new-born babe upon a table and discussing and deciding its fate. One of the Destinies is pictured as occupying herself with the spinning of the thread of life, the second with measuring it, and the third with cutting it. The verdict thus passed upon the individual could be influenced by the presentation of gifts and sacrifices. <sup>221</sup>

The Fates appear on the scene even after death ensues for the individual, for the soul of the deceased is portrayed as appearing before the Judge and then being handed over to the gods of the underworld.

#### Other geni

The ancient pagan Slavs believed that the entire world was peopled by a host of inferior beings or geni. It is these to whom Procopius undoubtedly refers when he says of the Slavs: "They honor flowers and nymphs." <sup>222</sup> According to the pagan Slavs these tutelary deities inhabited the sun, moon, stars, woods, forests, lakes, river, and fountains. The chief among them are the navky, rusalky, and vily.

#### Navky

The information available on the navky, also called navky, is meager indeed. They may, however, be classified as water-nymphs. They were thought to be the souls of the dead in

<sup>221</sup>. H. Michal, in Otto, op. cit. p. 436.

<sup>222</sup>. Quoted in Leger, op. cit. p. 166.

general.<sup>223</sup> If the term "navky" is correctly derived from the stem "nav", meaning dead, then the connection of navky with the dead is obvious indeed. Quite often navky are said to be the souls of children, of children drowned by their mothers,<sup>224</sup> or of children whose mothers met a violent death. Due to latter influence, undoubtedly, navky were said to be the souls of unbaptized children and to be angry at people for permitting them to die without baptism. They gave vent to their displeasure by seducing and killing people. If they were not liberated after seven years by having the baptismal formula pronounced over them, they were said to change into rusalky.<sup>225</sup> Often the rachmanovia are also mentioned in connection with navky. The rachmanovia were thought to be a happy and blessed people dwelling far to the east, beyond the Black Sea. They were regarded as the "blessed dead."<sup>226</sup>

Rusalky

Rusalky, like navky, were considered to be water-nymphs. Just what their nature and functions were cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy from their name. It is claimed on the one hand that their name is not even Slavic in origin, but is to be derived from "rosalia", the festival of the roses.<sup>227</sup> Others again maintain that the term can be traced back to a

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223. Machal, Báj. slov. p. 70.  
 224. Ibid. p. 71.  
 225. Ibid.  
 226. Machal, Nákres, p. 121.  
 227. Leger, op. cit. p. 177.



Slavic stem, "rus" as the equivalent of "ros", the sea; or to "rusý", light-colored and referring therefore to the color of the hair; or finally to "ruslo", river-bed, since the rusalky inhabited rivers.<sup>228</sup> It would seem that the most acceptable of these theories is the one which traces the term rusalky to the word rosalia.

The rusalky were conceived of as being goddesses or spirits, very attractive beings, beautiful and charming, with long light-colored hair in which their great power was supposed to reside.<sup>229</sup> They were fond of music, dance, and song. They were thought to be the souls of the dead, just as navky were, either the souls of betrothed young girls who died before marriage, or of unbaptized children or a drowned woman.<sup>230</sup> Their association with navky in the minds of the people can be clearly seen from these descriptions. They lived not only in the waters, rivers, and streams, but also in the fields and woods. The will-o-wisp (bludička) was considered to be the light which the rusalky carried about with them.<sup>231</sup>

The significance of rusalky in ancient Slavic belief and practice is difficult to determine. It is said of both vily and rusalky that they were either cloud-women, the personification of rain clouds, or the personification of ancestors.

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228. Ibid.

229. Osuský, op. cit. p. 42.

230. Morfill, op. cit. p. 270.

231. Máchal, Bál. slov. p. 74.

It seems that the idea of the ancestral cult predominated in the case of the rusalky,<sup>232</sup> for when rusadle, the festival of the rusalky, coinciding in point of time with the Christian festival of Pentecost, was celebrated, food was left for the rusalky on graves or brought to river banks.<sup>233</sup> The statement of Cosmas of Prague probably refers to the festival of the rusalky, when he states of Slavic peasants "offering their libations above the fountains they sacrifice victims."<sup>234</sup> On the whole it seems that the significance of both vily and rusalky in ancient Slavic belief was similar.

#### Vily

Vily were very similar in nature, function, and appearance to rusalky. It has been said of them that they are the "most beautiful pearls of our (Slavic) mythology" and that "they are similar to the angels of the Christians as far as their appearance and purpose are concerned."<sup>235</sup>

It is generally accepted that vily go back to primeval times among the Slavs.<sup>236</sup> They are known to all of the Slavic nations with the exception of the Baltic Slavs. For the South Slavs the vily play the same role as the rusalky do for the Russians.

A variety of theories is offered as to the derivation

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232. Máchal, Nákres, p. 122.  
 233. Máchal, Nájl. slov. p. 75.  
 234. Leger, op. cit. p. 180.  
 235. Osuský, op. cit. p. 42.  
 236. Meyer, op. cit. p. 246.

of the name vila. It has been advanced by various authorities that vila: 1) is a strange, non-Slavic word; 2) is related to the Lithuanian word "veles", ancestor, spirits of the deceased; 3) must be traced by to "vil", mad, for in Bohemian "vilný" means voluptuous, debauched, and in Polish "wila" means mad; 4) is to be derived from "vel", to perish.<sup>237</sup> In Macedonia vily are known by the name of Judy and in Bulgaria by the name of Samovily and Samodivy.

Like the navky and rusalky the vily, too, are said to be the souls of the deceased,<sup>238</sup> especially of betrothed brides who died before their marriage. Among the Slovaks there is a wide-spread story that these souls of betrothed maidens who died before their marriage could find no rest and consequently were doomed to roam about at night. Or vily are said to be the children of the dew and rain and are thought to be born also of the forest, of roses, of rain, of the sunshine, and of the rainbow.<sup>239</sup> They are pictured as beautiful young women, having long hair, pale cheeks, and white garments. They live in the woods and fields, in water, and in the clouds. While they can hardly ever be seen, evidence of their presence is a thick green circle of grass in the forest. Near the Serbian and Montenegrin border such a patch of green grass is called Vilino

237. Leger, op. cit. pp. 168-169.

238. Máchal, Nákres, pp. 108-109.

239. Leger, op. cit. p. 170; Máchal, Nákres, pp. 108-109.

Kolo. <sup>240</sup>

The vily are pictured as being strong and brave,<sup>241</sup> as having the gift of prophecy, of healing, and of reviving the dead.<sup>242</sup> They were thought to have the power of deciding the destiny of a new-born babe.<sup>243</sup> They engaged in song and dance and had a very sweet voice. It is said that if they chanced upon a man they would compel him to dance with them until he died of exhaustion.<sup>244</sup> Thus they were both good and bad. Their activity, however, is usually pictured as beneficial to man with whom they stayed in rather close contact, and evil only when they were dishonored. Thus a vila could become a "poses-trina", i.e. a "spiritual sister" or a "sister-in-god" to a human being for the purpose of helping him in life.<sup>245</sup> This role could be assumed not only in relation to human beings but also in relation to animals. Sometimes a vila would marry a human being, but such unions were usually tragic in their ending. One such story of the marriage of a vila and a man related that the vila was an exemplary wife to her husband, bearing him a daughter, also. She disappeared only when the word vila was pronounced. Even after her disappearance, however, her beneficent influence continued and she saved the family's

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240. The Vila Circle. Leger, op. cit. p. 174.

241. Máchal, Nákres, p. 123.

242. Leger, op. cit. p. 172.

243. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 18.

244. Leger, op. cit. p. 168.

245. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 17.

store of grain from destruction by a hail storm.<sup>246</sup>

The significance of the role of the vila in the life of the pagan Slavs has been referred to in the discussion of rusalky. It is probable that the vila is a cloud-woman, the personification of the rain-cloud.<sup>247</sup>

Assuming probably a lesser role in the life and belief of the ancient pagan Slavs than the navky, rusalky, and vily were still other spirits or geni. Slavic belief in their existence undoubtedly springs from the conviction that the principle of evil existed alongside of the principle of good from the very beginning, altogether independently. Demons were good and bad and therefore could either harm or help a person. That meant that the most insignificant tasks and duties of life had to be performed with one's relation to the spirits constantly in mind. The life of the ancient Slavs therefore was full of dread and fear lest the gods and geni be offended in some way.

The demons were believed to dwell somewhere in the north or west or even in subterranean regions. They could assume human forms. Mental derangement in a person was attributed to a demon dwelling in the individual.<sup>248</sup>

#### Lešij, Lesnik

Lešij, or Lesnik,<sup>249</sup> as the name indicates, was a male forest

246. Strickland-Erben, Pan Slavonic Folk-lore, pp. 298-299

247. Máchal, Hákres, p. 123.

248. Mansikka, "Demons and Spirits" (Slavonic) in Hastings, op. cit. pp. 622-623.

249. Derived from "les", forest, woods.

demon, a sort of Pan. It was believed that he could manifest himself either in human or animal form.<sup>250</sup> His arms were thought to be of the color of copper and his body the color of iron. At times Lešij was pictured with claws for hands.<sup>251</sup> He possessed the ability to change his size, this usually being regulated by the height of the trees in the forest he was guarding.<sup>252</sup> As a guardian spirit of the forest he felt it his duty to protect also the birds and the beasts in the forest,<sup>253</sup> and in order to carry out his duties he would lead people astray.<sup>254</sup>

There was also the belief in a female wood-sprite who lived in cornfields and furrows and would cut off the heads of children who went for the husks.<sup>255</sup> These wood-sprites were pictured as beautiful and were thought to be the souls of the deceased. If they succeeded in enticing a man they would compel him to dance with them until he died of sheer exhaustion.<sup>256</sup> Erben describes a female wood-sprite as very beautiful, with white garments, thin as a spider-web, long golden hair and a wreath encircling her head. In the story she dances with a girl from noon till evening to the accompaniment of the birds and then miraculously did her stint of spinning for her. She

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250. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 261.  
 251. Afanasæv-Magnus, op. cit. p. 347.  
 252. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 91.  
 253. Morfill, op. cit. p. 272.  
 254. Máchal, op. cit. p. 91.  
 255. Strickland, op. cit. p. 186.  
 256. Máchal, op. cit. pp. 92-94.

had the power to turn leaves into gold.<sup>257</sup>

#### Poludnica

Poludnica<sup>258</sup> was a kindred spirit, female and evil,<sup>259</sup> pictured usually as an old woman but sometimes also as a young woman. She was classified with the Divé ženy (Wild Women). It was her custom to ride through the fields and forests at noon. Everyone who was touched by her was said to die. In Slovakia it was believed that she would lead people astray.<sup>260</sup>

#### Vodník

Vodník,<sup>261</sup> the master of the waters, is pictured as an old man with the ability of assuming different forms. His palace was at the bottom of the sea.<sup>262</sup> He awakened to activity in the spring, according to Slavic belief, when the melting snows sent the water down the mountain and hill sides in rushing torrents.<sup>263</sup> Vodník was portrayed as the head of a vast household. It was held that he would at times carry off a young girl and take her to wife. It was claimed that he had one hundred eleven daughters who delighted in torturing drowned people.<sup>264</sup> Vodník was mischievous, finding pleasure in playing tricks on people, such as untying fishermen's nets and then

257. K.J. Erben, Národní pověsti, pp. 51-54.

258. Derived from "poludnie", noon.

259. Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, p. 312.

260. Máchal, Bal. slov., pp. 102-103.

261. Vodník is derived from "voda", water.

262. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 270.

263. Rážička, op. cit. p. 123.

264. Máchal, op. cit. p. 271.

good-naturedly repairing the damage.<sup>265</sup>

#### Vodné panny

Vodné panny<sup>266</sup> were water nymphs who were also called "biele panny".<sup>267</sup> They were tall, sad, pale, and dressed in transparent green robes. They delighted in seducing youths.

#### Smrtnica

Smrtnica<sup>268</sup> was a female demon who lived under the earth in a room which was lighted by innumerable candles, some of which were just being lighted and others were going out. This represented human lives.<sup>269</sup>

#### Nature and Its Phenomena

The god of paganism is nature. Also the ancient Slavs regarded nature and its phenomena with great reverence. Especially did the sky and its phenomena play an important role in ancient Slavic belief and practice.<sup>270</sup> The sun was most certainly an individual deity among some of the ancient Slavic tribes and the chapter on the chief Slavic deity demonstrates the importance of sun-worship in the life of the Russians and Balkan Slavs.<sup>271</sup> The Old Prussians identified Perkunas with the sun.<sup>272</sup> The diminutive form in which the Slavic word for

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265. J.C. Hronský, Zakopaný meč, pp. 35-37.

266. "Water maidens".

267. "White maidens."

268. "Death spirit."

269. Mansikka, op. cit. p. 626.

270. Morfill, op. cit. p. 275.

271. Cf. pp. 6ff.

272. "Perkunas(Perún) is the sun", quoted in Hanuš, op. cit. p. 89.



sun occurs, "since, slnko" has also been advanced as proof for the antiquity of sun-worship among the Slavs.<sup>273</sup> Also the moon was worshiped as divine from ancient times, its name, too, being found in the diminutive form.<sup>274</sup> The moon was regarded as the abode of the souls of the departed and later as the place to which sinful souls were transported for punishment.<sup>275</sup> Worship of the stars does not seem to be as widely attested as sun and moon worship are.<sup>276</sup> But it is thought that the stars also were originally worshiped as chief gods by the Slavs and that when they came to be regarded as only children of the highest god they were subordinated in the Slavic religious system. The ancient Slavs saw a definite interrelation between man and his destiny on the one hand and the stars on the other. Each person was supposed to be assigned a star at his birth. When the individual died, the star fell from the skies and the soul of the deceased would float upward to the skies.<sup>277</sup>

It is very probable that fire was also worshiped by the ancient Slavs. It is possible that the Slavic word for fire, "ogni", may have been a taboo.<sup>278</sup> Fire, the sun, and the moon were pictured as the caldron from which the "great Slavic race"

273. This is in accordance with Meyer's theory that the Slavs did not come into the presence of their gods with awe and solemnity but with filial devotion, op. cit. p. 249.

274. Ibid. p. 250.

275. Máchal, Slav. Myth. p. 273.

276. Meyer, op. cit. p. 250.

277. Máchal, Slav. Myth. p. 273.

278. Meyer, op. cit. p. 250.

had sprung.<sup>279</sup>

Rivers were also worshiped by the Slavs. The Don, Dnieper, and Bug were adored and represented by images.<sup>280</sup> Heaven and earth were considered the father and the mother of the Slavs.<sup>281</sup>

With regard to other natural phenomena such as winds, storms, lightning, conflicting claims have been made. On the one hand it is maintained that little can be proved concerning Slavic worship of these phenomena on the basis of present day tradition, and it is questioned whether these phenomena furnished the original Slavs with a permanent religious conception.<sup>282</sup> On the other hand it is asserted that these phenomena of nature were worshiped.<sup>283</sup> We are again faced with the ever-recurring problem of the difficulty of separating fact from fiction in Slavic mythology.

#### Supplementary List of Genii

The catalogue of demon-spirits worshiped by the ancient Slavs may be supplemented by the following list:

Divé ženy, wild women;

Jařenky, creatures having fantastic bodies, the faces of men, the bodies of sows, and the legs of horses;

Ozraty or Zruty, gigantic beings inhabiting the wilderness of the Tatra Mountains;

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279. Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 17.

280. Ibid. p. 15.

281. Machal, Nákres, p. 12.

282. Meyer, op. cit. p. 249

283. Cross, op. cit. p. 24.

- Veternica, the spirit of the wind and air;
- Baba-jaga(Ježibaba), a large and powerful female demon;
- Znok, a flying dragon, sometimes pictured as fiery;
- Lada, goddess of love;
- Kupala, the goddess of the fruits of the earth;
- Koleda, the goddess of festivals;
- Tras, the demon of terror;
- Morana, the goddess of winter and death;
- Vesna, the goddess of spring and fruitfulness and sometimes identified with Siva or Lada;
- Dzydzilelya, a kind of Venus, giver of children;
- Drzewana, often identified with Diana;
- Doda or Dodolya, goddess of waters and rain;
- Jutrebog, god of the morning, often considered the morning star;
- Zirnitra, the black dragon;
- Pochwist, god of the wind;
- Cica, worshiped by barren women;
- Bludičky or Svetielka, evil spirits;
- Topilec or Topnik, an evil spirit who drowns people and beasts;
- Čudi, strange water-animals who do evil only when angered;
- Škřiti, the hidden ones, personifying evil activity of darkness, often confused with house-spirits;
- Görzoni and Ohlas, mountain spirits;
- Powietrze, the demon of pestilence

- Dzuma or Chuma, the demon of epidemic;
- Kikimora, a kind of mora ;
- Mátoha and Bobo, the feminine and masculine demons who frighten children;
- Forenút, the protector of life in the womb;
- Zlota baba, who protected the birth and the first years of life;
- Led, Did, and Polel, the three sons of Lada;
- Usla or Oslad, the demon of sweetness;
- Hodu, the god of banquets;
- Torik, Kawas, and Woda, war-gods of certain Slavic tribes;<sup>284</sup>
- Kielo, god of the way;
- Bentis, god of travelers;
- Lutice, the Furies;
- Tur, god of the sun, usually identified with Svantovit;
- Trpaslík, Pidimužik, Palčik and Ludkovia, dwarfs;
- Pikulík, god of the underworld for the Eastern Slavs;
- Harášek, god of the underworld for the Western Slavs;
- Vii, demons whose glare would reduce a person to ashes;
- Ilia, god of thunder, author of rain, dew, and hail;
- Rinvit, sometimes identified with Rągievit;
- Furuvit, sometimes identified with Proven;
- Turupid may have been a martial god;
- Pissamar, may be derived from "besu", demon;
- Kovlad, god of subterranean treasure;

284. There does not seem to have been any proper war-god among the Slavs, Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, p. 380.

Tiernoglavius, the god with the black head and silver beard, the god of victory and companion on warlike expeditions.<sup>285</sup>

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285. Mansikka, op. cit. pp. 622-628; McClintock and Strong, p. 803; Lingsbach, op. cit. p. 27; Meyer, op. cit. p. 252; Leger, op. cit. p. 156-158; Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 19; Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, passim; Morfill, op. cit. pp. 272-273; Háchal, Baj. slov., p. 64; Růžicka, op. cit. p. 162; Háchal, Slav. Myth., pp. 263-265.

## VI Cult

## Temples

On the subject of temples among the pagan Slavs many conflicting statements are found. These range from the claim that the majority of Slavs did not have any temples to the claim that there was a profusion of temples. It seems safe to say that both statements are true. As far as the Russians are concerned it cannot be definitely ascertained whether they had temples or not,<sup>286</sup> but it is known that they built their idols on hills.<sup>287</sup> On the other hand Thietmar states that among the Polabian Slavs with whom he was acquainted "there were as many temples as there were regions."<sup>288</sup> This divergence of opinion on the matter of temples among the pagan Slavs may be partly explained by the fact that there are practically no specimens of Slavic architecture from pagan times extant and certainly no ruins of heathen Slavic temples.<sup>289</sup> It must therefore be considered that before the heathen Slavs came into contact with non-Slavic tribes and especially before they were markedly influenced by Christianity as represented by these non-Slavic tribes, it is probably true that they worshiped in the open air, in groves, at fountains, on mountain tops and by the river side.<sup>290</sup> Meyer is of the

286. Leger, op. cit. p. 185.

287. Máchal, Ráj. slov. p. 156.

288. "The Chronicle of Thietmar" in Šafárik, Slovenské starožitnosti, p. 967.

289. Leger, "Architecture and Art" in Hastings, op. cit. p. 774.

290. Ibid. p. 773

opinion that temples, statues, altars, and priests appear after the breakup of original Slavic unity.<sup>291</sup> Orloff agrees that as far as the South Slavs are concerned priests and idols were introduced to them by the Northmen.<sup>292</sup>

Since only the Polabian Slavs had a highly developed cult, which included also temples and statues, it is to them that we turn for more detailed information on the subject of temples. Fortunately a number of missionaries laboring among the Polabian Slavs have left us a description of pagan Slavic temples.

Thietmar in his Chronicle states concerning the temple in the "city of Riedegost, the country of the Riedererum" that its foundations were made of the horns of various animals, that the temple walls were marvelously sculptured with images of gods and goddesses upon which were engraved the names of the deities. These images were dressed with helmets and corselets, and their standards were guarded by special priests and were moved only in case of war.<sup>293</sup>

Adam of Bremen makes note of the enormous size of the temple of the Retaril in the city of Rethre. The temple, described as being only four days' journey from Hamburg, is called huge and, says Adam, was "constructed to the demons whose chief is Redigast." The city of Rethre had nine gates and was surrounded by a deep lake, a wooden bridge offering

291. Meyer, *op. cit.* p. 252.

292. M.A. Orloff, "The Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church" in Sheowring-Thiess, *op. cit.* p. 420.

293. "Chronicle of Thietmar", Šafárik, *op. cit.* p. 987.

access only to those who came to sacrifice or to seek replies to their petitions.<sup>294</sup>

The most detailed description of a pagan Slavic temple is that given by Saxo Grammaticus. He describes the temple of Svantovit in the city of Arkona on the island of Ruegen:

" On a level in the midst of the city was to be seen a wooden temple of most graceful workmanship, held in honour not only for the splendour of its ornament, but for the divinity of the image set up within it. The outside of the building was bright with carefully engraving ( or painting), whereon sundry shapes were rudely and uncouthly pictured. There was but one gate for entrance. The shrine itself was shut in a double row of enclosure, the outer whereof was made of walls and covered with a red summit; while the inner one rested on four pillars, and instead of having walls was gorgeous with hangings, not communicating with the outer save for the roof and a few beams..... Much purple hung round the temple; it was gorgeous, but so rotten with decay that it could not bear the touch. There were also the horns of woodland beasts, marvellous in themselves and for their workmanship." 295

Saxo Grammaticus also speaks of the three temples in Karentia, similar to the one in Arkona. He states:

" The greater temple was situated in the midst of its own ante-chamber, but both were enclosed with purple (hangings); instead of walls the summit of the roof being propped merely on pillars." 296

An Arabian geographer, Masaudi, speaks of a pagan Slavic temple as being built on "red coral and green emeralds."<sup>297</sup>

We summarize Palacký's description of a pagan Slavic temples as follows:

294. Adam of Bremen, in *Šafárik*, *op. cit.* p. 988.  
 295. Saxo Grammaticus, *op. cit.* Appendix 1, pp. 564 ff.  
 296. *Ibid.* pp. 584-585.  
 297. Quoted in Leger, *op. cit.* p. 195.



The chief temples of the heathen Slavs were divided into two main parts, the outer temple and the sanctuary. The walls of the outer temple were covered with beautiful carvings. The sanctuary rested upon pillars and was enclosed by heavy hangings. In the very center of the sanctuary stood the image of the chief idol, either an immense one of wood or a smaller one of metal. Other minor idols were placed at the side, in addition to the necessary temple utensils the temples contained also standards, booty, and weapons captured from the enemy and dedicated to the gods. In the outer temple were displayed objects which the people valued very highly. <sup>298</sup>

The deep reverence with which the Slavs regarded their deity and the place of worship may be seen from the statement of Helmold:

" They (the Rugiani) neither lightly indulge in oaths nor suffer the vicinity of the temple to be desecrated even in the face of the enemy." <sup>299</sup>

#### Priesthood

Only the Elbe Slavs had a ritual which included a priesthood. It cannot be determined whether a separate priesthood existed among the pagan Slavs in most ancient time, before Christian missionaries recorded their observations of Slavic life. The word which the Western Slavs used for priest "knez" <sup>300</sup> means also prince. This clearly indicates that before a separate priestly class arose the functions of the priest were performed by the head of the tribe or clan and by princes. <sup>301</sup> While the Elbe Slavs had a priesthood, the Russians, it seems, had only magicians whom they called by the name "vlukvu" from

<sup>298</sup>. Palacký, op. cit. 1, 105-109.

<sup>299</sup>. Helmold, op. cit. p. 276.

<sup>300</sup>. Derived from the Old High German "kuning", Leger, op. cit. p. 40-41.

<sup>301</sup>. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 305.

the root "to stammer."<sup>302</sup> It is said that among the things introduced among the Slavs when their original unity was disrupted was a priesthood,<sup>303</sup> and that the South Slavs became acquainted with the idea of a special priestly class from the Northmen.<sup>304</sup>

The priest was held in very high esteem by the Slavs. Hel-  
mold not only makes the statement that the honor accorded the  
priest was as great as that given the king,<sup>305</sup> but he indicates  
that it was even greater when he states:

"Among the "ugiani the king is held in light esteem  
in comparison with the flamen." <sup>306</sup>

The reason for this very high regard of the priest, exceeding  
even that given the king, is stated by Hel mold as follows:

" For the latter (the priest) divines the responses  
and ascertains the results of the lots. He de-  
pends on the command of the lots but the king and  
the people depend on his commands." <sup>307</sup>

There were three orders of priests: protoflamines, archifla-  
mines, and the flamines.<sup>308</sup> Among the duties of the priest  
may be mentioned the following: to offer sacrifice and to  
pray, to care for the shrine of the god and its treasures, to  
determine by lot what is acceptable to the god as well as  
"the certainty of things", to deliver oracles and to prophecy.

302. Leger, op. cit. p. 196.

303. Meyer, op. cit. p. p. 252.

304. Orloff, op. cit. p. 420.

305. Helmold, op. cit. p. 61.

306. Ibid. p. 276.

307. Ibid.

308. Hanus, Die Wissenschaft, p. 162.

Sacrifices of oxen and sheep and grain were made to the gods of the Slavs and Helmold adds "Christians with whose blood they say their gods are delighted." After the victim is felled, continues Helmold,

" the priest drinks of its blood in order to render himself more potent in the receiving of oracles. For it is the opinion of many that demons are easily conjured with blood." 309

It has been called into question whether the Slavs did actually offer human sacrifices, usually war captives. Helmold, whose statements are trustworthy, states that a Christian was offered annually, and it seems clear that human sacrifice was known also to the Russians.<sup>310</sup> The Russians were said to have offered up even their children, selecting the victims by lot.<sup>311</sup> Furthermore the evidence of Thietmar, even though he was unfriendly to the Slavs, must be considered:

" Their unspeakable rage is mitigated by the blood of men and animals." 312

Nothing is known about the altar of the pagan Slavs beyond the fact that it was the place where the sacrifices were offered.

It was the duty of the priest of Svantovit to sweep with a broom the shrine of the god on the day before the sacrifice was to be made. The officiating priest alone had the

309. Helmold, op. cit. p. 159.

310. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 25; Leger, op. cit. p. 185.

311. Kulhánek, op. cit. p. 181.

312. Thietmar, in Šafárik, op. cit. p. 987.

right of entering this shrine. During the cleaning process the priest

" took heed not to breathe within the building. As often as he needed to draw or give breath, he would run out to the door, lest forsooth the divine presence should be tainted with human breath." 313

#### Divination

On the day of the sacrifice the following act of divination was performed by the priest before the image of Svantovit:

" On the morrow, the people being at watch before the doors, he took the cup from the image and looked at it narrowly; if any of the liquor put in had gone away, he thought that this pointed to a scanty harvest for next year. When he had noted this, he bid them keep, against the future, the corn which they had. If he saw no lessing in its usual fulness, he foretold fertile crops. So, according to this omen, he told them to use the harvest of the present year now thriftily now generously. Then he poured out the old wine as a libation at the feet of the image, and filled the empty cup with the fresh; and feigning the part of a cup-bearer he adored the statue and in a regular form of address prayed for good increase of wealth and conquests for himself, his country, and its people. This done, he put the cup to his lips, and drank it overfast at an unbroken draught; refilling it then with wine, he put it back in the hand of the statue." 314

Head-cakes were also used in divining and worshipping the god. This ritual is described by Saxo Grammaticus in the following words:

" Head-cakes were also placed for offering, round in shape and great, almost up to the height of a man's stature. The priest used to put this between himself and the people and ask, whether the men of Ruegen could see him? By this request he

313. Saxo Grammaticus, op. cit. p. 564 ff.

314. Ibid.

prayed not for the doom of his people or of himself but for the increase of the coming crops. Then he greeted the crowd in the name of the image and bade them prolong their worship of the god with diligent sacrificing, promising them sure rewards of their tillage, and victory by sea and land.... Each male and female hung accoin every year as a gift in worship of the image. It was also allotted a third of the spoil and plunder as though these had been got and won by its protection." 315

The priest of Svantovit also had charge of the three hundred horses set aside for the god as well as of the men-at-arms who rode the horses. All of the gains, whether by arms or by theft, were placed in the care of the priest. From these he wrought various emblems and temple ornaments which he placed into coffers containing stores of money and piles of time-eaten purple. The white horse, especially sacred to Svantovit, could be fed and ridden only by the priest. Oftentimes the horse appeared with evidence of having ridden long and hard and then it was said that the god had fought for his followers. The white horse was used in taking omens in the following manner:

" When war was determined against any district, the servants set out three rows of spears, two joined crosswise, each row being planted point downwards in the earth; the two an equal distance apart. When it was time to make the expedition, after a solemn prayer, the horse was led in harness out of the porch by the priest. If he crossed the rows with the right foot before the left, it was taken as a lucky omen of warfare; if he put the left first, so much as once, the plan of attacking that district was dropped; neither was any voyage finally fixed until three paces in succession

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315. Ibid.

316. Ibid.

of the fortunate manner of walking were observed." 316

While the above ritual of taking omens was performed by the priest, the taking of lots was performed by the ordinary people also. This ritual is described as follows:

"Nor were these people ignorant of the use of lots. Three bits of wood, black on one side, white on the other, were cast into the lap. Fair meant good luck; dusky, ill. Neither were their women free from this sort of knowledge, for they would sit by the hearth and draw random lines in the ashes without counting. If these when counted were even, they were thought to bode success; if off, ill-fortune." 317

From the above quotations we can see that the pagan Slavs worshiped their gods by offering them gifts and sacrifices, by praying to them,<sup>318</sup> by dance and song and fasting.<sup>319</sup> The Slav came into the presence of his god not with solemnity or awe but with filial affection.<sup>320</sup> It is difficult to say just how highly this worship ritual was developed. It is maintained that there was no ritual nor indeed could have been to compare with that which flourished in India, since the Slavs lived scattered over their forests, marshes and fields.<sup>321</sup>

#### Songs

It is quite well established that the pagan Slavs sang

316. Ibid.

317. Ibid.

318. An old prayer of the Retarii for protection is engraved on an image of Perún: "Perún, Dewaite, nemusea und man" (Perún, dear god, do not strike(thunder) above me), Roužička, op. cit. p. 15.

319. Meyer, op. cit. p. 252.

320. Ibid. p. 249.

321. Ibid. p. 252.

to their gods.<sup>322</sup> Since, however, the only literate people who came into touch with these pagan literary products, the monks and the priests, turned away from them, they have not been preserved. It is asserted concerning a number of Slavic songs that they bear the stamp of antiquity but Vlček is of the opinion that the "single song breathing the true spirit of the pagan centuries" is the one dedicated to Morena, the goddess of death.<sup>323</sup> Its text is as follows:

Morena, Morena,  
za kohos' usrela?  
Ne za ny, ne za ny,  
než za ty křestany.<sup>324</sup>

While agreeing with the unquestioned antiquity of the song dedicated to Morena, Bujnák is of the opinion that also the following song points at least to the period of transition to Christianity:

Za oných časov  
za starých bohov,  
za boha Paroma.<sup>325</sup>

He also ventures the opinion that a third song, "Hoja, Dunda, hoja",<sup>326</sup> may likewise come from those times.

322. Vlček, op. cit. p. 6.

323. Ibid. p. 7.

324. A free translation:

O Morena, O Morena,  
for whom have you died?  
Not for us, not for us,  
But for those Christians.

P. Bujnák, Stručné dějiny lit. Československé, p. 11.

325. A free translation:

During those times,  
when the old gods lived,  
during the time of god Paros.

326. Dunda may refer to Did, a name for the household spirit, Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, p. 350.

## Festivals

The festivals of the ancient Slavs were determined by the sun in its course through the heavens. The entire year was thus pictured by the Slavs as a struggle between light and darkness, life and death.<sup>327</sup>

The Slavic year began, at least in ancient times, in the summer, and "leto"<sup>328</sup> still means year in certain Slavic tongues. The main festivals of the pagan Slavic year were: Koleda, at the time of the winter solstice; Rusalye, at the time of the spring equinox; and Kupalo also known as Jarilo at the time of the summer solstice.

### Koleda

Koleda, celebrated at the time of the winter solstice, coinciding with December 22 approximately, lasted for about a fortnight. A number of theories have been propounded with regard to the meaning of the term Koleda:

1) It has been regarded as the festival honoring the goddess of spring, youth, and fertility, Lada, who "is born simultaneously with the sun."<sup>329</sup> The name therefore would be a compound of the goddess' name, Lada, and the prefix "ko-" whose meaning has not been determined.

2) Koleda is related to the Slavic word "kolo", ring or circle, and has reference to the singing which was part of the festivities.

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327. Roužička, op. cit. p. 183.

328. Leto means summer, year.

329: Osuský, op. cit. p. 44.



ities which took place.

3) Koleda is to be derived from "colenda".

4) The most probable of the theories propounded is that Koleda is to be traced back to "calendae", since the Romans celebrated VIII Calendias Januarii as the birth of the sun.<sup>330</sup>

Other names were also used by various Slavic tribes. Among the Russians the term "kutuja" is used especially with reference to the Christian's Christmas Eve, for "kutuja" is the main dish which is served by them on that occasion.<sup>331</sup>

The Serbians use the term "Badnji Dan", "Badnjak", or "Budnik." If the last term is not merely a corruption of the first two, it may be from the stem "buditi", to watch, and would therefore have the meaning of Vigil.<sup>332</sup> The etymology of the term Badnjak is obscure but some have maintained that it is the name of a god or at least a term derived from the name of a deity.<sup>333</sup> The above-mentioned terms are used by the Serbians also to designate the yule-log which they burn on their hearths on Christmas Eve. The significance of Badnjak for them lies in the number of sparks which it emits which are thought to represent the number of calves, lambs, kids, and pigs which the master of the house will acquire during the coming year.<sup>334</sup> The South Slavs use the term

330. Hanuš, Die Wissenschaft, pp. 192-195.

331. Máchal, Slav. Myth. p. 307.

332. Ibid. p. 308.

333. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 47.

334. J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 638.

"Kračún" for the festival of the winter solstice, indicating thereby that the significance of the festival lay in the Slav-ic conception of the sun.<sup>335</sup>

The birth of the sun after its long journey southward and the beginning of a new year therefore are the prominent thought in the festival of Koleda. The image of a wolf was carried about signifying probably that the reign of Černobog, the Black God, was at an end and that the sun was being reborn.<sup>336</sup> It was mainly a domestic celebration as can be seen from the burning of the yule-log and the serving of the kutuja.<sup>337</sup> Also sacrifices were brought to the gods of the earth and water.<sup>338</sup> The household gods were intimately connected with the celebration.

In general it may be said that Koleda was a season of rejoicing, festivities, games, exchange of gifts, and forgetting of enmities.<sup>339</sup> Prophecy concerning the future was also practised. The spirit of joy which prevailed was derived from the fact that the sun would soon be in the ascendancy. In White Russia two boys are dressed to represent a Rich Koleda and a Poor Koleda and are then disguised. Selection of one or the other determined whether riches or poverty would be one's lot during the coming year. Children would also go

335. Kračún is from "krátky", short. Máchal, Nákres, op. 169

336. Hanuš, op. cit. p. 192.

337. Máchal, Slav. Myth., p. 309.

338. Máchal, Řáf. slov. p. 163.

339. "Lada is generous, her devotees receive gifts from her."  
Osuský, op. cit. p. 44.

from house to house during this festival and receive gifts in exchange for singing.<sup>340</sup>

To summarize, Koleda was the triumph of light over darkness, of life over death, celebrated at the time of the year when the sun began its gradual return northward.

### Rusalye

The spring festival of the ancient Slavs was known by various names, the most common of which was Rusalye or Rusadle. The name has been derived by some from the nymphs "rusalky" whom this festival was thought to honor especially. Others see in it a corruption of the Italian Festival of the Roses, "rosalia", signifying the return of spring.<sup>341</sup> The terms Turice and Letnice are also applied, being used by some Slavs to the present day for the festival of Pentecost. Turice is associated with the god of war, Tur. Tur also means steer or bison and during the festival of Turice the image of a steer was carried about. Finally, the opinion is held that "tur" is symbolical of the world. Letnice is derived from "leto", summer, year, and its connection with the spring festival is obvious. It has been pointed out that also Trisna(tryzna) was a term applied to the Slavic spring festival. Its use would

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340. The custom of caroling at Christmas time will be recognized. In Slovakia it is customary for ministers of the gospel or teachers to visit their members at Christmas time. They would be remembered with special gifts. The term "koleda" is still used with reference to this visit.

341. Máchal, Slav. Myth., pp. 311-312.

imply that certain contests were carried on during the festival.<sup>342</sup>

Among the Slavs the festival of Rusadle is celebrated at the season of Pentecost, but it is not limited to this season. It is maintained that Rusadle was celebrated also on the Festival of St. John, on Christmas Even, and on Epiphany. A similar commingling of certain features connected with other festivals can be noted in the custom of carrying about trees and of burying, drowning, or burning dolls symbolizing winter and death.

The festival of Rusadle was celebrated in Russia by throwing a doll into the water at one point in the ceremony. The Russians called the doll "rusalka". This has been explained as an attempt to secure the favor of the rusalky, the spirits of those who died a violent death and were not buried with proper religious rites. This would introduce a funereal element into the festival.<sup>343</sup> On the other hand, the Serbians are said to honor the goddess of love, Lada, during this festival, for the refrain "Lada-ox, Lada-leh" occurs in a song used on this occasion.<sup>344</sup>

Two customs connected with the celebration of the festival of the summer solstice, especially by the Russians, deserves mention here. The first is that of carrying about a ~~young tree, called "máj"~~. The "máj" was usually a pine, fir

342. Hanuš, op. cit. pp. 194-199

343. Máchal, Slav. Myth., pp. 311-312.

344. Petrovitch, op. cit. p. 52.

or birch. It was customary to cut down such young trees and to carry them about at the beginning of spring. The original symbolical significance of this custom has been lost but it undoubtedly had some connection with the pagan Slavic conception of the struggle of winter and spring, of death and life. The custom of carrying about the "máj" has therefore been connected also with the concept of fertility.<sup>345</sup>

The other custom is that of casting Morena<sup>346</sup> into the water and drowning her. The name Morena has been derived from 1) "mar", "mariti", to die, kill; 2) from "marit", to shine,<sup>347</sup> and 3) from "mo", great, and Rana, meaning therefore the Great Rana, the goddess of death and treasures.<sup>348</sup> Morena was a little doll which was carried about in procession and at a certain point in the festivities was cast into the waters. At the same time a chant was sung, a number of versions of which are used to this day:

Smrt sme vám zanesli,  
nové leto priniesli.<sup>349</sup>

Also:

Smrt plynie po vode  
nové leto ku nám ide.<sup>350</sup>

The significance of drowning Morena evidently was that Morena symbolized winter and its rigors, while drowning Morena

345. Máchal, "Máje", in Otto, op. cit. XVI, p. 647.

346. Other names: Morana, Smrt (death) and Smrtholka (death-doll).

347. Máchal, Nákres, p. 194.

348. Růžička, op. cit. p. 173.

349. Death we have carried away,  
Life we have brought.

350. Death sails on the water,  
The new year comes to us.

Quoted in Otto, op. cit. XVI, p. 831.

meant her retreat before the oncoming spring and summer.<sup>351</sup>

Thus a different significance attached to Morena than to Rusal-ka which was also drowned. It has been pointed out that the Roman custom of expelling Mars at the beginning of the spring and the new year is identical with the Slavic custom of casting Morena into the waters to be drowned and thus "carrying out death".

Rusalye, the ancient Slavic spring festival, may therefore be characterized as the festival of nature's renewal or regeneration.

#### Kupalo and Jarilo

The festival of the summer solstice celebrated by the ancient Slavs was known by various names. The most general of these are Kupalo and Jarilo. Other names are Kostroma, Sobotka,<sup>352</sup> Kresnice,<sup>353</sup> and Vajano.<sup>354</sup>

The theory is held that Kupalo was the name of an ancient Slavic deity, the god or goddess of treasure and fertility, and that the sun was thereby meant. Or a resemblance between Kupalo and the word "kúpel", bath, is seen, since sprinkling with water was a part of the festival and because the ancient

351. Ibid.

352. The Polish term. Hanuš thinks that Sobotka is the name of a mountain on which a god of the same name was worshiped and is inclined to the opinion that this god was Svan-tovit, op. cit. p. 204; Stanislav Klima, "Čomu nás učia miestne názvy" in Slovenská zem, p. 13.

353. The Yugoslav term.

354. The Slovak term. Vajan means St. John.

Slavs considered the setting of the sun to be a bath.<sup>355</sup>

Finally, since the festival was transferred to the Christian festival of St. John the Baptist, it is asserted that the term may have been coined from its association with John and his baptism.

Jarilo has also been called a Slavic deity, probably identical with Herovit or Rugjevit of the Baltic Slavs.<sup>356</sup> In Little Russia the term Kostroma is also used with reference to this festival. No information is available concerning the term beyond the fact that there is also a city in Russia which bears the name of Kostroma. Ceremonies centering about Kostroma seem to be identical with those of Kupalo and Jarilo although the festival was linked, in the Christian era, with St. George.

A common feature of the festival of Jarilo and Kupalo was the little doll which was made and to which various names were given. In celebration of the spring equinox the doll was called Morena. To the doll of the summer solstice the following names were applied: Jarilo, Kupalo, Kostroma, Kukla, Tatman, Carodejnica.<sup>357</sup>

During the celebration of the summer solstice a doll was dressed in the clothing of a woman. Some of the Slavs also cut

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355. Hamuš, *Die Wissenschaft*, p. 268

356. H. Máchal, "Jarilo", in *Otto*, *op. cit.* XLII, 82

357. The Bulgarian, Slovenian, and Bohemian terms respectively. Carodejnica means witch.

down a tree and adorned it, and both the doll and the tree were used in their ceremonies. After some dancing about a fire which was kindled the doll and the tree were discarded, sometimes being thrown into the water, and at other times burned or buried. Instead of a doll representing Jarilo a human being was sometimes chosen and then the entire company would separate into two groups and engage in a fight. The main features of the festival were kindling fires, sprinkling with water, and foretelling the future.<sup>358</sup> The fires which were built were known as "svätójánske ohne" or "kupal-ské ohne".<sup>359</sup> Their significance may have been to strengthen symbolically the dying light of summer. This explanation is in harmony with the general conception of the pagan Slavs that at the summer solstice the energy of nature was decreasing and that nature was preparing for a rest. Because of its connection with the sun it has been called Svantovit's festival.<sup>360</sup>

The element of sprinkling with water may have been introduced in more recent times when the festival became so closely associated with that of St. John the Baptist. It must also be kept in mind that the setting of the sun was regarded as a descent of the sun into a bath from which it arose purified and cleansed each morning. The prophesying was often

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358. Máchal, Nákres, p. 200.

359. The Fires of St. John; the Fires of Kupalo.

360. Hamš, op. cit. p. 202.



done with flowers and was concerned with the probability of a maiden marrying during the coming year.

The festival of Kupalo and Jarilo was originally a purely domestic one. At this season marriages were contracted and new members were admitted into a family. The funereal element was also reminiscent of the dead ancestors who were also called to mind during the feast.<sup>361</sup>

Many features of this festival remind us of Morena but seem to have been performed at a different time.

To summarize, it may be said that Jarilo and Kupalo represented the sun at the height of its life-giving activity.

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361. Máchal, Báj. slov. p. 167.

## VII Conclusion

The religion of the ancient Slavs was one of unmixed paganism. It was a system of polytheism with traces of animism and ancestor-worship.<sup>362</sup> The god of the Slavs was nature, the number of Slavic gods was many, and yet the Slavs were not without the idea of one supreme being.<sup>363</sup> As animists the pagan Slavs saw a soul residing in all of nature about them. It is claimed that the Slav never advanced beyond "inchoate conceptions" of nature and that "he neither philosophized like the Hindu, nor created types of pure grace like the Greek nor beautiful fancies like the Celt."<sup>364</sup> Slavic religion does seem to have been altogether without anthropomorphism.<sup>365</sup>

In contrast to this view of a development from lower to higher forms in the religion of the pagan Slavs we find the idea of Radosavljevitch that the early religion of the Slavs was a kind of monotheism. It is pointed out that during the centuries which elapsed from the time the Slavs lived in their ancient homeland<sup>366</sup> and their Christianization, many changes took place and that these changes represented a transition from monotheism to polytheism and then to pantheism.<sup>367</sup> This opinion is worthy of note since it accords

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362. K. Menges, "The Early Slavs and Their Neighbors" in The Slavonic Monthly, Jan. 1943, p. 14.

363. Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 13.

364. Afenasaev-Magnus, op. cit. p. VIII.

365. Leger, op. cit. p. 45.

366. This can be broadly identified as modern Poland.

367. Radosavljevitch, op. cit. p. 13.

with the Biblical account of the fall and devolution of man.<sup>368</sup>  
The era spoken of, it is also maintained, was furthermore characterized by the emergence of individual deities, for up to this time the spirits and demons had been regarded as collective beings.<sup>369</sup>

Pagan Slavic religion is considered by some to be an aggregate of foreign elements, especially Oriental and specifically Hindu features. In evaluating this opinion it must be considered, as we have pointed out, that pagan Slavic belief and practise were undoubtedly influenced by many factors. The Slavs came into contact with the Scandinavians, Teutons, Finns, and Lithuanians in the north, and with the Greeks and Romans in the south. Nor can it be doubted that there is a relation between Oriental religion and Slavic. Hanuš bases his entire book "Die Wissenschaft des slavischen Mythos" on such an hypothesis. Archer also states frankly in discussing the great religions of the world, "We are linked with India and Hinduism."<sup>370</sup> Furthermore, it is well to keep in mind the fact that scholars are of the opinion that basically more or less the same folklore exists everywhere.<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless it does not seem in keeping with the facts to maintain that there were no distinctive elements in ancient Slavic belief and practice.

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368. Cf. Gen. 3.

369. Meyer, op. cit. p. 244.

370. J.A. Archer, "Hinduism" in The Great Religions of the World, E.J. Jurji, ed., p. 46.

371. Morfill, op. cit. p. 26.

The religion of the pagan Slavs seems to have been a purely domestic religion with the idea of a state religion not entering into the Slavic concept of one's relation to the supreme being.<sup>372</sup> The religion of the early Slavs has also been characterized as of the non-fanatical type. It is a question as to whether such a statement permits of a broad application. As a matter of fact Orloff limits it to the religion of the Southern Slavs maintaining that it was of a purer kind than the Scandinavian or that of the northwestern Slavs.<sup>373</sup>

The dual principle of good and of evil, of light and of darkness, is very prominent in early Slavic belief. Even though it is admitted that not all Slavic deities can be paired off into good and bad, nevertheless the cult of the early Slavic tribes bears out the claim that ancient Slavs conceived of the principles of good and of evil as existing independently side by side. In some creation myths the devil appears as the helper of God in the work of creation.<sup>374</sup>

The idea of sin appears in ancient Slavic belief in the concept of the necessity of sacrifices for the gods. The gods were pictured as being delighted by gifts. Their anger could be appeased by them and the conduct of the gods towards men could thus be influenced. The unworthiness of man to appear in the presence of the deity is well brought out in the account

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372. Morfill, op. cit. p. 276.

373. Orloff, op. cit. p. 420.

374. Máchal, Nákres, p. 4.

of the priest serving in the temple and withdrawing in order to exhale and inhale lest the air of the temple be polluted by the breath of a mere mortal. Also the fear which permeated the entire life of the pagan Slav and regulated his every action supports the view that early Slavic religion operated with the idea of offense against the deity.

The ancient Slavs believed in the existence of a soul and in a life beyond the grave. Whether this concept of a future existence included more than the soul cannot be definitely determined. However, it does not seem so, in spite of the fact that mention is made of a god who awakens the dead. This is very likely due to the influence of the Christian religion. But it is firmly established that the Slavic concept of the future existence was sensuous. Nor was it easy, according to Slavic belief, to enter the realms of bliss. The way was pictured as a glassy or iron mountain hard to climb. Filings of nails, or claws were therefore thought to be necessary for successful negotiation of this mountain leading to the land of bliss and happiness. The idea of righteousness through one's own efforts is thus introduced.

The facts presented above concerning the religion of the pagan Slavs amply bear out the Scriptural teaching concerning the creation of man in a pure and innocent state, of his fall into sin and of a consequent obscuring of his original knowledge of God.<sup>375</sup>

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375. Cf. Romans 1 and 11

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