

# Cosmology and Deities in Slovene Folk Narrative and Song Tradition

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*It is the aim of this paper to examine Slovene traditions, mainly folk narrative and song traditions and partly customs that contain some traces of old Slavic deities and cosmology. These traces are then compared to other similar religious structures. In this way the origin of earth, the flood, the thunder deity and the cosmological fight, the mother goddess, the underworld, the yearly cycle, the day and night cycle and the world axis are being discussed.*

## 1. The Origin of Earth Resting on a Fish – Faronika the Fish

In cosmogonic myths, as well as in the Bible, water symbolizes the original matter from which a new world was created. Hindu texts, for instance, mention that »Everything was water, ample waters had no banks.« The Bible says: »The spirit of God blew over the waters.«

The notion of primeval waters at the onset of the world is almost universal. Often it is accompanied by the myth of diving animals such as the Hindu boar (God Vishnu), for instance, that brings dirt to the water surface. It is very likely that Slovene folk tradition contained notions of the earth originating from a grain of sand from the sea bed; this motif was published by Janez Trdina in Neven in 1858. According to the story, as it narrates: at the beginning there was nothing but God, the sun and the sea. The sun was scorchingly hot and God dived into the sea to take a bath. When he resurfaced, a grain of sand was stuck beneath one of his nails. The sand fell to the sea bed and from it our earth came into existence.<sup>1</sup>

The earth thus floated on the surface of the cosmic ocean. Folk fairy tales recount that two fish circle the floating earth:

*Zemlja plava na vodi, okoli nje pa se podita dve veliki ribi. Kadar se katera od njiju obregne ob zemljo ali udari po njej z repom, nastane potres.*

*The earth floats on water, and two big fish swim around it. When one of them snubs the earth or hits it with its tail, this causes an earthquake. (Porabje, recorded by Števan Kúhar).<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Iv(an) Trdina, Odkuda nam zemlja (Where Did This Land Come from, pp. 60-61), Narodne pripovedi iz staroslovinskoga bajeslovja (Folk Tales from Old Slavic Mythology), in: Neven 7, Ljubljana 1858. Comp. also: Jakob Kelemina, Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva (Folk Tales and Fairy Tales of Slovenes), Celje 1930, No. 206/III.

<sup>2</sup> Š. Kúhar, Narodno blago vognrkij Slovāncof (Heritage of Hungarian Slovenes), in: Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje 8, Maribor 1911, p. 59, No. 52.



Faronika the Fish, relief from Čedad / Cividale, Italy, 8th century.

According to some folk tales the earth did not just remain floating on water, but was stuck on a fish or a water snake. Slovenes still have a tradition that says that a huge fish carries the earth on its back. When the fish moves, an earthquake occurs. When it dives into the water, this causes the end of the world. The same is quoted in the folk song about Faronika the fish in which Jesus asks the fish not to swing its tail or turn onto its back lest the world be sunk or doomed:<sup>3</sup>

*Riba po morji plava,  
riba Faronika.  
Jezus za njo priplava  
po morja globočin.*

*A fish swims in the sea,  
A fish named Faronika.  
Jesus swims after it  
From the great sea depths.*

<sup>3</sup> Karel Štrekelj, *Slovenske narodne pesmi I (Slovene Folk Songs I)*, Ljubljana 1894 (henceforth SNP), p. 500, No. 493; *Slovenske ljudske pesmi I (Slovene Folk Songs I)*, Ljubljana 1970 (henceforth SLP), p. 123, No. 20/2.

»O le čakaj, čakaj riba,  
riba Faronika.  
Te bomo kaj prašali  
kako se po svet godi.«

»Wait for me,  
Faronika the fish!  
We want to ask you  
What goes on around the world.«

»Če bom jest z mojim repom zvila,  
ves svet potopljen bo.  
Če se bom jest na moj hrbt zvrnila,  
ves svet pogubljen bo.  
O nikari, nikari riba,  
riba Faronika.  
Zavolj nedolžnih otročičev,  
zavolj porodnih žen.«

»If I wag my tail  
The whole world will be sunk.  
If I turn onto my back  
The whole world will be doomed.  
»Oh do not do this,  
Faronika the fish.  
For the sake of innocent babes  
And women in labor.«

Chaotic snake – or a fish – lives in the sea, dozing and resting. According to proto-Indo-European religious notions it rides on the back of Varuna. Varuna is the proto-god who had created the world from original chaos. According to Phoenician mythology and the Bible the sea lion Leviathan, when irritated, could cause the end of the world. The same is true of the German mythological Midgard snake, of the Grecian Hydra, the Babylonian Tiamat, Swabian Zelebrant, etc. Slavs had similar explanatians as well.<sup>4</sup>

Faronika the fish from Slovene folk traditions is a parallel to these mythical creatures. Her name originates from the folk belief that when they were devoured by the Red Sea, the pharaoh's warriors turned into fish and in certain situations may assume human form. The tradition about Faronika the fish became interwoven with the folk tale about Veronika from Mali grad by Kamnik, and the tale about mermaid Melusina. The tale states that because of her avarice Veronika had been bewitched into a half girl half snake, a woman with the lower body of a snake, and is thus depicted on a twelfth-century relief in Mali grad. The oldest one among the still-preserved tales about Veronika from Kamnik is the one dated 1684 that was later recorded on paper. Somewhat shortened, it was preserved by Valvasor<sup>5</sup> and later on conveyed in oral or in literary form in numerous variants. Emilijan Cevc alone noted down ten variants of this motif. Cevc was of the opinion that the tale had originated from the 1684 Kamnik coat-of-arms that, according to him, depicted St. Margaret and the dragon or the snake. The picture was mistakenly interpreted as Veronika – half woman half snake. He felt that the snake became part of the tale because people thus explained the long necks or tails of dragons or snakes in this coat-of-arms; these tails optically merged with the image of St. Margaret. The depiction of Veronika, half snake or half fish, therefore originated because of the contamination of the tale about the mermaid Melusina with the tale of Faronika the fish, and hence the name Veronika was born.

According to France Stele, Faronika became the art history technical term for a mermaid.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this see: Zmago Šmitek, Slovenske ljudske predstave o stvarjenju sveta (Slovene Folk Notions about Creation of the World), in: Traditiones 27, Ljubljana 1998, pp. 118–119.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Weichard Valvasor, Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain, Laibach-Nürnberg 1689, XI, p. 543.

## 2. The Flood and Kurent

The tradition about the world flood has been preserved in Slovenia as well as in many other parts of the world. After having heard the tale about the flood in Mengeš, Janez Trdina wrote the tale titled *Povijest o božjem kokotu* (The Tale about God's Rooster), publishing it in *Neven* in 1856.<sup>6</sup> According to the tale the earth was initially barren. There was nothing on it but stone. Then God sent forth his rooster. The rooster sat on a rock and laid an egg. The egg cracked and seven rivers started to flow from it. The rivers drenched the land that quickly became green and fertile. People lived in this paradise with no work or worry. High in the sky the rooster of God crowed to let them know when to go to bed, eat or work. But the people grew haughty, stopped listening to the rooster's crowing, and sickness descended upon the earth. People finally decided that in order to raise the surface of the rivers the egg had to be broken. They struck a stone against the egg, the egg broke with a mighty thunder, and out came so much water that it flooded the whole human race. The waters reached the highest mountain peaks. The only one who managed to escape was a guard who climbed to the top of the highest mountain and from there up a vine into the clouds.

The question whether Trdina's, or later Bilc's,<sup>7</sup> record of this tale was authentic or not remains unsolved. The motif of the cosmic egg and the flood is a reflection of old archetypal notions of numerous peoples. The egg is often connected with the genesis of the world and its gradual formation. According to some archetypal religious notions a cosmic egg hatched on the surface of primeval waters. Hindu texts contain this reference: »Brahmanda, the egg of the world, rolls on the surface of waters.« The cosmic egg has been preserved in Chinese mythology, in which giant Panku, who had been dreaming in the egg, halved it and thus created the Sky and the Earth. In antique Orphean cosmogony the night gives birth to an egg, from the egg comes love, and from the two egg shells the Earth and the Sky are born.

According to the Slovene tale the guard, originally a Carniolan from Kranjska (Carniola), fled higher and higher into the mountains until the waters flooded even the last mountain top. The guard came upon a vine, which belonged to Kurent. Happy that the guard took hold of his plant, Kurent made the plant grow high into the clouds. After nine years the waters vanished and the earth became dry again. The guard, who had spent these years clutching the vine, eating its grapes and drinking its wine, was able to climb down to solid ground again.

The flood can be found in numerous mythologies and religions all over the world. Let us just remember Noah from the Old Testament, Ziusudra from Mesopotamia, Utnapishtim from Sumer, or Manu from India.<sup>8</sup> In the Slovene tale Kurent saved the guard from Carniola from the flood.

In Slovene tradition, Kurent is a mythical lunar character of fertility.<sup>9</sup> According to France Bezljaj's etymological explanation the name Kurent has been derived from the root creating, devising. If we connect this tale with the one about the creature in the moon,

<sup>6</sup> Iv. Trdina, *Povijest o božjem kokotu* (The Tale about God's Rooster, pp. 105–107), *Povijest o Kurentu* (The Tale about Kurent, pp. 153–156); *Narodne pripovedi iz staroslovinskoga bajeslovja* (Folk Tales from Old Slavic Mythology), in: *Neven* 7, Ljubljana 1858.

<sup>7</sup> Jazego Bilc, *Pravlica od Kuranta* (The Tale about Kurant), in: *Novice* 17, 28. 2. 1857, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> Zmago Šmitek, *Kristalna gora* (Crystal Mountain), Ljubljana 1998, pp. 24–25.



Kurents from Markovci in Styria

spread practically all over the world, and knowing that the moon in Slovene tales is often personified by Kurent, it seems that Kurent was viewed as a primogenitor, a being who helped the human race to multiply and the fields to regenerate and bear food. The root *kur* could also be connected with the chicken (*kura* in Slovene) or to the rooster, and to hatching an egg, which is the attribute of the heavenly God the Creator. Let us also consider a Slovene folk Carnival custom in which the *kurenti*, accompanied by a procession of the *pickei* (chicks) jump up and down and »plow« around houses to make their owner's turnips grow thick and plump. The latest archeological discoveries revealed the connection between the *kurenti* and the antique cult of Cybele, according to which the mythical companions of Cybele were called the *kurenti* and the *koribanti*.<sup>10</sup> They were dressed in the masks of a cock. In view of all this we can safely say that in all probability Kurent was a deity or a demon connected to fertility and licentiousness, even though Milko Matičetov as well as Leopold Kretzenbacher had denied Kurent his mythical origin,<sup>11</sup> people believed that kurent was responsible for the land's renewal.

<sup>9</sup> According to Ivan Grafenauer Kurent, or Keremet, was the lunar proto-father and an evil superior being, a younger brother and an opponent to Juma, the superior being; in: *Prakulturne bajke pri Slovencih*, Etnolog 14, Ljubljana 1942, pp.2–45, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Slavko Ciglencečki, Late Traces of the Cults of Cybele and Attis. The Origins of the Kurenti and the Pine-wood Marriages ("Borovo gostovanje"), in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 2, Ljubljana, Videm 1999, pp. 21–31.

<sup>11</sup> Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Germanische Mythen in der epischen Volksdichtung der Slowenen*, Graz 1941; Milko Matičetov, *O bajnih bitjih Slovencev s pristavkom o Kurentu* (On Mythological Beings among Slovenes, with a Supplement on Kurent), in: *Traditiones* 14, Ljubljana 1985, pp. 23–32.

Unlike ordinary human birth from a mother's body the renewal of the world and humanity is the task of men. Alan Dundes has ascertained that in most myths referring to the flood male deities were at work, and that the sole survivor was male as well. This is true of the Sumerian Ziusudra, the Babylonian Utnapishtim, the Indian Manu,<sup>12</sup> and also of the Carniolan Kurent.

### 3. Perun and His Fight with a Dragon

Since life on earth is subjected to the laws of death and birth, which is true for living beings as well as nature, many religious beliefs contain the motif of a cosmic snake, the opponent of the sun as the source of life. In Ancient Egypt, for instance, the sun god Ra is repeatedly attacked by the snake Apofis, but Ra always wins the duel. In Vedic mythology Vritra endangers Indra. Antique Zeus managed to defeat Tifon, the hundred-headed monster, only after a hard fight, and the Hittite weather god Taru had to fight the dragon Ilujankas.

A fight with a dragon is the basic myth and a repetition of creation, the counterpoint between two opposing forces representing the central act of cosmogonic and fertility myth.<sup>13</sup> This is why numerous mythological heroes – and the heroes in fairy-tales later on – fight a dragon in the course of their lives.<sup>14</sup> In Slavic mythology Veles was said to assume the image of a dragon or a snake. Like the antique Zeus, Germanic Thor, Scandinavian Odin or the Vedic Indra, Perun was the god of the heavens, and therefore Veles's opponent.

Perun, in Slovenia also called Gromovnik (the Thunder God), St. Elias or Trot, was the Slavic god of thunder and lightning, the supreme god and the creator.<sup>15</sup> Similar to the fight between the heavenly deity Perkunas and the chthonic god Velnias from Baltic mythology, Slovene folk tradition contains the memory of the fight between Perun and Veles. Like Thor with his Mjøltnir (hammer), Perun uses his golden axe or his hammer – a symbol of thunder – to strike at the hostile snake. Under the pseudonym Fr. Pohorski, Davorin Trstenjak published in Novice in 1858 a folk tale from Pohorje. It recounts of Trot and Kresnik riding in a golden coach to a feast hosted by the snake queen. The snake queen sends a snake to meet them. With her eagle's wings the snake flies from under the clouds to the golden coach. Using a golden axe, Trot beheads the snake. The snake hits a cloud with her tail and a terrible storm ensues.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A. Dundes, *The Flood as Male Myth of Creation, The Flood Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1988, pp. 167–182.

<sup>13</sup> V. V. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov wrote exhaustive studies on this subject; see: *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskih drevnostej*, Moscow 1974. Comp. also: V. V. Ivanov, *La situazione etnica e religiosa dell' Europa orientale del X. sec. d. C.*, in: *Studi slavistici offerti a Alessandro Ivanov nel suo 70. compleanno*, Udine 1992.

<sup>14</sup> A fight with a dragon has been ritually connected with boys' initiation. For more on this see: Vladimir Ia. Propp, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*. Torino 1949, pp. 358–362.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the basic Slavic myth see: V.V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskih drevnostej*, Moscow 1874.

<sup>16</sup> Fr. Pohorski (Davorin Terstenjak), *Slovenske narodne pripovedke. O kresniku* (Slovene Folk Tales. On Kresnik), in: *Novice* 16, Ljubljana 1858, p. 374; comp: Jakob Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Celje 1930, No. 202.



The hero fights the dragon, the beehive painting (Slovenian Ethnographical Museum in Ljubljana)

As Perun defeated Veles, the Zeleni Jurij, sometimes named Jurij, Jarilo or Vesnik, conquers his enemy Rabolj in a duel; Slovene folk customs have preserved the memory of this fight.<sup>17</sup> In Slovene folk songs a hero saves the girl Marjetica. In the song »Trdoglav and Marjetica« (Trdoglav in Marjetica SNP I, 21) a prince saves a girl kept captive in Trdoglav's desolate castle; Trdoglav here personifies the devil. In these songs or narratives the hero defeats his opponent in a duel, or escapes with the girl on his horse, managing to elude his pursuers by using magic objects or by demanding something impossible from the girl's abductor.

Radoslav Katičić has written extensively on Jurij's myth among the Slavs and on the duel between the Thunder God with a dragon.<sup>18</sup> A comparison with the constellation of Orion and with Early Medieval Slavic reliefs has been made by Vlado Nartnik<sup>19</sup> and Zmago Šmitek.<sup>20</sup>

The same as Jurij, also Kresnik, sometimes called Šentjanževc, Vedogonja, Bergant, etc. defeats his enemy: Vedomec – sometimes called Vouvel the giant or Babylon the snake king<sup>21</sup> – who threatens Jurij and the world. Nikolai Mikhailov,<sup>22</sup> and Z. Šmitek, followed

<sup>17</sup> Niko Kuret, *Praznično leto Slovencev (Slovene Festive Year, Second Edition)*, Ljubljana 1989 (henceforth PLS) I., pp. 254–255.

<sup>18</sup> R. Katičić, *Nachlese zum urslawischen Mythos vom Zweikampf des Donnergottes mit dem Drachen*, Wiener slawistisches Jahrbuch, Bd. 34, Wien 1988.

<sup>19</sup> V. Nartnik, *Sveti Jurij in začetki glagolice (St. George and the Beginnings of the Glagolitic Alphabet)*, in: *Riječ, časopis za filologiju* 1/1-2, Rijeka 1995, pp. 27–32.

<sup>20</sup> Zmago Šmitek, *Astral Symbolism on the Pre-Romanesque Relief in Keutschach (Hodiše)*, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 4, Ljubljana, Udine 2001, pp. 119–140.

<sup>21</sup> Comp.: Jakob Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Celje 1930, No. 35, 179, 1/I.

<sup>22</sup> N. A. Mihajlov, *Fragment slovenskoj mifologičeskoj tradicii, v: Koncept dviženija v jazyke i kul'ture, Rossijskaja akademija nauk, Institut slavjanovedenija i balkanistiki, Moscow 1996. pp. 127–141; N. Mikhailov, Kr(e)snik, eine Figur der Slowenischen version des urslawischen Hauptmythos*, in: *Baltische und slawische Mythologie*, Madrid 1998, pp. 111–137.

the connection between Perun and Kresnik.<sup>23</sup> Kresnik is connected with fire, with the striking of sparks, and the sun. In Slovene folk tales and songs he is the winner of the fight with a dragon who abducts Kresnik's sister and shuts her in a rocky cave. The young prince saves his sister, an act which is followed by the sacred marriage – hierosgamos.<sup>24</sup> Some folk songs, sung around St. John's fire on Midsummer Eve, for instance the ones called *Brat in sestra* (Brother and Sister, SNP III, 5014) and *Device tri kresujejo* (Three Maidens Celebrate Midsummer Eve, SNP I, 297)<sup>25</sup> still, although only vaguely, contain the memory of the sacred marriage:

*Device tri kresujejo,  
Na sred vesi kres nitijo:  
»Bog daj ti dro, oj kralič mlad!«*

*Bara srednjo dečelco:  
»Kaku pa ti pojaš?«*

*Taku lepu sprepivlajo,  
Da se je daleč slišalo,  
Daleč v deveto dežalo.*

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Jaz pojam, ko bi cinglol.«*

*Kaj mladi kralič govori:  
»Al je to glas žegnanah zvonov?«*

*Bara mlajši dečelco:  
»Kaku pa ti pojaš?«*

*Bil je to glas drobnah tic,  
Bil je to glas čistah devic? —*

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Jaz le pojam, kakor znam.«*

*Daj mi konjča frišnega,  
Da šitro ta pojzdim ga,*

*Bara starejši dečelco:  
»Kaj tvoj oča delajo?«*

*Da jaz sam še slišol bom,  
Kaj je to kej za en glas!«*

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Moj oča drugja ne delajo,  
Ko rumeno pšenico merijo.«*

*Sda pa kralič perleti,  
Tam device tri dobi.*

*Bara srednjo dečelco:  
»Kaj tvoj oča delajo?«*

*Tako lepu sprepivlajo,  
Da kralavo serce premotijo.*

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Moj ča drugja ne delajo,  
Ko bele tolarje preštivlajo.«*

*Bara starejši dečelco:  
»Kaku kej ti pojaš?«*

*Bara mlajši dečelco:  
»Kaj tvoj oča delaj?«*

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Jaz pojam, ko bi zvonil.«*

<sup>23</sup> Zmago Šmitek, *Kresnik: An Attempt at a Mythological Reconstruction*, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 1, Ljubljana, Pisa 1998, pp. 93–118.

<sup>24</sup> Comp. also: Monika Kroječ, *The Horse as a Cosmological Creature in the Slovene Mythopoetic Heritage*, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 1, Ljubljana, Pisa 1998, pp. 153–167.

<sup>25</sup> Recorded by Matija Majar in Podgorjane in Rosental. Manuscript in VO XVI. F 8–10. Printed by Slovenska Bčela II. 1, Celovec/Klagenfurt 1851, p. 187.

*Ona mu odgovori:  
»Jaz nemam oče bil matere,  
Sim zapuščena sirutica.«*

*Njo vzame kralič pa sebo.*

*Daleč v deveto dežalo*

*Kralič ji pa govori:  
»To je tista štimica,  
K se v deveto dežalo je slišala.«*

\* \* \*

*Three maidens, celebrating St. John's Eve,  
Light a bonfire in their village midst:  
»May god grant you good health, young  
prince!«*

*Their song is beautiful and fair  
The beauty of it is heard far,  
Far off away in the wonderland.*

*The young prince speaks:  
»Is this the sound of blessed bells?*

*Is this the sound of tiny birds,  
Is this the sound of maidens pure?*

*Saddle a fresh horse for me,  
So I may ride with him away,*

*To hear this sound all by myself,  
To see to whom does it belong!«*

*The young prince to the village comes  
To find the three young maidens there.*

*They sing with such a wondrous voice  
That they entice the prince's heart.*

*He asks the oldest of them there:  
»What may the sound of your voice be?«*

*The girl then gives him this reply:  
»My voice, it sounds like church bells  
wide.«*

*He asks the middle maiden there:  
»What may the sound of your voice be?«*

*The girl then gives him this reply:  
»My voice, it is like jingling bells.«*

*He asks the youngest of them there:  
»What may the sound of your voice be?«*

*The maiden gives him this reply:  
»I sing the way I know to sing.«*

*He asks the oldest of them there:  
»What does your father do in life?«*

*The maiden gives him this reply:  
»My father, he does naught  
But measure corn throughout the day.«*

*He asks the middle maiden there:  
»What does your father do in life?«*

*The middle one answers him thus:  
»My father, he does naught  
But count the shiny coins of his.«*

*He asks the youngest of them all:  
»What does your father do in life?«*

*The youngest gives him this reply:  
»I have no mother nor a father,  
I am but a poor orphan girl.«*

*The prince then takes the youngest one,  
And off they go to wonderland.*

*The prince then tells the maiden young:  
»Yours was the voice I heard  
So far away in the wonderland.«*

Since the maiden that Kresnik has chosen for his wife does not know of her parents, it is not impossible that Kresnik, the young prince, marries his sister. According to N. Kuret the custom of the midsummer marriage, or the Pentecost couple from West European traditions, is similar to the tale about the marriage of the Sun to the Moon.<sup>26</sup> As the sun sets for some time, Kresnik rests and dies as well, but always returns to this world. While Perun remains the indisputable supreme God of the Heavens, Zeleni Jurij and Kresnik are susceptible to death, constantly traveling between this world and the other, but always returning.

#### 4. Mother Goddess, Mokoš

Almost all, even the oldest world religions,<sup>27</sup> are based on the idea of the Great Mother, or the giver of life, who may be either good or fearful. Such are for example the Phrygian Cybele, Atargis from Syria, Astarta from Phoenicia, Sumerian Anana, Babylonian Ishtar, antique Venus, Balto-Polabian Živa, Germanic Frigga and many others. Many Slavs worshipped Mokoš, a female deity of fertility, who was also the patron saint of trade or craft, specially of spinning, weaving and also of music. Mokoš was the only female deity in Vladimir's pantheon in Kiev. The root of the name *mok-* denotes wet, damp, while the root *mot-* denotes to coil, to spin. Water and spinning held a central position in the cult of this deity whom the Russians also called Mat syra, denoting Damp Mother Earth. This female deity also had its more terryfying side that made her similar to antique Hekate, Grecian Artemis, Roman Diana, Russian Jaga Baba, German Frau Bercht, or Slovene Pehtra Baba. Similar is also the tradition of Belestis or Belena, a Celtic deity from Noricum, a companion of Belin or Belenus.<sup>28</sup> Belestis was the goddess of light bringing health and taking care of birth and development in the animal and human world.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the fact that the great Mother Goddess evoked terror and fear, she was a brilliant goddess, often the companion or mother of the sun god, much like Isis in Ancient Egypt. Isis was the sister and, at the same time, wife of Osiris, a goddess who knew how to practice sorcery and who taught people how to bake bread, spin, weave and heal.

In Slovene folk traditions these properties and skills were the domain of female mythic creatures of the *sredozimke*; two of them are Zlata Baba (Golden woman), called also Baba, and Pehtra Baba; the latter is still very much alive in folk traditions. Pehtra roams around in the period between Christmas and Epiphany, therefore in the period of twelve nights at *pernahti*, accompanied by the *divja jaga* (wild hunt, wild chase). According to folk beliefs they bring brightness, light and fertility, which is also evident from their name. The name has been derived from German Frau Holle or Percht, Bercht, meaning that which glitters.<sup>30</sup> In the year 1858 Peter Hicinger wrote the following:

<sup>26</sup> Niko Kuret, *Praznično leto Slovencev I*, Ljubljana 1989 (Second Ed.), p. 433.

<sup>27</sup> For more on this see: Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, London 1989.

<sup>28</sup> More on Belin or on Belbog has been written by N. Mikhailov: *Appunti su \*Belobog e \*Černobog*, in: *Ricerche Slavistiche* 41, 1994, pp. 41–51.

<sup>29</sup> Marjeta Šašel Kos, *Belin*, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 4, Ljubljana, Udine 2001, pp. 9–16.

*Pehtra baba roams around on the Karavanke mountains, strolls around the mountain tops above the Kamnik Alps with a golden bucket in her hand.*<sup>31</sup>

The wild chase, connected with this character, brings fertility and renewal to nature. Similar in character were the *vesne* who strolled around in February, bringing fertility. February, once also called *vesnar* in Slovene, had acquired its old name from this deity. Another property of all female mythic creatures that adopted the role of the *Zlata baba* or *Pehtra* was her connection with spinning, thread or yarn, and also other female chores such as doing laundry, bread baking, etc. As a sacrificial offering people would leave for them a flock of wool, sheaves of flax, napkins, etc.<sup>32</sup> Since it was forbidden to spin or weave on certain days, such mythological creatures were called *torka* (Tuesday), *petka* (Friday), *kvatra* (Ember Day). *Rojenice* or *sojenice* (the Fates) are also connected with this mighty female deity who had power over life and death. Parke established the beginning of one's life and cut the end of the life yarn of every person.

With the arrival of Christianity, *Pehtra* has been replaced by St. Lucia, who brings light, and St. Gertrude (*Jedrt*) who spins flax and yarn, and whose attributes are the mouse and the spindle. On St. Gertrude's nameday the mouse bites through the yarn, signifying that spinning is no longer allowed. *Pehtra's* magical and healing powers have been adopted by St. Walpurgis, whose nameday is on May 1 »when witches have the strongest power.« Some parts of Slovenia still know the tradition about *Mokoška* the witch and *Pehtra* the witch; in Gailtall in Austria, for instance, people talked about *Pehtra Baba's* crime, committed by the women who practised sorcery.

## 5. The Underworld and Veles

*Veles* or *Volos* was a Slavic god of the underworld, of cattle and war, akin to Baltic *Velnias* who was the opponent to *Perkunas*, and was able to transform himself into a dragon or a snake.<sup>33</sup> Since he represented the underground world, people built him temples in valleys. Temples dedicated to *Perun*, on the other hand, were erected on hills because *Perun* was the god of the heavens. The remnants of cult altars in Macedonia still evoke the memory of *Perkun* and *Veles*.<sup>34</sup> In folk tradition, *Veles* was also called *Trdoglav*, *Črt*, *Potoglav* or *Velikan Vouvel* (*Vouvel* the Giant). Wishing to increase

<sup>30</sup> Niko Kuret, *Sredozimka pri Slovencih* and *K imenu sredozimke*, in: Niko Kuret, *Opuscula selecta*, Ljubljana 1997, pp. 66–78 and pp. 79–84 (original: *Die Mitwinterfrau der Slowenen*, in: *Acta quinti conventus de ethnographia Alpium Orientalium tractantis, Slovenj Gradec*, 29. III. – 1. IV. 1967, Ljubljana 1969, pp. 209–239 and *Zum Namen der Mitwinterfrau. Innovation und Wandel*, in: *Festschrift für Oskar Moser zum 80. Geburtstag*, Graz 1994, 241–248). Comp. also: Niko Kuret, *Beseda "baba" v narodopisju* (*The Word »Baba« in Ethnography*), in: *Traditiones* 23, Ljubljana 1994, pp. 15–18.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Hicinger, *Tudi nekaj iz slovenskega bajeslovja III: O divjem lovu* (Also *Something from Slovene Mythology III: On the Wild Chase*), in: *Novice* 16, Ljubljana 1858, p. 269.

<sup>32</sup> *Slovenskaja mitologija*, enciklopedijski rečnik, Beograd 2001.

<sup>33</sup> For more on *Veles* see: Roman Jakobson, *The Slavic God Veles and his Indo-European Cognates*, in: *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani*, Torino 1969. V. V. Ivanov & V. N. Toporov, *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskih drevnostej*, Moscow 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Nikos Čausidis, *Mitskite slike na južnite Sloveni* (*Mythological Pictures of the South Slavs*), Skopje 1994, pp. 428–434.

his wealth by kidnapping their bride or a flock of sheep from his opponents Perun or Kresnik, Veles hides them in his barren castle made of rocks, sometimes also called the golden castle. According to folk tradition Vouvel hides treasures in a mountain. The only way of obtaining these treasures is by picking the *vouvelica* grass that, like the fern, blooms only on Midsummer Eve from midnight to one:

*In a deep mountain Vouvel keeps a large herd of cattle. A blacksmith once notices that Vouvel has left his home. He goes and strikes his hammer against Vouvel's door. A white lady answers from within: »Whoever you may be, you cannot open this door. You must find the vouvelica grass and say: 'Whoa, cow, return to Krsnik, the earth needs rain!' The door shall open quickly then.» As soon as the man hears this, he leaves to look for the vouvelica grass. But his long search is not successful. Then he sees a black cloud in the midst of which Vouvel the Giant is riding home. Frightened, the blacksmith runs away so that the giant cannot catch him.*<sup>35</sup>

A legend recounts that the Vurberg Kresnik was born in the Vurberg castle, also called *Kačjak pri Ptuju*. As Kresnik is roaming faraway lands, a terrible snake comes to the castle and lies down in the Drava. The river floods the fields. The snake then slithers to the castle and coils around it. The dragon spends six months in this position, lying in wait for Kresnik's sister *Vesina*. On St. George's Day Kresnik returns home and steps on the snake, but the snake has wings and rises into the air. Kresnik grows wings and the fight continues in the air. Finally Kresnik conquers the snake, it falls to the ground and Kresnik chains it to a rock in the castle brook. Golden wheat starts to fall upon the earth, and Kresnik marries *Vesina*.<sup>36</sup>

While the fight between Perun and Veles takes place in the sky, the fight between Kresnik and Vedomec, who endangers fertility and threatens to take away the harvest, occurs on the ground. There are numerous folk tales about this fight. Even today some people say that when there is lightning on beautiful fall evenings, on Christmas or on Midsummer Day, the *vedavci* (vedomci) fight the *šentjanževci* (the kresniki). They may assume the image of two bulls, a red and a black one, or two dogs, one white and the other black. The vedomci are creatures who could – transformed into an animal or a half-animal – cause an eclipse of the sun, and could uproot old trees. In groups, or one by one, the vedomci fought others on crossroads or underneath trees.

Even though Veles endangered cattle or the riches of the land, or sometimes herded cattle into his underwater domain, he watched over cattle herds in the wintertime. People worshipped him as the protector of cattle. This role of the protector of sheep and cattle, as well as Veles's healing abilities, are reflected in the character of the wolf shepherd, also called *volčko*, white wolf, *šent*, St. George, or *Jurij s pušo* (George with a gun). The wolf herder is a mythological protector of cattle herds, a forest and a chthonic deity like the Slavic – especially Serbian – *Dažbog*, Germanic *Wodan*, antique *Pluto*, or Celtic *Dis*

<sup>35</sup> After: Fr. Pohorski (Davoren Terstenjak), *Pohorski Vouvel* (The Vouvel from Pohorje), in: *Novice* 1858, 1st page; Jakob Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Celje 1930, No. 179.

<sup>36</sup> Jakob Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Celje 1930, No. 245/III.



Veles in the form of a snake, depicted on the coat-of-arms of the Stubenberg family who owned the Vurberg castle (vurm= snake, worm) on Ptujsko polje between 1441 and 1616. (From Ivan Stopar's book *Gradovi na Slovenskem/Castles in Slovenia*, Ljubljana 1987).

Pater.<sup>37</sup> The wolf herder,<sup>38</sup> Jurij s pušo and Vedomec are characters who, each in his own way, adopted the role of Veles. Christianity has replaced them with St. Sava, St. Martin,

<sup>37</sup> Comp.: J. Polívka, Vlčí pastyr, in: *Sborník prací verovaných profesoru Dru Václavu Tillovi k šedesátým narozeninám 1867–1927*, Praha 1927.

<sup>38</sup> More on the Wolf Shepherd see.: Mirjam Mencej, Volčji pastir v kontekstu dosedanjih raziskav na področju slovanske mitologije (The Wolf Shepherd in the Context of Previous Research of Slavic Mythology), in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 4, Ljubljana - Udine 2001, pp. 159–187.



Shepherd the devil, in: Johann W. Valvasor, *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain*, Laibach-Nürnberg 1689.

St. Nicholas and St. Basilius. In the role of the protector of herds and medicine he was identified as St. Blas.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. The Yearly Cycle and the Goldenhorn

According to folk beliefs, Zlatorog (the Goldenhorn) is a white chamois with golden horns, the leader of white goats who, shepherded by ladies in white, graze on mountain ridges. The ladies in white protect the Goldenhorn from any harm, even if he is struck in his heart. From a drop of his blood blooms a miraculous flower called the flower of Triglav. As soon as the wounded Goldenhorn eats the flower, he is cured. The Goldenhorn is the owner of all treasures guarded by a snake with several heads, and whoever can manage to get hold of the Goldenhorn's golden horn may take the treasures.

A similar tradition, but about a white chamois, has been preserved in Koroška (Carinthia); in the Gorenjska (Upper Carniola) region people speak about a white horse on Vršac; equally similar is the theme about Nesrečni lovec (Unfortunate Hunter) in folk songs.

<sup>39</sup> Comp.: Gregor Krek, *Beiträge zur slavischen Mythologie I. Veles, Volos, Blasius*, in: *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 1, Berlin 1875.

The tradition about a mythological golden or white-hoofed animal with golden horns or with only one horn (the unicorn) and with golden hooves,<sup>40</sup> is of Indo-European origin, in Europe known from Ireland to Albania.<sup>41</sup> The tales are based on antique writers, for instance Euripides, Polybius or Strabo,<sup>42</sup> who wrote about a stag with golden horns. According to an old German saga, written down in the 17<sup>th</sup> or the 18<sup>th</sup> century, king Odin hunts a stag with golden rings, who lures Odin to Hulda's kingdom. There are also legends about St. Hubertus, St. Eustace, St. Felix of Wales, or St. Julian Hospitalit who track a stag. When the stag turns, a cross is formed between its horns, and Jesus Christ speaks from the cross.<sup>43</sup> In the *Laibacher Zeitung* from 1868<sup>44</sup> Karel Dežman published a tale in late romantic disguise about a hunter from Trenta. After being rejected by a girl who favored an Italian tradesman's rich gifts, the hunter from Trenta is persuaded by the Green Hunter into shooting the Goldenhorn. The Goldenhorn eats a miraculous flower, pushes the hunter into an abyss, then digs up the magic garden.<sup>45</sup>

The Goldenhorn personifies the chthonic deity of heavens, holds the key to treasures on earth, and brings life. His opposite Jarnik the Hunter, the Green Hunter, among the Slavs also known under the name Bartholomew, or sometimes called Jurij s pušo, personifies chthonic powers.

In Slovene poetic traditions the Goldenhorn or the white horse, Zeleni Jurij as a rider on a white horse, or the white foal born as a Christmas foal at Christmastime, represent a teriomorphic image of the deity that has the decisive role in the process of renewal. Zeleni Jurij, Kresnik, Zlatorog and the Christmas foal mark the four turning points in the yearly cycle and represent an earthly incarnation of Perun, the god of heavens. The horse is namely a sacrificial animal par excellence, and according to old religious beliefs sacrifice is necessary for the renewal of life on earth. The death of the Goldenhorn concludes the yearly cycle, but the year begins once again with the rebirth in the winter solstice.<sup>46</sup>

## 7. Lepa Vida, Light and Darkness

Vida occupied an important place in Slovene folk traditions. Evident proof of this is found not only in numerous folk songs, but also in the vernacular name for the artemisian

<sup>40</sup> Comp.: Tone Cevc, Pripovedno izročilo o gamsih z zlatimi parklji iz Kamniških Alp (Oral Heritage about the Chamois with the Golden Hoofs from the Kamnik Alps), in: *Traditiones* 2, Ljubljana 1973, pp. 79 – 96; Robert Wildhaber, Das Tier mit den goldenen Hörnen, in: *Alpes orientales* 7, Monachii (München) 1975, pp. 93 – 123.

<sup>41</sup> Comp.: Joža Glonar, "Monoceros" and "Diptamus", in: *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 7, Maribor 1910, pp. 34–106; Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Mystische Einhornjagd. Deutsche und slawische Bild- und Wortzeugnisse zu einem geistlichen Sinnbild-Gefüge*, München 1978.

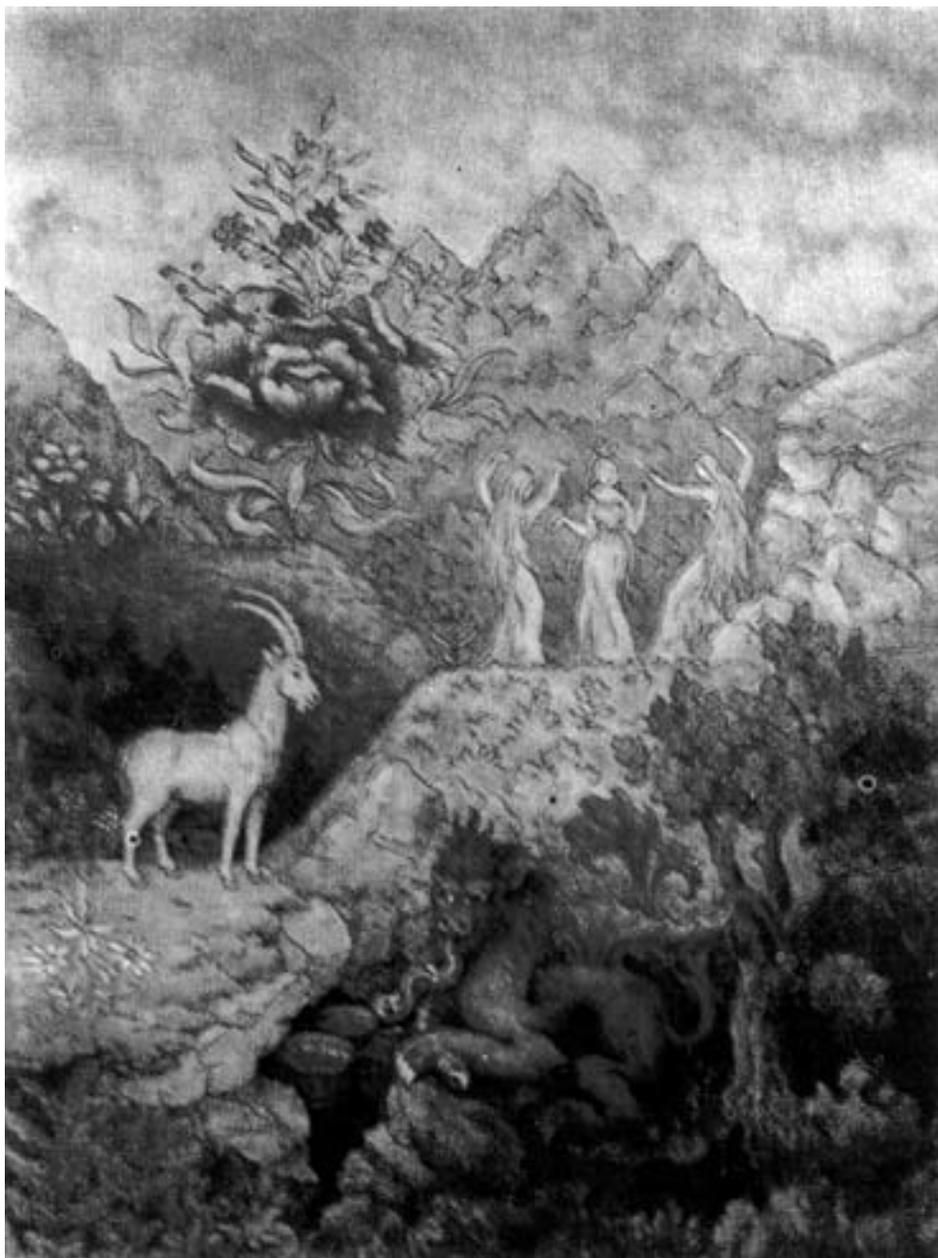
<sup>42</sup> For more on Strabo's and Polybius's reports see.: Marjeta Šašel Kos, From the Tauriscian Gold Mine to the Goldenhorn and the Unusual Alpine Animal, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 1, Ljubljana, Pisa 1998, pp. 169–182.

<sup>43</sup> Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Sage und Mythos vom Zlatorog*, in: Baumbach / Funtek: *Zlatorog, Eine Sage aus den Julischen Alpen*, München 1968, pp. 129–144.

<sup>44</sup> Karel Deschmann, Beiträge zur Landeskunde Krains II. Der Triglaugletscher und die Spuren einstiger Gletscher in Oberkrain: Die Sage vom Goldkrikel (Zlatorog), in: *Laibacher Zeitung* 43, Ljubljana 21. 2. 1868, pp. 325–327.

<sup>45</sup> Comp.: Baumbach / Funtek: *Zlatorog, Eine Sage aus den Julischen Alpen*, München 1968.

<sup>46</sup> For more on this see: Monika Krojej, The Horse as a Cosmological Creature in the Slovene Mythopoetic Heritage, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 1, Ljubljana, Pisa 1998, pp. 153–167.



Jože Karlovšek: Zlatorog, 1955.

plant named after the Greek goddess Artemis; in Slovenia, the plant is called *Vidina zel* (Vida's herb). Yet despite its name it is not easy to prove its mythological role, and Milko Matičetov himself did not grant it a place within the so-called »Slovene pantheon.«<sup>47</sup> But due to numerous artistic adaptations based on folk songs and also because of the symbolic

<sup>47</sup> Milko Matičetov, O bajnih bitjih Slovencev s pristavkom o Kurentu, in: Traditiones 14, Ljubljana 1985, p. 24.

and metaphoric connotations connected to the character of Fair Vida, *lepa Vida* in Slovene, it has become a veritable Slovene myth.

According to a folk song Vida washes her sick child's diapers on a sea shore when a black man sails by. Luring her onto his ship, he takes her across the sea into his kingdom. But Vida misses her sickly baby, her husband and her home terribly, and keeps asking the moon and the sun how they are doing. She asks the sun to take her back home. Although the sun travels very fast, resting only at noon, Vida follows the sun and returns to her husband and child. In some variants Vida is so sad she drowns in the sea. The historical background of the song is the period of Arab and Moor invasions into the Mediterranean and the Adriatic between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Late romantic elements have been added later. Similar motifs have been known elsewhere in the Mediterranean, especially in Sicily, Calabria, Albania and throughout the Balkan peninsula, particularly among the South Slavs and the Lutetian Serbs.<sup>48</sup>

In Slovene mythology, the figure of the mother Fair Vida, laundering diapers by the sea, is similar to a mythological being called *Perica* (Laundress), *Nočna gospa* (Night Lady), or *Božja deklica* (God's Maiden), a beautiful woman clad in white who quietly washes laundry in ponds or springs at night. The motif of a woman doing chores by the water connects Vida with *Perica* and with *Mokoš*, the Slavic goddess of fertility. Above all, Vida is the light aspect of this mythological creature, for she is abducted by a black man who, personifying the night, takes her across the sea; this voyage is an allegory of the sunset or of the setting moon, and of the sun's (moon's) journey. In the morning the sun, accompanied by the morning Dawn (Greek Eos, Roman Aurora, in Slovene mythopoetic heritage called *Sončica* – after *sonce*, the sun) rises from the sea, and in the evening it sets into the sea again, accompanied by the evening Dawn (in Slovene mythopoetic heritage called *Zarika*, after *zarja*, the dawn). Vida is the light that accompanies the sun (the moon), her very name signifying seeing, illumination.

The comparison of fair Vida with the Greek goddess Eos may be extremely bold, but it is interesting that both stories contain the character of an elderly husband. Titon, the lover of Eos, was a mere mortal, so Eos asked Zeus to grant him immortality. But she forgot to mention that she wanted Titon to stay eternally young as well. Titon therefore grew older and older, but could not die, so Eos transformed him into a sloughing cicada. Although the fate of Vida's husband remains unclear, the cicada's sloughing indicates rebirth, much as the sun or the moon transform themselves. One of the songs about Vida contains the connection between Vida and the sun, or the being symbolizing rebirth. In this song, called *Lepa Vida in kača* (Fair Vida and the Snake), Vida lifts a spell from a snake. An allegorical parallel is the fact that, like the cicada, the snake also sheds its skin, therefore symbolically illustrating rebirth.

In the above-mentioned song from Prekmurje about Vida and the snake, written down by Stanko Vraz (SNP 1., 76, 77), Vida weeds millet before dawn. She notices that the dew around her has been shaken off. At night, a large snake had shaken the dew from the millet. The snake has nine tails, and a key on each of them. The snake, in reality a bewitched young prince, asks Vida to follow it to a white castle and there hit it three times

<sup>48</sup> Ivan Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida. Študija o izvoru, razvoju in razkroju narodne balade o Lepi Vidi* (Study on the Origin, Development and Disintegration of Folk Ballad Fair Vida). SAZU, Dela (Dept. of Philology and Literature) 4, Ljubljana 1943.

with three three-year-old hazel switches. Vida obeys it and the snake is transformed into a prince. Together with Vida, the prince becomes ruler of nine castles. This song<sup>49</sup> tells us more about Vida's husband who owns nine castles and rules over nine lands. Nine is the number of cosmological spheres ruled by a cosmological ruler:

*Lepa Vida proso plela,*

*Jako rano pred zorjami.  
Lepa Vida plela proso,  
Stepeno je našla roso:  
»Da bi, Bog daj, mojo bilo,  
Kaj nocoj je tod hodilo,  
Kaj nocoj je tod hodilo,  
Rano roso je strosilo!«*

*Drugo jutro plela proso,  
Stepeno je našla roso:  
»Da bi, Bog daj, mojo bilo,  
Kaj nocoj je tod hodilo,  
Kaj nocoj je tod hodilo,  
Rano roso je strosilo!«*

*Tretjo jutro proso plela,  
Tam je našla velko kača.  
Kača mele devet repov,  
Na vsakšnem repi devet ključov:  
»Ne straši se, lepa Vida!  
Kaj si prosila, si dobila:  
Saj sem jaz ne huda kača,  
Saj sem jaz ne huda kača,  
Al jaz sem ti mladi kraljič,  
Ki kraljuje v belem gradi. -*

*Very early before the dawn  
Fair Vida was weeding millet,  
Finding the dew shaken off the millet:  
»Please, God, grant me the wish  
To become mine that which has roamed  
around at night.  
That which has roamed around at night,  
Shaking off the early-morning dew!«*

*Ti boš šla po glaskoj stezi,  
Jaz pam šla po gostem germji  
Tam bova se mija zišla,  
Na polji per belem gradi.  
Tam vtergaj tri drobne šibe,  
Ki bodo tri leta stare.« —*

*Da ga vujdre s prvojo šiboj,  
On postane od glave človek;  
Da ga vujdre z drugojo šiboj,  
On je do pojasa človek.  
Te ga vujdre s tretjojo šiboj,  
On postane do pet človek:  
»Hala, hala, lepa Vida,  
Kaj si štela, si dobila:  
Vzemi, vzemi meni z repa,  
Z mojega repa devet ključov,  
No odkleni bele gradi,  
No poberi srebro, zlato!  
Če sem bila grozna kača,  
Pa sem ti zdaj mladi gospon,  
Ki kraljuje v devet gradih.  
Z lepoj Vidoj nestrašljivoj.«*

*Fair Vida was weeding millet.*

*The following morning she was weeding  
millet,  
Finding the dew shaken off the millet:  
»Please, God, grant me the wish  
To become mine that which has roamed  
around at night,  
That which has roamed around at night,  
Shaking off the early-morning dew!«*

<sup>49</sup> Recorded by Stanko Vraz, VO. XIX. .x. 4a, Prekmurje, in: SNP I., No. 76.



Fair Vida. In: Die Österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie im Wort und Bild V, Wien 1891.

<p><i>The third morning she was weeding millet, And found a large snake. The snake had nine tails, A key on each of them: »Fear you not, fair Vida! Your wish has been granted: For I am not a mighty snake, For I am not a mighty snake, But I am a fair young prince Who reigns in a castle white. – You will follow a smooth path, And I will follow through thick dense shrubs. We will meet On the field by the white castle. There you pluck three small switches, They must be three years old.« –</i></p>	<p><i>When she hits it with the first one, Its head becomes a human head. When she hits it with the second one, It becomes man down to its waist. When she hits it with the third one, It becomes man down to its heels. »Hello, hello, fair Vida, You have gotten what you bargained for: Pray, take the nine keys from my tail, And unlock the nine castles white. Then take the silver and the gold! Once I was a mighty snake, But now I am a master young, Reigning in the castles nine With fair Vida who has no fear.«</i></p>
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An analysis of the folk song about Fair Vida by the sea as well as its variant about Fair Vida and the snake points to the possibility of Vida being a companion to a cosmological figure. Simon Rutar has presumed that Vida personified the moon travelling from sea to sea.<sup>50</sup> Yet it is questionable whether Vida represented the light of the moon or the sun, for her name denotes seeing, illumination and light, be it from the sun or the moon. It was Ivan Grafenauer's opinion that parallels of some of this song's motifs can be found in the epic poems the Iliad and the Odyssey; therefore they originated in antiquity and later evolved into the Albanian-Calabrian-Sicilian ballad pattern.<sup>51</sup> While Damjan Ovsec<sup>52</sup> has provided a psychological explanation of the ballad and mythological song of Fair Vida, in his astromythological analysis Vlado Nartnik presumed that Vida could be the wife of Svetovit and the mother of Dajbog.<sup>53</sup>

## 8. King Matjaž (Matthias) and the World Axis

Folk hero kralj Matjaž (King Matthias) has acquired his name from the Hungarian king Matthias Corvin (1458-1490). In *Patriarcato aquileiese di Filippo d'Alenconio* Marc Antonio Nicoletti (around 1536-1596) writes about the people from the Tolminsko

<sup>50</sup> Simon Rutar, *Dunajski zvon* 6, p. 310.

<sup>51</sup> Ivan Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida. Študija o izvoru, razvoju in razkroju narodne balade o Lepi Vidi*. SAZU, Dela (Dept. of Philology and Literature) 4, Ljubljana 1943, pp. 367–371.

<sup>52</sup> Fair Vida. The Everlasting Importance of the Psychological Aspect of the Slovene Ballad. Interdisciplinary Ethnological Interpretation, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 1, Ljubljana Pisa 1998, pp. 265–277.

<sup>53</sup> V. Nartnik, Časovna odprtost oblikovanja lika lepe Vide, v: *Individualni in generacijski ustvarjalni ritmi v slovenskem jeziku, književnosti in kulturi (Ob 10-letnici smrti Marje Boršnikove)*, Ljubljana 1994, p. 193–202; comp. also: V. Nartnik, *Od lepe Vide do Zarike in Sončice (From Fair Vida to Zarika and Sončica)*, in: *Dialogi* 26, Ljubljana 1990; comp. also: V. Nartnik, *Pogledi na Pavlove raziskave tematike Orfeja (Views on Pavel Avgust's Research on the Theme of Orpheus)*, in: *Slovensko-madžarski jezikovni in književni stiki od Košiča do danes, Budimpešta* 1998, pp.205–210.

region who sang songs and told stories about *kralj Matjaž* as early as the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While Slovene folk songs mostly praise his heroic deeds while fighting the Turks, or sing about his imprisonment in Turkey, and how he was saved from jail by a Turkish woman,<sup>54</sup> or contain the antique motif of »The Musician in front of Hell«, Slovene folk tales about this hero are either a rendition of the same motifs from folk songs set in prose, or have wholly different contents. In them the conceited King Matthias fights God for total rule over the world, loses the fight and is saved from death by a mountain that covers him and his army. He lies asleep at a stone table with his beard wrapped around it, together with his soldiers, in the Peca mountain, or in the Postojna Cave, by Mrzla voda under Višarje, under the Štajerska (Styrian) Sveta gora, in Dobrač, under Krim, Donačka gora or Triglav, in Sorško polje, in the Bleiburg field, in Ljubljansko polje, etc. His quarters, once closed by an iron door, are also by Zavratac in the Idrija region.

Some stories recount how a young boy, who was really God, adds salt to King Matthias's dinner. Matthias wishes to obtain more salt and promises the boy as much land as his horse can cover in a single day, or as much as God's farmhand and maidservant can cover in a day. Since the farmhand and the maidservant of God are in reality the sun and the moon, therefore covering the whole world, the whole world belongs to God. But King Matthias refuses to pay his debt and is punished. In another variant God refuses to give the salt to King Matthias even though he has a whole mountain of salt left. King Matthias therefore attacks God and is covered by a mountain.

Some tales mention that King Matthias, and not king Salomon, was the brother of Šembilja. Tricking her brother, Šembilja is the first to drink from the fountain of wisdom and becomes the wisest of them all. Other tales speak about King Matthias and the Fairy, or about the woods populated by fairies. When Matthias's army starts cutting down trees in the woods, a mountain buries them. Sometimes Matthias is an honest man who punishes an unjust judge. He also appears in tales about »The Clever Peasant Girl« (AaTh 875),<sup>55</sup> in the tale about »The King and the Abbot« (AaTh 922),<sup>56</sup> and in others.

At times, accidental passers-by chance upon the sleeping king. He wakes up for a moment and tells them to look through a window. They see a vast field and a black army with horses sleeping in the middle of it. In some folk tales a traveller glimpses crowds of people through the first window, a beautiful wheat field reaped by a solitary figure through the second, and another group of people through the third. King Matthias explains that the first window shows the present situation, the second the future that will happen when he returns to the world, and the third one the distant future when people multiply again and turn bad. Sometimes King Matthias asks his visitors if ants still crawl upon three mountain peaks (for instance Šent Krištof, Šent Helen and Šent Urh peaks, all situated east of Celovec / Klagenfurt in Austria), meaning if pilgrims still frequent sacred mountain tops. When the pilgrims no longer do so, Matthias will raise his black army and restore order on earth. At times he wants to know if crows still fly

<sup>54</sup> Milko Matičetov, »Linčica Turkinčica«. Pubblicazione per nozze Micelli-Longhino. Udine 1966, published by the author, 8 pages. Translation: Milko Matičetov, Tri ljudske iz Rezije za pokušnjo (Three Folk Songs from Resia to Taste), in: Sodobnost 17, Ljubljana 1969, pp. 199–202; comp.: Slovenske ljudske pesmi I, No. 5 »Kralj Matjaž rešen iz ječe« (King Matthias Saved from Jail), pp. 28–51.

<sup>55</sup> Jan de Vries, Die Märchen von klugen Rätsellöserin, FFC 73, Helsinki 1928.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Anderson, Kaiser und Abt, in: FFC 42, Helsinki 1923.

around his mountain. If they do, he shall have to sleep another hundred years. If there are still magpies in the world, he will have to sleep until they have all disappeared. Around Tolmin people still say that King Matthias asks a passer-by if the fig tree still bears fruit. When it does not, he shall return and defeat all other kings. The mountain where kralj Matjaž is asleep is also filled with treasures. Sometimes he tells people to gather leaves in his cave; when that person turns around, or comes home, the leaves turn to gold. It can also happen that a person enters Matthias's cave and falls asleep there for three hundred years. Upon waking up, he or she thinks that they have been asleep only for several hours.

A linden tree grows in front of King Matthias's cave. Though dry most of the year, the tree turns green on Christmas, blooms between midnight and one in the morning, then dries out again. When on St. George's Day Matthias wakes up again, hanging his shield on the linden tree branches, the tree shall once again turn green and King Matthias's army shall become alive again. In the not-so-distant past Slovenes worshipped sacred springs and sacred trees in certain places.<sup>57</sup> Fran Orožen, among others, wrote down the tale about the linden tree in front of King Matthias's cave:

*Kralj Matjaž (King Matthias) lies asleep in a cave under the Pečice mountain, the last magnificent mountain in the east Savinja Alps. A tale from Koroška recounts about the moment Matthias wakes up: On Christmas Eve, a green linden tree grows in front of his cave. At midnight, the tree shall bloom for an hour, filling the vicinity with pleasant smells. Soon afterwards, the tree shall become dry again. On St. George's Day, when King Matthias hangs his shield on its branches, the tree will turn green again and bring prosperity to Slovenes.*<sup>58</sup>

The linden tree that turns green on St. George's Day, when King Matthias hangs up his shield, represents the tree of life, or the world tree. The image of King Matthias is therefore connected with cosmological symbols.

If Matthias draws his sword half out of the sheath his army starts to wake up. If he draws it out completely, or if his sword jumps out of the sheath by itself, or when Matthias's beard coils around the stone table three, seven or nine times, the army will fully awaken and Matthias will be able to restore the golden age. According to other sources he will raise his terrible army and destroy the world, whereupon the golden age will be restored.

The tales about King Matthias contain numerous myths from old Oriental, Indo-European and medieval European heritage. These stories also contain Christian notions about the apocalypse, the end of the world, Christ, Antichrist, the Saviour, or the Messiah. Other motifs had been taken from fairytales, ballads, romances, cloak-and-dagger novels, etc.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Walter Anderson, *Kaiser und Abt*, v: FFC 42, Helsinki 1923.

<sup>58</sup> Fr. Orožen, *Praznovanje sv. Jurja na Štajerskem (Celebrating St. George's Day in Styria)*. Ljubljanski zvon 21, Ljubljana 1901, pp. 319–327.

<sup>59</sup> Exhaustive studies on King Matthias were written by Ivan Grafenauer: *Slovenske pripovedke o kralju Matjažu (Slovene Fairytales about King Matthias)*, SAZU Dela (Dept. of Philology and Literature) 4, Ljubljana 1951, and Milko Matičetov: *Kralj Matjaž v luči novega slovenskega gradiva in novih raziskovanj (King Matthias in the Light of New Slovene Material and New Research)*, in: SAZU Razprave (Dept. of Philology and Literature) Ljubljana 1958, pp. 101–155.



King Matthias. In: Die Österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie im Wort und Bild V, Wien 1891.

The image of King Matthias combines mythical as well as epic heritage.<sup>60</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century this personality was incorporated into literature as a mythical symbol of national and social ideas. J. Komorovsky is of the opinion that due to unfavorable circumstances af-

<sup>60</sup> Ildiko Kriza has written about Hungarian traditions on Matija Korvin in the 18th century: King Matthias as a Folklore Hero. Hungarian Tradition about Matthias Corvin in 18th Century, in: Studi Finno-Ugrici II, Napoli 1996–1998, pp. 185–202.

ter the death of Matija Hunjadi that resulted in peasant rebellions and uprisings, Matthias is by far the most popular traditional figure.<sup>61</sup> Trdina wrote that people believed that King Matthias would abolish socage and tithe, and kill the noblemen and the Antichrist.<sup>62</sup>

Tales about King Matthias were recounted in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Northern Balkans.<sup>63</sup> There are other, similar heroes sleeping in a mountain – the world mountain (motif D 1960, 2) – for instance the Breton King Arthur who lived in the cave of the Mount Etna,<sup>64</sup> further Holgar from Denmark, Czech Vaclav, Romany Penga, Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa and German Frederick II.<sup>65</sup> According to beliefs Attila the Hun is also buried under a mountain in the center of the world, resting in three iron coffins.<sup>66</sup> The linden tree in front of Matthias's cave resembles the tree of life. Though dry, it becomes green when King Matthias rises again. Another tree of life starts to grow under Mount Golgotha where Adam is buried.<sup>67</sup> The cross with Jesus Christ is a dried-out tree that is reborn again. The dry tree that turns green after Frederick II – or King Matthias in Slovene tales – hangs up his sheath, therefore has a long tradition.<sup>68</sup>

King Matthias is asleep under the cosmic mountain, or the world mountain, and the whole world leans on him much as it leans on Adam buried under the Mount Golgotha. On the world mountain grows the tree of life just like the cross on Mount Golgotha. In front of Matthias's cave grows a tree of life, a tree that turns green when King Matthias reawakens. The hero will raise his army, destroy the evil in the world, and restore the golden age. In apocalyptic prophecies he will wake up upon the end of the world and, like an Antichrist, destroy the corrupt world.

King Matthias opposes God, but remains to fight for humanity. In that he resembles King Arthur in his quest for the Holy Grail, a symbol of inner, spiritual perfection that brings invincibility.

There is much still to be written about cosmology and deities in Slovene folk traditions, and there are other, different aspects of the interpretation of the motifs mentioned so far. I have deliberately refrained from touching upon the world of demons,

<sup>61</sup> J. Komorovsky, *Kral' Matej Korvin v l'udovej prozaickej slovesnosti*, Bratislava 1957.

<sup>62</sup> There have been heated discussions about Matjaž and his origin in Slovenia. Milko Matičetov has written a polemic article on this subject: *Kralj Matjaž nad ideologijo* (King Matjaž above Ideology), in: *Sodobnost* 39, Ljubljana 1991, pp. 709-711. Comp. also: *Zakaj ruvati Matijo Korvina iz našega ustnega izročila?* (Why Should We Uproot Matija Korvin from Our Oral Traditions?), in: *Traditiones* 20, Ljubljana 1991, pp. 199-207.

<sup>63</sup> Zenon Kuzelja wrote about this subject: *Ugorski korol' Matvij Korvin v slavjanskij ustnij slovesnosti*. Lvov 1906.

<sup>64</sup> Comp.: Z. Šmitek, *Kristalna gora*, Ljubljana 1998, pp. 51 s.s.

<sup>65</sup> For more on this see.: Ivan Grafenauer, *Slovenske pripovedke o Kralju Matjažu*, SAZU Dela (Dept. of Philology and Literature) 4, Ljubljana 1951: *V votlini speči vladar. Od kod je?* (Ruler Sleeping in a Cave. Where Did He Come from?), pp. 108-124.

<sup>66</sup> Comp.: Zmago Šmitek, *Primerjalni vidiki slovenskega ljudskega izročila o Atili* (Comparative Aspects of Slovene Folk Tradition on Attila the Hun), in: *Traditiones* 23, Ljubljana 1994, pp. 187-201.

<sup>67</sup> Comp.: Roberto Dapit, *Il motivo del Salvatore nella culla in un racconto popolare resiano*, in: *Studia mythologica Slavica* 3, Ljubljana, Udine 2000, pp. 161-171.

<sup>68</sup> For more on this see: Ivan Grafenauer, *Slovenske pripovedke o kralju Matjažu*, SAZU Dela (Dept. of Philology and Literature) 4, Ljubljana 1951: *Suho drevo, ki spet ozeleni* (A Dried-Out Tree Turns Green Again), pp. 92-97.

ghosts and other mythological creatures that abound in the material preserved up to the present. Some traditions remain alive, or are created anew, in the present as well. This, however, is the subject of yet further research endeavors.

## Kozmologija in boštva v slovenskem ljudskem pripovednem in pesniškem izročilu

*Monika Kropelj*

V članku želim na kratko in pregledno predstaviti slovensko izročilo, v katerem je ohranjenih nekaj sledi o starih slovanskih boštvih in kozmologiji. Te drobce skušam vzporediti z drugimi sorodnimi verskimi strukturami. Izhajam iz slovenskega ljudskega pripovednega in pesemskega izročila ter delno iz šeg in obravnavam naslednje teme: nastanek zemlje, riba Faronika, potop, Perun in Veles oz. boj z zmajem, boginja mati Mokoš, letni cikel in Zlatorog, lepa Vida ter kozmična gora in kralj Matjaž.

Pojem prvobitnih voda ob začetkih sveta je skorajda univerzalen. Pogosto se temu pridruži mit o potapljaški živali, kakršen je npr. hindujski merjasec (bog Višnu), ki prinaša zemljo na vodno površje. Tudi v slovenskem ljudskem izročilu so bile po vsej verjetnosti ohranjene predstave o nastanku zemlje iz zrna peska z morskega dna, saj je ta motiv objavil kot Narodno povest Janez Trdina v Nevenu leta 1858. Po tej pripovedi naj bi na začetku ne bilo nič drugega kot Bog, sonce in morje. Sonce je pripekalo in Bog se je potopil, da bi se v morju skopal. Ko pa se je zopet vzdignil na površje, mu je ostalo za nohtom zrno peska. Zrno je padlo na morsko gladino in iz njega je nastala naša zemlja. Zemlja je torej obležala na gladini kozmičnega oceana, ljudske povedke in pesmi pa pripovedujejo, da krožita okoli te plavajoče zemlje dve ribi ali, da zemlja počiva na ribi Faroniki. Izročilo o svetu, ki sloni na ribi oz. kači je zelo razširjeno in znano že iz antike.

Potop sveta najdemo v številnih mitologijah in religijah širom po svetu, spomnimo se npr. Noeta iz Stare zaveze, mezopotamskega Ziusudro, sumerskega Utnapištima in indijskega Manuja. V slovenski povedki je Kurent pomagal Kranjcu, da se je rešil pred potopom.

Kurent je v slovenskem izročilu bajeslovni rodovitnostno lunarni lik, po etimološki razlagi Franca Bezlaja je ime izpeljano iz pomenskih korenov ustvarjajoči, snujoči. Če to razlago povežemo s tako rekoč po vsem svetu razširjeno povedko o bitju v luni, ki je v slovenskih pripovedih pogosto poosebljeno s Kurentom, se zdi, da so ljudje videli v njem nekakšnega praočeta, nekoga, ki je pripomogel k razširitvi človeškega rodu, k preroditvi (kot takrat po potopu) in k obroditvi njihovih polj. V korenu imena kur- bi lahko prepoznali povezavo s kuro oz. petelinom in valjenjem jajca – atributom nebesnega boga stvarnika. Tudi če primerjamo ljudske šege, ko o pustu kurenti med drugim orjejo okoli hiše za debelo repo in poskakujejo, da bi čim bolje rodilo, v sprevodu pa za njimi hodijo piceki – piščančki, in če k temu dodamo najnovejša arheološka odkritja o povezavi med kurenti in antičnim kultom Kibebe – v katerem so se imenovali mitski spremljevalci Kibebe kurenti in koribanti – lahko rečemo, da je bil Kurent po vsej verjetnosti božanstvo oz. demon povezan z rodovitnostjo in razbrdanostjo, in da so ljudje verjeli, da skrbi za obnovo na zemlji.

Perun, na Slovenskem imenovan tudi Gromovnik, sv. Elija, sv. Matija in Trot, je bil slovanski bog groma in strele, najvišji bog in stvarnik. Podobno kot je v baltski mitologiji izpričan boj med nebesnim božanstvom Perkunasom in htoničnim boštvom Velniasom, slovansko ljudsko izročilo ohranja spomin na boj Peruna z Velesom. Kot Thor z mjolnirom tudi Perun z zlato sekuro ali s kladivom – simboloma groma – udari po sovražni kači. Davorin Terstenjak, je pod psevdonimom Fr. Pohorski v Novicah leta

1858 objavil ljudsko povedko s Pohorja, po kateri naj bi se Trot in Kresnik v zlati kočiji vozila h kačji kraljici na gostijo. Kačja kraljica jima pošlje nasproti kačo, ki ima peruti kakor orel in zleteti iz oblakov na zlati voz. Toda Trot kači z zlato sekiro odbije glavo. Kača z repom zamahne v oblak in ulije se strašna ploha.

Veles oz. Volos je bil slovanski bog podzemnega sveta, bog živine in vojne, soroden baltskemu Velniasu in je lahko privzemal podobo zmaja ali kače. Ker je torej predstavljal podzemni svet, so mu postavljali svetišča v dolini, medtem ko so Perunova, ker je bil nebesni bog, gradili na hribu. Bogastvo, nad katerim ima oblast, želi Veles – imenovan v ljudskem izročilu tudi Trdoglav, Črt, Potoglav ali Velikan Vouvel – pomnožiti, zato ogroža svojega nasprotnika Peruna ali pa Kresnika s tem, da mu skuša ugrabiti čredo oz. nevesto in jih zapreti v pečine, v svoj pusti skalni, včasih imenovan tudi zlati grad. Ljudsko izročilo med drugim tudi pripoveduje, da ima Velikan Vouvel v gori skrito blago in zaklade, ki jih lahko odpre le trava vouvelica, ki cveti na kresno noč od polnoči do ene podobno kot praprot.

Kljub temu da je Veles ogrožal živino in bogastvo na zemlji, s tem da je npr. čredo odpeljal v svoj podzemni svet, so ga vendarle častili kot zavetnika živine, saj je prevzel varstvo nad njo v zimskem času. Velesovo vlogo zavetnika ovac in živine kakor tudi njegove zdravilne sposobnosti odsevajo v liku volčjega pastirja, imenovanega tudi volčko, beli volk, šent, Šentjurij ali Jurij s pušo. Volčji pastir je bajeslovni varuh čred, gozdno in htonsko božanstvo, kakršen je bil slovanski, predvsem srbski Dažbog, germanski Wodan, antični Pluton in keltski Dis Pater, Volčji pastir, Jurij s pušo, in Vedomec so liki, ki so vsak na svoj način prevzemali vlogo Velesa.

Skoraj vsa, tudi najstarejša verstva sveta temeljijo na predstavah o veliki materi oz. darovalki življenja, ki je bila lahko dobra lahko pa tudi strašna, kot npr. frigijska Kibela, sirijska Atargatis, feničanska Astarta, sumerska Inana, babilonska Ištar, antična Venera, balto-polabska Živa, germanska Frigga in še mnoge druge. Pri Slovanih je bilo razširjeno čaščenje Mokoši, ženskega božanstva rodovitnosti, ki je bila tudi zavetnica obrti: preje, tkanja in glasbe. Mokoš je bila edina boginja Vladimirjevega kijevskega panteona. V slovenskem izročilu je ohranjen spomin nanjo tudi v povedkah o pehtri babi, torki, petki, kvatri ipd. Tudi divji lov, ki je z njo povezan, naj bi prinesel v naravo rodovitnost in obnovo. Podobno so po nekaterih pripovedih pohajale oz. vesnarile vesne v mesecu februarju, ki se po njih imenuje vesnar, in tudi Vesna naj bi bila nekakšno rodovitnost prinašajoče boštvo. Značilno je tudi, da so vsi ženski bajeslovni liki, ki so privzemali vlogo zlate babe oz. Pehtre, povezani s prejo, nitjo in tudi drugimi ženskimi opravili, kot so pranje, peka kruha ipd. Kot žrtveni dar so ji puščali pramene volne, snope lanu, prtičke ipd.

Zlatorog pooseblja nebesno sončno božanstvo in ima ključ do zemeljskih zakladov ter prinaša življenje. Tako kot vedno znova oživi Zlatorog, čeprav zadet od smrtnega strela, oživi tudi zimska mrtva narava, zato ima Zlatorog ključno mesto v letnem ciklu.

Analiza tako ljudske pesmi o lepi Vidi pri morju kot drugače o lepi Vidi s kačo je pokazala, da bi Vida lahko bila spremljevalka kozmološkega lika. Simon Rutar je domneval da je lepa Vida od morja do morja potujoča luna, toda Vida bi lahko predstavljala tako lunino kot sončno svetlobo, kajti njeno ime oznanja videnje, torej razsvetljenje in svetlobo, ki je lahko tako sončna kot lunina. Ivan Grafenauer je potegnil vzporednice nekaterim motivom te pesmi že z motiviko Homerjevih epskih pesnitev Iliado in Odisejo.

Zgodbe o Kralju Matjažu so pripovedovali v Srednji in Vzhodni Evropi in na severnem Balkanu, sicer pa so podobni junaki, ki spijo v gori – svetovni gori – tudi bretonski kralj Artur, ki naj bi živel v votli gori Etni, danski Holger, češki Václav, ciganski Penga, Karel Veliki, Friderik Barbarosa in Friderik II. Tudi Atilov grob naj bi bil pod goro v središču sveta, počival pa naj bi v treh železnih krstah. Lipa, ki rase pred njegovo votlino, spominja na drevo življenja. Lipa je suha, toda oživi takrat, ko Matjaž vstane. Tudi na gori Golgoti, kjer je Adamov grob, zrasedrevo življenja, križ, na katerem je križan Kristus, suho drevo, ki ponovno ozeleni. Suho drevo, ki ozeleni potem, ko nanj obesi Friderik II., v naših zgodbah pa kralj Matjaž, svoj ščit, ima torej že dolgo tradicijo.

Kralj Matjaž torej spi pod kozmično oz. svetovno goro, na njem sloni celi svet, podobno kot na Adamu, ki je pokopan pod goro Golgoto. Tako kot na gori Golgoti suho drevo – križ – ozeleni, tudi pred Matjaževo goro rasedrevo življenja, suho drevo, ki ozeleni, ko se Matjaž zbudi. Junak bo dvignil svojo vojsko in po uničenju zla na svetu se bo vrnil zlati vek. Po apokaliptičnih pripovedih pa se bo prebudil ob koncu sveta in kot nekakšen Antikrist uničil pokvarjeni svet. Kralj Matjaž se upre Bogu, toda ostaja borec za človeštvo in s svojo latentno prisotnostjo v svetovni gori podpira človeštvo.