

## Old Slavic Gods

### Perun

Perun is the Slavic god of thunder and the sky. He should not be confused with Svarog, who is also a god of the sky because Svarog is the god of the universe, and Perun belongs to the lower sky, which could be interpreted as the atmosphere. He is one of the most powerful Slavic gods. He represents the destroyer because he is the god of bad weather and natural disasters. Perun is a member of the biggest and the most powerful Slavic trinity (Triglav) together with Svarog and Svetovid (the theory that Triglav is not a god, and that he represents a trinity is very questionable and disputed over, and it is possible that it was first set by Neo-pagans). In many places, Perun is mentioned as Svarog's and Veles's brother.

Perun also represents the punisher of perjury, as well as the punisher of evil in general. Perun punishes the evil and disobedient by closing the heavenly door to them. He punishes for perjury during the life of the perjurer and uses lightning's in the process of punishing. In many written documents from the early Middle Ages (Nestor's Chronicle, Sbornik Paisijev (Paisije's Anthology), Sofyskij Sobor), and even in peace contracts can be seen that the Slavs swore to obey Perun himself and he was supposed to punish and curse any man who would break the contract. Perun was most often mentioned and frequently satanised in the Christian notes from the early middle ages. This shows us that the cult of Perun was deeply implanted in the Slavs. Their dedication to Perun can also be seen in the fact that many geographical places and plants bear his name (Perun's peak, and Perun's coast in Russia, Perunja ves in Slovenia, mountain Perin in Bulgaria, perunika is iris germanica, etc.). Even today there are sayings and curses with Perun's name in some Slavic languages. 'Go to hell' is 'do Paroma' in Slovakian, where Parom represents Perun. The word 'thunder' is 'piorun' in Polish. The Baltic Slavs called 'Thursday' – 'perendan'.

The name Perun is made from the suffix -un, or -unj (-унъ) which signifies the doer of an action, and the root 'per' which means to hit, to break, to smash. Thus Perun indicates a hitter, a breaker, a smasher, a thunderer, and also a deity – the destroyer, the demolisher. This was the reason why natural disasters were attributed to him. Legends tell us that thunders are heard because of the clattering of the wheels while Perun is riding in his coach in the sky. On statues, Perun was portrayed as a strong man with a beard. Parts of his clothes tell us that he is a warrior in his amour. There are some notions of Perun with a stone sledgehammer in his hand, which he throws at people and petrifies them. There are also notions of him with a bow, which used to be identified with a rainbow, and when he used it, the arrows would turn into lightning's. One of the odd weapons of Perun were golden apples. Some folk songs show this:

... Te izvadi tri jabuke zlatne  
I baci ih nebu u visine...  
...Tri munje od neba pukoše  
Jedna gađa dva djevera mlada,  
Druga gađa pašu na dorinu,  
Treća gađa svata šest stotina,  
Ne uteče oka za svjedoka,  
Ni da kaže, kako pogiboše.

Which translates as:

...Then he pulled out tri apples of gold  
and threw them high in the sky...  
... Three bolts of lightning cracked  
The first hit two young brothers of the groom,  
The second hit a pasha on a sorrel,  
The third hit 600 wedding guests,  
Not an eye of a witness was left,  
Not even to utter, how they were killed.

There are some legends about Perun's conflict with Veles. Supposedly, Veles stole Perun's wife, people, and cattle. Veles was hiding afterwards, but Perun found him by smashing the rock which he was hiding behind and beat him. This Belarus story further tells us that Veles was compelled to stay on the surface after this event. According to another legend, Veles took aside Dodola, the rain goddess, during her and Perun's wedding, and expressed his love to her. After this, he was defeated by Perun in the battle and

banished to the surface until he eventually found his place in the underworld.

Perun was also associated with fire and fiery animals. Perun's animal was a fiery rooster, which is a sort of Slavic Fenix. His beings were also dragons. Rites related to fire were connected with Perun. Next to the idol the eternal fire was burning, which should not be extinguished in any case because, otherwise, all the servants in the temple would be hurt. Perun was also a fighter against droughts. According to one theory, he had an influence on the rain, and according to another, Dodola, Perun's wife, was the one who influenced the rain. In any case, he could surely do a lot about it. Songs were sung:

Da zarosi sitna rosa,  
 oj dudula mili Bože!  
 Oj lija daj Bože daj!  
 Oj Ilija moj Perune!  
 Daj Bože daj, daj Ilija daj!

which translates as:

Let fine dew drizzle,  
 oh dudula dear God!  
 Oh Elijah give us, God, give!  
 Oh Elijah, my Perun!  
 Give us, God, give, give, Elijah, give!  
 (a chorus of Dodola song from around Gnjilane)

As far as plants are concerned, the Perun's plant was an oak tree. Even today, the Serbs call a kind of an oak tree 'grm', which originates in the word 'grmeti', which means 'to thunder'. It is thus obvious that grm was dedicated to thunder, i.e. Perun. Of the other plants there are iris, sage, nettle, apple, and houseleek. The animals which symbolized him are a he-chamois, and a European bison. When they did not have temples, the Slavs prayed to Perun in groves, at sacrificial altars, and under oak trees.

After the arrival of Christianity, the role of Perun was taken over by St. Elijah. Perun, as well as the stories about him remained in the folk tradition, but some of them took the form of St Elijah stories, and the others had to change the name of the main character. The Church satanised Perun, probably because of his strong cult and strong influence on people's lives. The Novgorod Chronicle speaks about this:

' In the year of 6479 (989) Vladimir was baptized. Prins-Bishop Acim came to Novgorod, and destroyed all sacrificial altars, knocked Perun down, and ordered that he should be thrown into the Volhova river; and he was dragged through the mud and beaten with whips and sticks; an evil spirit possessed Perun, and started to whine: "Oh, I'm so unhappy! I fell into the merciless hands". And he crossed the big bridge, threw his cudgel onto the bridge, and even today, madmen hit themselves with the cudgel to please evil spirits. Then he ordered that no one should accept him (Perun), and in the morning one inhabitant of Pidba went to the river bank at the very moment when Perun came to the bank, and pushed him away with a pole: "You ate and drank enough here, my little Perun, move on and keep sailing!" And the satanic object disappeared.'

by Nikola Milošević

## **Belobog (Belbog, Belun)**

Belobog is a deity whose historical existence was, and still is, a subject of numerous debates. Belobog, which, translated into English, means White god, is imagined as a counterpart to Crnobog, or Černobog (Black god) and as such represents the light deity of good essentially opposed to the deity of evil. The first thing that a connoisseur of pagan religions will ask is: how come there is such a division into black and white, good and evil in paganism? It is, indeed, a proper question. This division appeared only with the acceptance of Christianity which is why Belobog is substantially considered to be a product of Judeo-Christian religion mixed, by the common people, with their old religion. Spasoje Vasiljev is of an opinion that Belobog was constructed in order to represent the opposite of Crnobog, and many others think the alike. On the other hand, Belobog is not that much present in the Mythology of the Southern Slavs, but he is often mentioned among the Western and the Baltic Slavs. This fact can explain why Belobog seems so strange to us. But, is it really only the influence of Christianity that is the matter, or must the occurrence of Belobog be sought in a much earlier age? According to the theory of Peter Kotka, the Slavs accepted Belobog in the period when they lived in the Persian neighborhood (8th – 2nd c. BC). As we know, the Persian religion was dualist in its nature, thus two opposed forces – Ormuzd and

Ahriman ruled the Persian universe. The Slavic Belobog would thus correspond Ormuzd, though he was never on such a high place with the Slavs. Furthermore, Kotka presented a Slavic myth in which two opposed forces, just like those mentioned above, were responsible for the creation of the Slavic world, and the forces, of course, were Belobog and Crnobog. Both of these forces were necessary for the creation of the universe, which is, indeed, a principle that could have been taken from the Persians. However, this myth should not be taken for granted since there is a quite different myth about the creation of the universe, and the myth is about a god Rod who created the cosmos from a huge egg.

However you look at it, the impression that Belobog is more of an abstract principle than a typical anthropomorphic deity stays, which can be seen in the way it was represented by the Slavs. Well, how was this deity represented? The Slavs imagined Belobog as an old man with a long white beard, dressed exclusively in white. As such, he would appear only during the daylight, doing good deeds as he went and bringing people success and happiness. Belobog helped many peasants to finish hard work in the field and he showed many strayed travelers the way out of a thick forest. The general impression of whiteness, light and positively made him an abstract deity, completely different from other gods. This is why he is more likely the very principle of light and goodness wrapped in the form of an anthropomorphic deity, than a god pagans would otherwise bow to.

Whether it is an abstract principle, or a manifestation of the supreme god (Ormuzd or Christian Yahweh), the appearance of Belobog in the Slavic mythology should by no means be ignored. Certain data about the notion of him with the Slavs can be found through the analysis of the name of this deity. Belobog's name reminds us a lot of the names of gods of other pantheons: Baldur, Belunos, Baal etc. All these deities are also of a light and solar nature since their names contain the same root (bal means something light and bright). The very occurrence of Baldur in the Nordic mythology is parallel to the occurrence of Belobog in the Slavic – both seem a bit of a foreign body in their systems, by being different in every possible way from other gods and by making their appearance seem extremely mysterious. The same rules were applied both to Baldur and Belobog, Baldur was considered to be a Christian creation, wherefore he was even named Hvit Christ, i.e. White Christ. As far as the Serbs are concerned, Belobog's name has, up to now, remained with the people who use it to denote a deity, which can be seen in an old saying “he ate the white god”, used to show that somebody ate very much, i.e. that he ate everything there was to be eaten.

## Devana

Devana The goddess most frequently associated with the Greek Artemis and the Roman Diana. In a view of the fact that Devana and Diana are very similar names, it is considered that the Slavs took this deity from the Romans. Her long name, Dziejwona, or Dzevana as the Poles used to call her, is even more reminiscent of the name of the Roman goddess of hunt, which is another argument in favor of the theory that Devana is not an originally Slavic deity. However, Devana is a name of Aryan origin, which offers a possibility that Devana and Diana are just two different variants of the same name. Which one? Old Aryans believed in Devases, who were sons of Dayus, the father of the sky, meaning, gods themselves. Words deus and theos, which also signify god, came from the Sanskrit term deva. Names of numerous gods have their origin in this term: Dionysos, Zeus, Diona, Dana (Celtic supreme goddess), and, of course, Diana and Devana. In this way, Diana and Devana would represent the primordial supreme goddess who later lost her supreme power and became one of the gods. The belief in the primordial goddess similar to Devana has existed in these territories from times immemorial. Inhabitants of the Balkans bowed to Forest Mother, the mistress of forests and its creatures. Diana and Devana are those forest goddesses, protectors of wild animals and goddesses of hunt. If we perceive Devana as an aspect of the pagan Supreme Goddess, who appears through three phases of the moon and three phases of a woman's life as the Virgin, the Mother, and the Old woman, we shall see that the first aspect, that of the Virgin, is, by no means, Devana's aspect. The very name Devana comprises this quality, for she is deva, or in English: a maiden, a virgin or a young girl. The forest goddess certainly signifies a woman with something wild and unruly inside of her, as she has not given herself to a man. This trimorphic goddess division certainly does not exist with the Slavs, at least not in its original form, but it will be easier if the Slavic system is completed with the Celtic and some parallels are drawn between the two kinds of paganism. More details about the Slavic supreme goddess and her possible triple aspect can be found in a book by Aleksandra Bajić *The Great Goddess of the Slavs*.

What else can we say about Devana? Her sacred animal is a mare, and Devana herself is considered to be a goddess-mare. On Mount Devica, which is obviously connected to Devana, a rock with a picture of a mare was found. Aleksandra Bajić is of an opinion that Devana appears in Serbian epic poems as the mother of Miloš Obilić, whose last name – Obilić originates in Kobilic (from Serbian kobila, which means mare; -ić is a suffix for Serbian family names). Miloš, thus, represents Jarilo, Devana's and Veles's son.

What was the marriage of Devana and Veles like? In the beginning, the goddess was opposed to this marriage, however, Veles found a way to placate her. He turned himself into a basil flower and thus soothed a bit wild Devana. As Veles's wife, Devana appears in Russian fairy tales as Vasilisa, a beautiful wise woman who helps her husband to win numerous challenges. Apart from being

mostly the forest goddess, Devana is associated with rivers and lakes. Her trees are a hazel tree, and also a willow. The Willow Day, a holiday celebrated in the early spring, is dedicated to this goddess. Anyhow, Spasoje Vasiljev deems Devana a goddess of spring, which is the reason why we can consider her to be similar to, if not identical with Vesna.

## Lada

Lada The Slavic goddess of love and beauty, who appears as Freya, Isis, or Aphrodyte with other peoples. It is, of course, linked to the planetary power of Venus who is, besides love and beauty, associated with fertility. Lada is represented as a girl with long golden hair sometimes with a wreath of ears of grain braided into her hair, which symbolizes her function of fertility deity thus making her an aspect of Mother of Wet Land. A symbol of Sun, a mark of life-giving power was sometimes on her breasts. As a fertility goddess, Lada has her annual cycles, which can be shown by the belief that she resides in the dwelling place of the dead until the vernal equinox comes. This world of the dead is called Irij, and here, besides Lada, dwells Veles, the horned god of cattle. At the moment when Lada is supposed to come out into the world and bring spring, Gerovit opens the door of Irij letting the fertility goddess bless the earth. At the end of summer, Lada returns to Irij (there is a similar myth in German mythology in which Freya spends a part of the year underground among the elves, whereas Greek Persefona dwells in Had during the winter period). Although her reign begins on the 21st of March, Lada is primarily the goddess of summer. She follows Vesna, the Slavic spring goddess. However, both of these goddesses are associated with fertility so sometimes it can sometimes be difficult to separate their functions. As we can see, Lada's reign begins in spring, the proof of which is ladeň, another name for April, given after this goddess. Apart from the Sun, Lada is also associated with rain and hot summer nights, the ideal time for paying respect to the love goddess.

Lada's animals are a cock, a deer, an ant and an eagle, whereas her plants are a cherry, a dandelion, a linden and a peony. Besides Venus, Lada is connected with the constellation of Taurus, which Aleksandar Asov wrote about in *The Slavic Astrology*. Here, we can once again see here her function of fertility goddess, whose reign begins in spring, mix with the function of the goddess Vesna. A myth says that Lada is married to Svarog who is only with her help able to create the world. According to another one, she is a companion of Jarilo, thus associated with Aphrodyte, whose lover is Ares. Rituals performed in Lada's honor are most often linked with contracting marriages, or choosing a spouse. One of the known rites is ladarice, also performed under the name of kraljice in Serbia. Vuk Karadžić described the basic characteristics of this ritual. On Holy Trinity Day, a group of about ten young girls gathers, one of them is dressed like a queen, another one like a king, and another one like a color-bearer. The queen is sitting on a chair, while the other girls are dancing around her, and the king and the color-bearer are dancing on their own. In this way the queens go from house to house looking for girls of marriageable age. Jumping over the fire is another characteristic of rituals performed in Lada's honor. This custom existed in all parts of Europe and its purpose was to ensure fertility as well as to protect people and cattle from evil forces.

## Crnobog (Cernobor, Cert)

Crnobog, as his very name shows, is Slavic black god – god of night, chaos and evil. Slavs believed that all evil originated from this god, so Crnobog, above all other gods, was the least favorably disposed towards men. Most information about Crnobog we gather from Helmold. In one of his records he claims: “There is one curious custom among the Slavs. At their feasts they all drink from the same cup, and while doing that they utter certain words which, I daresay, do not have the purpose of a prayer, but rather a curse in the name of their gods - gods of good and evil. They believe that all good comes from the good god, and all evil from the evil one. And so they call that god Crnobog in their own language.” As we can see, our forefathers thought that the role of one of their gods was to bring misfortune, and from the example above it is clear that they themselves used that god to help them bring about bad luck (the cursing ritual). Misfortune could befall the Slavs in many different ways – through extreme cold, famine, poverty, illness, or simply through a combination of circumstances, and Crnobog was responsible for everything. Building around the fact that cold and darkness made their lives disagreeable, the Slavs postulated an entity that was related to these natural phenomena. Crnobog, Cernobog, or Cert thus became a winter deity and a god of darkness, a terrifying creature that shrouded the world in black. However, we should bear in mind that the Slavs considered Crnobog's impact was necessary and that consequently Cernobog was respected as all the other gods. None of the sources relevant to Slavic mythology classifies Cert as a lower-rank deity and, regardless of being attributed the source of all misfortune, he was considered equal to other gods of the pantheon. All this means that our forefathers thought accidents were also caused by their gods, or that even extreme cold, famine, death and disease were of divine origin (coming from either Cert or Morana). And what was sent by the gods certainly had to be respected. This illustrates how pagan perception of the world is different to Christian, because Christianity puts earthly life in the so-called vale of tears, while to pagans life, happy and unhappy alike, is a divine bestowal.

Although old Slavic religion had no dualism characteristics, researchers of Slavic mythology put in opposition to Crnobog a deity of contrasting properties – Belobog. Belobog, as a principle of light and goodness, should have been a contrast to Crnobog, or the power that counterbalances his negative impact. To prove their theory that there was dualism in Slavic mythology the researchers claimed that names of some places can be related to Belobog. Some of these places are Belbuch in Pomerania, Belobozice in Bohemia, as well as Bialoboze and Bialobożnica in Poland. However, as Louis Léger claims, the name Belobog cannot be found in any authentic written document concerning Slavic culture. Some Slavic myths, such as the myth of creation, feature Belobog, but we cannot be certain that this myth has its origins in the pre-Christian period. This myth tells that the world was created by Crnobog and Belobog who, through joint effort, brought their creation to perfection. Although during the process of world creation the gods came into conflict, precisely those actions they performed against each other caused the universe to look as it does. There was another dualistic concept that proclaimed Cernobog god of the dark half of the year, opposed by Belobog – the ruler of the sunny half. The rule of Belobog, according to this belief, started with the winter solstice, while Cert's rule over nature started with the summer solstice. The winter solstice itself was the battle day of these two opposed powers, and on that day Belobog won a victory. This belief could have its roots in authentic Slavic faith since all the other pagan tribes understood that day in a similar way.

We have already mentioned that records on old Slavic religion give no information whatsoever on family relations between gods. However, Vladimir Aleksejevic Istarhov, the author of *The Strike of the Russian Gods*, says that Crnobog had a life companion, a she-goat Sedunja, with whom he had a son named Vij. Although Istarhov did not record the myth about this relation, we can conclude that this legend too dates from the period after conversion to Christianity, because Christianity associated horned animals, especially goats, with evil forces.

However we choose to understand Cernobog, we should remember that no pagan system, including the Slavic one, involves dualism. Polytheism, as a fundamental characteristic of pagan religions, could never contain teachings about one unique primordial cause, or two of them. Due to this fact, the Wicce system for example is a typical product of the new age, because this religion operates on two basic principles – male and female, that is God and Goddess. Slavic neo-paganism also postulates only one god (sometimes it is Rod, sometimes Dazbog) that represents the primeval principle of the universe. Such an idea of the universe did not exist in the authentic Slavic creed, neither did the division between a good and a bad deity. This split could only come through the influence of Christianity, which is based on dualism of good and evil embodied, on the highest level, in God and Satan, and in angels and demons on lower levels.

## Horz

In 980 Prince Vladimir erected statues of pagan gods on a hill above Kiev, unaware that he would be the one to pull them down soon after that. Apart from the statues of Perun, Mokosi, Stribog, Simargal and Dazbog, Vladimir also put up a statue of Horz. There is no information on how this statue looked like, but we can at least guess how Horz was imagined by analyzing the records. Momir Jankovic attributed to Horz these physical characteristics: solar halo above his head, on his head a horn that symbolizes the Moon and on his chest a wolf devouring the Moon. From this description we can conclude that Horz was above all a god related to the celestial bodies, although we can doubt that his influence was confined strictly to this area.

A Ukrainian legend features Prince Viseslav who at his “wolf pace” covers the distance between Kiev and the Crimea. His goal is to intercept Horz and reach the Crimea before a cock's crow. Horz here has the role of the morning Sun that Viseslav has to outrun, but he also stands for the Moon whose path Viseslav follows. What does Viseslav's “wolf pace” stand for? We know that Slavic folklore abounds with stories about werewolves, the people who during their lifetime or after death turn into wolves. Prince Viseslav is one of them, a werewolf who under the influence of Horz/the Moon casts off his human form and takes the form of a wolf. Quite similar is the story of Emperor Trajan, a demonic creature who performs evil deeds at night, lingering in the darkness and hiding from the morning sun. Horz is therefore the Moon ruling over the werewolves, vampires and demons, although he cannot be thought of as an evil force because of that, but simply an energy that awakes beastly, dark and hidden urges in man and creatures similar to him. Horz is related to the Moon in yet another way. His symbol is a horn, and on his chest he has a wolf devouring the Moon, thus symbolizing its eclipse. The adjective kors is very similar to Horz's name, and it denotes something that is incomplete, imperfect. This adjective, of course, refers to the Moon that in its crescent and waning phases looks exactly like that.

As we have said already, Horz represents not only the Moon, but the morning Sun as well, maybe even the Sun at all its stages. Sreznjev, the researcher who discovered a Horz's statue, calls him Apollo. Horz is sometimes thought to be the same as Dazbog, thus making a single deity Horz-Dazbog. Horz's sisters are Hrsalkas – the Sun girls. Linguistic analysis shows that Horz was sooner a god of the Sun than the Moon. Precisely that analysis will point to the problem of Horz's primal origin and his position in Slavic

mythology.

Most experts (Dragoslav Srejavic, Louis Léger) do not consider this deity to be originally Slavic. The basic problem that emerges when studying Horz is his name, which is not thought to be of Slavic origin. What can etymology tell us? Spasoje Vasiljev thinks that the name Horz comes from the Iranian word kursid and Hebrew cheres, both meaning “the Sun”. There are also Egyptian Horus and Persian Khores, who have similar characteristics as Horz. All these words mark Horz as a god of the Sun, but he is not just that. Horz is, like Svarozic, just another form of the Sun represented as the flame or the light that appears as the Moon at night and as the rising Sun in the morning. Supporting this is one of his forms – Svarozic, son of Svarog, immaterial, the flame of heaven. As we know, Horz and Dazbog belong to the “svarozic” group (little Svarogs), and they simply represent two aspects of one and the same thing.

It then comes as no surprise that Horz and Dazbog are sometimes seen as one entity: Horz-Dazbog. Namely, the Sun as the light of day is seen as Dazbog, and the Moon that illuminates the night is Horz (the Sun of the night). Apart from that, Horz is also the morning Sun that Trajan and Prince Viseslav try to elude. Horz as one of the “svarozic” had one more role. In the Preun-Horz-Veles trinity, that was worshipped before the statues of the Kiev pantheon were erected, Horz was perceived as the flame. In Horz we can see different forms of the earthly flame that is a manifestation of Svarog’s heavenly fire, the fire that appears on earth as the Sun, the Moon and the flame.

Horz’s name is related to many place names, like Horsovo and Horos in Bulgaria, the island of Hortica on the Dnjepr River and the Horem Sea that the Volga flows into. Czech term for fire is horecka, which once again indicates that Horz can be a “svarozic” taking the form of a flame. One of the terms used to refer to a rooster is oroz, so this is the animal that heralds the coming of Horz as the morning Sun. There is also xorovod, a type of dance.

Although the Slavic origin of Horz is disputable, we have included him among the traditional Slavic deities. Horz is mentioned in Nestor’s chronicle in the description of the Kiev pantheon, and in many other sources as well. We have already mentioned the Ukrainian legend of Prince Viseslav, which is found in The Stories of Igor’s People. Jordanes, the chronicler that studied the period of history from the second to the sixth century AD, mentions the Hortica Island on the Dnjepr as the site of a temple dedicated to Horz. Numerous place names support the theory that Horz was a Slavic god, but when analysing this deity we must take both interpretations of his origin into consideration.

by Vesna Kakaševski

## **Dazbog, Dazdbog, Dabog, Dajbog**

Dazbog was a god of the Sun, flame and rain. Dazbog was also considered to be a giver-god, because one of his names was Dajbog. The first part of the name is “daj” – a form of the verb to give, while the second part “bog” means god. But what did Dazbog actually give? It is possible that giving refers the Sun and sunlight which is essential for many natural processes. The Sun was also very important to the Slavs. It was the source of life and was always considered to be a positive force. The Sun gave life to the Earth, and the god who gave it was therefore Dajbog. Dazbog actually stands for the Sun disc.

In all surviving medieval texts concerning the Slavs, Dazbog is always mentioned at some point. His name was written down by Roman, Greek and Russian chroniclers who wrote about old Slavic creed. Helios from Greek texts was translated into Slavic as Dazbog. In the Malalin manuscript dating from the 6th century Helios was also translated as Dazbog. The Russian translator tried to tell a story set in Egypt, but he substituted Greek gods for Slavic. Dazbog is also mentioned in the Spanish Code, an epic telling about Igor’s quest and many other things. Vladimir the Great put statues of seven gods in front of his palace in Kiev, and among them was Dazbog’s statue.

To a family he was a protector of the house’s fireplace and its fire, man’s basic necessity for survival during the winter, and an indispensable help in performing everyday work. But flames could be cruel and turn against men, and take them to the underworld or destroy their property. Flames’ benevolence was crucial to survival, and many rituals were therefore related to them.

Dazbog was definitely the god of rain, too. One of his names was Dazdbog, and “dazd” in many Slavic languages means rain (Slovak, Czech, Russian, Polish...). The rain was important because harvests depended upon it. In times of drought many rain invoking rituals were performed.

We know that the Slavs addressed their gods as their equals and that they considered themselves gods' descendants. To be more precise, they thought of themselves as Dazbog's grandchildren, or his lineal descendants. Due to a short lifespan, it was uncommon in those times that grandchildren should meet their grandfather.

Dazbog was one of Svarog's sons. It is not certain how many sons Svarog had, but Dazbog was almost beyond doubt one of them. Some authors mention only two – Svarozic and Dazbog (Vyacheslav Vsevolodovi and Vladimir Toporov), while others mention Perun, Svetovid, Dazbog and Veles as Svarog's sons, and they refer to all of them as a group - "svarozici" (little Svarogs). Be that as it may, Dazbog appears in every combination.

During the day, the Sun was in the sky giving out light, while at night it was in the underworld. Actually, every morning Dazbog would set out on the journey across the sky riding a white horse or riding in a carriage, and in the evening he died or went to the world of the dead, only to come to life again next morning. We can notice in Dazbog the cycle of dying and rebirth that is frequently found in many pagan creeds, including Slavic paganism. The Serbs mention Dazbog, and folklore preserved a lame Daba, who was almost always presented as an evil spirit, which probably indicates Dazbog's nature when being a part of the underworld, that is the world of the dead. The Serbs more than any other people imagined Dazbog as a lame old man, dressed in animal skins, usually bear skin, accompanied by a wolf. The wolf actually stands for his animal incarnation, or his primary shape that did not cease to exist after Dazbog turned anthropomorphic. The wolf became a servant, and often a messenger as well. Although his basic form was anthropomorphic, Dazbog frequently changed his shape, and his earliest wolf form remained his symbol. As the Serbs considered themselves his descendants, the wolf became a sacred animal. In one catalogue of peoples, it is recorded that the Serbs were descendants of the wolf. "Saracen is descended from the boar, Turk from the snake, Tatar from the hound, Serb from the wolf, Bulgarian from the bull, Aleman from the eagle..."

The belief in the power of the Sun was extremely strong among the Slavs. Cajkanovic claims that Dazbog was the supreme god of the Serbs. This is supported by the fact that a Slavic festivity dedicated to the invincible Sun coincides with Christmas Day. Since this holiday was impossible to uproot, it was simply substituted by a similarly important Christian one.

Upon conversion to Christianity demonic characteristics were attributed to Dazbog. He became the most powerful of the demons and the main opponent of the Christian God. This was possibly due to his appearance of a lame one-eyed old man, dressed in dark bear skin, dwelling in the underworld quite often. We can however opt for the possibility that this was due to the power of Dazbog's cult that was to be eliminated at all costs. Dazbog's characteristics were later in Christianity transferred to St Sava, who was also presented in folk tales as a shepherd followed by a wolf. St Sava is also a giver in those tales.

by Nikola Milošević

## Gerovit, Jarilo

Gerovit could be understood in two ways: as a war god or as a Sun god who, as Jarilo, stands for the one who bestows fertility. We will first examine Gerovit's warrior nature.

Jarilo - On the island of Rujan there was a temple in which Gerovit's statue with seven heads and eight swords took up the central position. The temple was built from wood and had only one room with four columns, while the walls were decorated with purple drapery. What did the seven heads of Gerovit (or Rudjevit, as he was called on the island of Rujan) symbolize? Some think that this god embodies all the seven gods of the Kiev pantheon, while others claim that the seven heads stand for the seven summer months during which Gerovit ruled. The same goes for the seven swords, while the eighth one, which Gerovit holds in his hand, is his own and therefore represents an attribute of a war god. There was also a shield covered with golden plates that was kept in the temple as a holy object and represented Gerovit himself. This shield was carried out among the people who bowed respectfully to the image of their god.

As for the planetary connections, Alexander Asov links Jarilo with the warrior planet Mars. Many facts support this claim: Jarilo's colour is red, while he himself is connected with the zodiac sign of Aries. The month of Belogar – the term is a compound containing Jarilo's name - started on March 21st, the day when the Sun enters the Ram. Term "jare" (meaning kid) also survives in the expression used to denote this month, and lambs were in the old days sacrificed in Gerovit's honor. We also have the noun "jarost" (frenzy) and the reflexive verb "razjariti se" (fly into a rage) that contain Jarilo's name and so perfectly describe his warrior nature. After the Slavs converted to Christianity St George took over Gerovit's role. St George is a warrior-saint fighting dark forces embodied in the form of a dragon. Some people claim that this dragon stands for pagan gods and forces that Christianity proclaimed to be demonic and St George by killing the "dragon" actually kills precisely those "demons". But if we consider St George to be none

other than Gerovit, this explanation becomes invalid and masks a much clearer mythical picture. If we go beyond the boundaries set by a religion, in this case by Christianity, we come to the image of a solar, just god, a god who abides by the law of Justice, who destroys the forces that try to get in the way of Light, forces that cause degeneration and ruin of all that is good, beautiful and just. Mars is the planet related to this kind of divine purification and destruction of what ought to be destroyed. Another fact supports Asov's theory that Jarilo and planet Mars are interdependent. Greek Ares, equivalent of Roman Mars, is Aphrodite's lover, and her Slavic equivalent is Lada. As we know, Gerovit and Lada are represented in Slavic mythology as a divine couple. This match can be interpreted in two ways: as a mixture of Love and Hate, or a connection between Love and War that can become Love's other side, and vice versa. But it can also be interpreted quite differently: as a relationship and connection between a god and goddess of fertility. This brings us to the analysis of Gerovit's other aspect, the study of Gerovit as a fertility god.

We have already mentioned that Gerovit's seven heads could symbolize the seven summer months of his reign. Opposed to him is Porevit, the ruler of the remaining five winter months. At the same time, he was Gerovit's brother, and there was a temple on Rujan Island dedicated to him. Seen as a god of fertility, Gerovit stands for the Sun itself - abundant harvests depend upon it. As a protector-god he also protects the crops from hail that can destroy them. In rituals Gerovit was celebrated primarily as a fertility god. Festivities dedicated to him took place in the early summer, and their aim was to celebrate a new waking of the sun after a winter period. One Slavic ritual is very similar to the ritual the Celts used to perform to honor their fertility god – the Horn God. During the festivities dedicated to Jarilo boys would make a doll from straw and young twigs, and the doll represented Gerovit. The Slavs used to throw this doll in the water, hoping that it would bring a bumper harvest. As we know, the Celts used to burn the effigies made of wicker for the same reason, and they represented their Horn God as a green deity covered in leaves.

by Vesna Kakaševski

## Koledo

Koledo is a being that can be seen in two ways – as a winter spirit and as a god. Festivals dedicated to Koledo took place in the winter, and the most important one was Koljada that coincided with the date of the winter solstice. Customs related to this holiday survived into Christianity, and some authors consider that Christianity took this holiday over and transformed it into Christmas. In Bulgaria Christmas is still called Koleda, and the greeting used on this day is “merry Koleda”.

Koledo is Ovsenj's twin brother. Their mother is Zlatogorka Maja and their father is Dazbog. Ovsenj was born before Koledo and harnessed the horses to the heavenly chariot to make way for his brother. Koledo symbolizes the descent of god Krishna or Krisnji to earth. Ovsenj appears in the summer and Koledo in the winter. On the day of the winter solstice Ovsenj says farewell to the old year and Koledo welcomes the new year, or the new Sun.

Koledo gave people the knowledge of the universe and the celestial bodies. He gave them a book about the stars that the Slavs called Koledo's Star Book. Here we can see another similarity between Koledo and Krishna. Krishna brings people knowledge in form of books – Vedas, and Koledo does the similar thing. If we consult the Vedas we can draw a conclusion that Koledo is an embodiment of Krishna or Krisnji, the term used by the Slavs to denote this god. Koledo made a calendar for the humans, a calendar that the Slavs called “Koledo's gift”, and he also revealed to them the knowledge of “the Great Circle” (probably the Milky Way). According to legend, Koledo's last descent on earth was around 6530 BC. Since then the knowledge was passed on from one generation to the next. The Greeks used to say that they got their sacred knowledge of the stars from the Hyperboreans from the north. Hyperboreans are the people from Greek myths who lived in the far north. They never waged wars and they lived in luxury. They worshipped the Sun and the solar gods. It was said that the Sun never set in their country. From the facts that they worshipped the Sun and lived in the north we may conclude that these people were actually the Slavs. The Book of Veles tells about the time when the Slavs led easy lives and knew of no wars. We can therefore propose a theory that the Greeks acquired the knowledge on astronomy and astrology from the Slavs. The Slavs in their turn gained this knowledge from Koledo.

Koledo's name is mentioned in many toasts. There are the so-called koledar songs or koledi. These lyric ritual songs are mostly performed during Christmas holidays and are even today present in many areas. It was thought that, while bidding the old Sun farewell, Ovsenj released the dead, so men dressed in various clothes and went through the villages making noise. Koledars were exclusively men. They learned koledar songs from the village master. Koledars went through the village and sang for one entire night, up until the afternoon of the next day. There were always twelve of them, but they split up into two groups of six. Each group had a leader who carried a lantern decorated with rosemary. There were also three singers and a treasurer. They would hire a bag carrier whose only role was to carry the gifts given to them by the heads of the households they went to. The gifts mainly consisted of food



and drink.

Here is an example of a koledar song:

Our host, koledo!  
 Has an infant, koledo!  
 Young infant, koledo!  
 Male head, koledo!  
 On his head, koledo!  
 Mink hat, koledo!

Koledars went through the streets and knocked at the doors of the houses that had a candle burning in the window. They sung songs dedicated to every member of the household. They sang to a groom, a household head, a bride, babies, children. All koledar songs had their purpose. Koledo was mentioned in them as a protector and his name was chanted as a plea for happiness, strength and love. Through that he became a protector of the family and its individual members. He was later in some songs substituted by the Christian God, logically, we may say, since Koledo was a Vedic god, just one of the manifestations of one and the same god.

## Stribog, Striboh

Very little is known about Stribog today. A lot of information about this deity is lost, even though Stribog was one of the most important gods of the Slavs. Testimony to his role and importance is the fact that he is mentioned in all the old epics about the Slavs. In the epic "Slovo o polku Igorove" it is said that the winds, the grandsons of Stribog, blow from the sea. This leads to conclusion that Stribog is imagined as an old person, since he has grandsons. The grandsons were the winds from all directions. Many of the western chroniclers wrote that Stribog could be a destroyer of the good, but this should not be taken seriously, because these chroniclers always wrote with a purpose to decrease the importance of Slavic gods and impose their religion, mostly Christianity. In order to understand this better, we should consider the region where Slavs lived. These were mainly plains, in the vicinity of rivers and swamps. Winds could be strong in these regions, but there were no winds that could destroy such as hurricanes and tornados. Therefore, Stribog could not be a destroyer. The winds in the regions where Slavs lived did not destroy, so Stribog as the lord of the winds, was not a destroyer. In order to understand his role, we need to see what his name consists of. A part of the name tells us that it is a deity, namely it contains the word bog (god). We should learn more about the function of Stribog from the first part of his name, the word STRI. The verb 'to spread' in some Slavic languages, like Slovakian, is roztrusovat. It is clear that a sound change occurred so that s became z, but otherwise we can see the word STR from Stribog's name. Considering this, it is probable that he was pollinator of seeds, the one who spreads small things, but he could also spread litter.

He was imagined as an old man who had a warrior's horn. With this horn he woke up the winds, his grandsons. Because of this feature a lot of army chiefs identified with Stribog and saw him as an ideal. By the same token, princes often built his idols and worshipped them. Stribog was especially worshipped in Kievian Russia, with the eastern Slavs. A lot of records from that time tell us about this. In the record Povest vremennih let it is mentioned that Stribog's statue was built on a hill above Kiev, together with Perun's, Hors', Dažbog's, Simargil's and Mokoš's.

Stribog was also a protector of Vesna, together with Jarilo. Stribog, as a god of wind and air, brought Vesna every spring on the wings of an easy spring gale. Together they defeated Morana every spring and brought spring and better life conditions to the earthly world.

Eagle was the animal consecrated to Stribog. Plants consecrated to Stribog were hawthorn and oak. When pledges were made, Stribog was often warrantor. Festivities in Stribog's honor were organized in the summer as well as in the winter. They were probably organized in the summer in order to invoke winds and rain, while in the winter they were organized in order to appease him. In the period of Christianization Stribog's characteristics were overtaken by St. Bartholomew and Stevan vetroviti (windy).

## Rod

As well as all other religions and peoples, the Slavic religion also has its own genesis story. One of the first questions of every conscious being is related to the genesis. Where did everything come from? Where did the man's environment come from and how

did it come to be? What is the purpose of the man on the Earth? How should one behave and act? Religions answer plenty of these questions with a genesis myth. Where there is a beginning, there is a cause, and where there is a cause, there is the purpose of existence.

Rod is a creator. Actually, he is everything that exists. He was self-born. In the beginning, there was only darkness, and Rod was, like a bud, trapped in an egg. When he gave life to the love goddess, Lada, the shell cracked and love went out through the openings (this manner of creation of the Universe reminds us of the Big Bang). Having cut his own yolk stalk, Rod separated celestial waters from the waters of the ocean by placing the Earth between them. When he released himself from the egg, he continued creating. He separated the truth from a lie, light from darkness, Nav from Jav, good from evil. After that, he created Mother Earth who entered the ocean. Rod is the creator of all gods. At the end of the creation, Rod made celestial bodies, nature, and natural phenomena from himself. He made the Sun from his face, the Moon from his chest, stars from his eyes, sunrise and sunset from his forehead, dark nights from his thoughts, winds from his breath, rain, snow, and hale from his tears, and thunders and lightning's from his voice.

By doing this, Rod became the principle of the universe. He created a cow Zemun and a goat Sedunia. Their milk was spilt and it created the Milky Way.

Rod - Svarog completed the creation of the world by setting up 12 pillars which support the celestial vault. It is mentioned in some sources that Rod created the stone Alatir which he used to stir the milk of life and from the milk, Mother Raw Earth (Mother Earth, mentioned earlier) and the Milky Ocean were created. According to the same sources, Alatir remained at the bottom of the Milky Ocean, and the duck Sveta ('sveta' meaning 'holy'), which later hatched many gods was created from sea foam.

Rod actually represents a monotheistic side of Slavic religion. Although there are many gods with the Slavs, Rod actually represents a God which fits into present monotheistic religions. Also, Rod fits into the scheme of Nietzsche's God, who existed in order to create the world and establish the principles of the universe. Once he had completed his goal, he was able to disappear, to die. Rod has become the principle and stopped appearing as a god, stopped interfering directly with the lives of mortals and gods, however, he is always present in them and the principles he represents influence everything. He is in everything, in fact, he is the foundation of everything. All the visible and invisible represents Rod.

Rod is worshiped in another way as well, however, that way has also something to do with the genesis. Rod is a protector of fruits, birth, and family. In all Slavic languages, all of the following nouns have a common root – ROD (urod [fruits], rodjenje [birth], porodica [family]). The following words also contain ROD in their roots: rođak [cousin], rodbina [relatives], porod [offspring], priroda [nature], narod [people]. This shows how much the Slavs respected Rod and to which extent they saw the foundation of everything in him. The literal translation of the Slavic word 'priroda' which means 'nature' is 'close to Rod'; and the word 'narod' which means 'people' literally translates as 'on Rod', and Rod is also the protector of people. Rod is the protector of kinship and relations between clans. Rod is in everything as a foundation or as a sort of a base. Rod is everywhere around us in the manner later represented in Christianity (with the difference that Rod is deprived of his name, because Christian god is nameless).

It is quite possible that numerous Slavic gods are just epithets or incarnations of Rod. There is a similar phenomenon in Hinduism, where Krishna has a lot of incarnations. Thus, there is a connection between the Slavs in Europe and the period before their arrival in Europe when they, as well as all Indo-European people, had lived on the territory of modern India before they moved to Europe. There are many analogies which go in favor of this theory, starting with the fact that some Slavic words originate in Sanskrit (e.g. Swarga, which means 'sky' in Sanskrit).

by Nikola Milošević

## Kupalo

Anyone who even superficially searched the sites on Slavic mythology had a chance to find a deity named Kupalo in numerous glossaries and dictionaries. Brief explanations and descriptions of this god's roles will induce the reader to conclude that this is simply a god of bathing (kupati se = to bathe) whose main feature became an integral part of his name. The problem of Kupalo's tradition and, in general, his status as a god, is hardly ever the target of such perfunctory research which will withhold many useful and valuable pieces of information from the reader.

Before we proceed to examine the origin of Kupalo in Slavic mythology, we will give a brief explanation why we have enlisted him among the non-traditional Slavic deities. Firstly, none of the traditional sources on Slavic mythology mentions this god, his temples, statues, or the members of his cult. Although the same is true of many Slavic gods, and even more of goddesses, authors like Vasiljev, Srejovic and Legé do not even mention Kupalo and think that he was not worshipped by the Slavs before conversion to Christianity. If we however turn to the Christian sources, that is the authors who describe Slavic customs and myths of the late Middle Ages, we will see that the situation is quite the opposite. The period following the conversion of the Slavs is very important for the research on Slavic mythology, since at that time many new myths were established while some old ones were modified. The period of the so-called religious duality was characterized by interpenetration of the traditional Slavic religion and the new, Christian, ideology. That was the time when the myths about Rod and world creation emerged, as well as many links of kinship between gods unmentioned in the myths related to the pre-Christian period. Regardless of what the customs related to Kupalo were like before Christianization, we cannot find any information on them in the traditional sources dealing with Slavic mythology. The only thing we know is that the customs were connected with the celebration of the summer solstice (21st June), and that this festival was, upon conversion, substituted by St. John's Day, or the day of Russian Ivan Kupala. We will therefore start our analysis with the Christian holiday, and end our article with a final conclusion about Kupalo's nature.

John the Baptist, or Ivan Kupalo, appeared, according to legend, on the Volga River in the fifteenth century AD. After that, the holiday dedicated to this saint was celebrated in Russia, and its main characteristic was ritual bathing. The Christian saint himself was always connected with the act of bathing since St. John was the one who baptized Jesus Christ in the waters of the Jordan River. In the Christian world, ritual bathing was therefore related to spiritual and physical purification and to some sort of initiation. On the other hand, even before St. John's holiday was established in Russia, there was the tradition of ritual bathing already existing among the Old Slavs. What's more, Alexander Asov thinks the introduction of St. John's holiday was just an incentive for the renewal of the Slavic tradition he refers to as "kupalenjska". Consequently, even before the Slavs adopted the customs related to the festival of the so-called Ivan Kupalo, they had evidently followed some similar custom. Some sources inform us that the Slavs used to celebrate the summer solstice, called Kupalo, of which ritual bathing was a compulsory part.

We can conclude beyond doubt that in this way a Christian holiday was purposefully established in the Middle Ages Russia in order to render Christianity more acceptable to the Slavs. Insignificant difference between the dates of pagan and Christian holiday supports our claim since, as we know, St. John's day is celebrated on 7th July. Now we can draw a conclusion about Kupalo's nature – he was connected to the period of the summer solstice celebrations the custom of ritual bathing.

What else can we learn from the sources on Slavic customs? During this holiday, ritual cleansing was not preformed only by bathing – holy fires were also used for the same purpose. These holy fires were most frequently jumped over, since the Slavs believed that in that way they could free themselves from the influence of negative, that is demon, forces. They used to lead cattle over the holy fire for the same reason.

Apart from that, there was a custom of searching for and cooking magic herbs. There was one more interesting custom, with which we will deal in more detail, since it is related to a myth featuring Kupalo. The myth is connected to the custom of throwing wreaths down the river, the purpose of which was to help young Slavic girls find their future husband. Once upon a time, the myth says, there were twin brother and sister – Kostroma and Kupalo. Separated at birth from each other, they grew until they were at a marrying age. As she was walking by the river one day, Kostroma's wreath fell from her head into the river and was accidentally picked up by her long-lost brother – Kupalo. Ignorant of being relatives, Kostroma and Kupalo got married, since a boy who picked up a girl's wreath was bound by custom to become her husband. Learning however that they were related, Kostroma and Kupalo drowned, and the gods, feeling pity for them, turned them into flowers.

Can we, from everything mentioned above, conclude that the Slavs worshipped a god of male gender named Kupalo? Not at all. Description of a "kupalenjski" ritual (the term used by Asov) supports the theory that Kupalo's holiday was actually dedicated to a goddess. Namely, on the day of the summer solstice the Old Slavs would make a doll from straw, having female genitals, and then ritually destroy it. Most frequently they would "drown" Kupala doll in the water or burn it ritually, and similar practice was common to the former neighbors of the Slavs – the Celts. Kupalo could therefore have been of female gender as well, that is, this deity could have had the name Kupala. Was it really a deity or just the spirit of the solstice is the question we still have no answer to. Slavic custom of ritual bathing is described in The Book of Veles, the authenticity of which is still a matter of dispute. On the plate number 14 of The Book of Veles one of the authors says: "We wash our bodies and our spirit in the pure living water". Text on the plate number 25 says something similar: "And Kupalo sends us the message that we have to be an army of pure bodies and souls. And so we follow the footsteps of he who is our protector in a righteous fight". We can see from all this how much attention the Slavs were

devoting to the purity of body and soul, and how much their behavior was influenced by a strict moral code. This kind of attitude is closely connected with the Slavs' Aryan origin, since the old Vedans had a similar view of the world and performed similar cleansing rituals.

We hope that Kupalo's role in Slavic spiritual world is now somewhat better explained. Slavic system of spiritual values cannot be fully understood if we do not take into consideration the significance the Slavs attached to spiritual and bodily purification. Due to that, we can think of Kupalo primarily as a symbol of the Slavs' striving for spiritual and moral purity, which makes the problem his divine status, his gender or his traditional origin less significant for the research into and analysis of Slavic religious feeling.

## Lela (Ljelje, Poljelja)

Lela as a deity is not mentioned in Russian sources on old Slavic religion, nor in the sources on the religion of the Polab-Baltic and the Western Slavs in general. Serbian lyric songs, however, are full of invocations of Lela, whereas in Serbian epic poems this character also appears, admittedly, masked behind the name of Jelena or Jelica. We can therefore rightfully conclude that Lela might have been worshipped on Serbia's territory or even beyond.

Judging by the roles associated with this goddess, we can think of Lela as a very old deity. In the Southern Slavs' religion she has the role of the Forest Mother whose cult is connected to the period of matriarchy. Lela is most similar to Greek Artemis, since both are associated with wild female sexuality in the period when women had not yet been made inferior. She was the goddess of the forest, taking care of the forest creatures and the people who sought shelter in the woods. Aleksandra Bajic thinks that Lela is the protector of women still invoked by Serbian and Vlach women who face serious problems. We can see from all this that Lela is the most similar to Devana due to her unrestrained femininity. On the other hand, differences between Devana and Lela are considerable. Devana is, above all, a goddess of marked lunar characteristics, unlike Lela, who is represented as the goddess of summer and the bride of the Sun.

In this way, Lela stands for that part in woman which slowly is submitting to male dominance and which gives in only to the one who is as divine as she. Her companion is the Sun himself, of whom Lela is eternal bride. In lyric folk songs she is also referred to as the Sun's little sister. By analysing the myths about Lela we can see how a supreme female deity was dethroned and made to share her divine features with her male counterpart. The goddess of matriarchy was losing her power more and more until the point when she was finally deprived of her divine status in Christianity, which mentions no female deity.

What can we learn about Lela from Serbian lyric poems? They represent her as the daughter of Lada, the goddess of love. In some poems these two goddesses are perceived as one: "Lejla, Ljejlja / Hey Poljelja, Ljelja / Liljana Lada" . \* Ljelj was thought to be her father, and her brother was Poljelj, as can be seen from the following lines: "...that beautiful dance of Lada, / both of Lada and of Ljelj, / and of their son Poljelj, / and of their daughter Poljelja". \* In the songs of this type there frequently occurs an exclamation – "le" – which is considered to be a short form derived from Lela's name. The exclamation "le" is in Serbian and Macedonian songs associated with expressing sadness and sorrow, and consequently, in the group of Southern Slavic languages the term used for keening is "lelek". Here is an example of "lelek": in Macedonian poem "Zajdi, zajdi" a young man complains to the forest about his transience addressing her as "you forest, lo, my sister", uttering his grief in that way. The exclamation "le", thus connected to the forest, supports the theory that Lela was the goddess of the forest. Lela also appears in lyric poems in disguise – as a wild forest girl wooed by many men, none of whom is destined to have her. When this girl is taken away by the suitors representing the emperor of Turkey, the skies vent their rage by sending thunder and lightning down on them. They are punished for being impertinent enough to kidnap the Sun's sister, the cousin of the Moon and the mistress of the forest. Epic poems feature a girl named Jelica, who is frequently the companion to the heroes representing solar deities. One of those heroes is, for example, duke Prijezda, who jumps into an abyss with his wife to avoid being captured by the Turks. Natko Nodilo thinks that duke Prijezda and his brother Pojezda are Slavic version of the Asvins, Hindu heroes that are considered to be the descendants of the sun. According to Aleksandra Bajic, Jelica that appears in this epic poem ("The Death of Duke Prijezda") is, like many other Jelicas, none other than Lela, the powerful goddess of the forest and the bride of the Sun.

\*taken from: SVEVLAD

## Majka Vlazna Zemlja, Matka Ziema, Mati Syra Zemja

Mati Syra Zemlia (Moist Mother Earth), Slavic mother goddess, is probably one of the oldest and most important deities. Her name explicitly describes her as forever fertile, life-giving and reproductive force. The cult of the mother goddess originates from the period of matriarchy, the system that, in some of its forms, lasted among the Slavs even until the 10th century. Records on the life of Lady Olga (second half of the 10th century) mention that the women of that age had almost the same rights as the men. Olga herself was the owner of a land, and she ruled over it before she married Lord Igor, whose throne she inherited.

### Majka zemlja

According to written sources, mother goddess, along with an array of natural deities and ancestral spirits, was worshipped until 988. We can see here that some forms of matriarchy survived up to the point when prince Vladimir converted to Christianity in 988 and pulled down the polytheistic idols placed on a hill above Kiev. As for the women rights on our territory, the situation was quite similar. Vladislav Ribnikar thought that the Slav women had lost their rights only after the Serbs had accepted Byzantine customs and laws. Although all the researchers do not share the idea that women's rights were equal to men's (Marija Gimbutas), they generally agree that the Slavs lived in some type of matriarchy. This fact was used by Maria Semionova, the writer, who in her novels on Vukodav described Slavic society as the one in which women were sacred. Another fact supports the claim that the cult of mother goddess was very old – she was never represented in a human form, but was rather worshipped as the divine Earth itself. As we know, this type of perception is characteristic of the oldest form of religion – animism. In animism, everything that surrounds the man is divine and infused with a soul.

Mati Vlazna Zemlja is just one of the names of the mother goddess. In Poland she was known as Matka Ziemia, and in Lithuania as Zemyna, that is, the Earth itself. In The Book of Veles she is mentioned as the cow named Zemun, the divine cow connector with the constellation of the Bull (the town of Zemun was probably named after this mother goddess). The cow is certainly related to a goddess of fertility, since every mother goddess is represented as having many breasts. The Slavs always had a particular connection with their mother goddess, quite different from the one they had with all the other gods. This connection was a mix of love, admiration, and the feeling of deep intimacy. Mother goddess was the only deity whom the Slavs addressed directly, without mediators or using priests' services. She had the role of an oracle that the Slavs consulted for advice, but she was also a divine witness and judge. In the disputes about private property, people used to plead with her to be their witness and they swore by her name. To confirm that the marriage ceremony is satisfyingly concluded, people would swallow a lump of earth or put it on their head. Her help was also invoked when the cattle needed protection from disease. The Slavs would make a furrow with a plough in the earth around the cattle, releasing in that way the protective power of the earth.

Since Mati Vlazna Zemlja was one of the most worshipped deities, it comes as no surprise to find traces of her cult among the Slavs even after they converted to Christianity. In Russia, after 988 there was a period of the so-called religious duality, during which pagan gods were worshipped along with Christ and Christian saints. Characteristics of mother goddess were transferred to Virgin Mary. A myth presenting mother goddess in a somewhat atypical role originates from this period. This myth tells about how Rod and Lada created the universe, and how the three worlds – Jav, Nav and Prav were created. Jav was connected with Majka Vlazna Zemlja and it stood for everything that people could perceive with their five senses, the material world. Sources available on the internet describe an event that took place in a Slavic village (the name of the village is not given) in which cholera broke out. The village women gathered one night and started to plough the earth in order to stir the powers of the mother goddess and plead with her for help. While doing this, they tried to look as scary as possible, so they carried skulls and various tools with them. Their goal was to drive cholera out of their village by using the power of Majka Vlazna Zemlja, at the same time awaking an ancient force that was slumbering within themselves for hundreds of years. The village virgins let their hair hang loose, and the old women covered their heads with a white cloth. The group made terrible noise to scare the evil forces, and every man that chanced to be in the women's way was beaten by the tools they carried. It would not be surprising to witness this kind of ritual in the times of matriarchy, when the woman had the leading role in the society and when it was believed that she was the human form of the earth goddess. But this particular event took place at the beginning of the 20th century. This shows that the cult of Majka Vlazna Zemlja survived into our times in an almost unaltered form, and we can consequently conclude that this goddess was one of the most important deities of the Slavic pantheon.

## Mokoš

Goddess Mokos was worshipped by the Eastern Slavs, but some forms of her name also appear among the Western Slavs (Mukes, Mukus, Mococize). Mokos was the goddess of spinning, but she was also a protector of women, taking care about their health and their children. She helped the women in labor and protected their babies, at the same time helping the women keep a good marriage. Besides spinning, Mokos was connected with other duties reserved for women and with household management, but spinning was

the skill that was in close relation with this goddess. There were many customs concerning Mokos as the protector of the spinners.

**Mokoš -**

Slavic women would throw hemp, called "mokrica" (mokar = wet), into the water. The hemp was a sacrifice offered to Mokos. Hemp yarn was not to be left over the night, lest Mokos would spin it. Another of Mokos's roles was to protect the sheep and their fleece; the Slavs made offerings to her for that reason, too. A pair of scissors, basil and a skein of wool used to be put before the feet of Mokos's statue, with the aim of insuring protection for the lambs that hadn't been shorn yet. Even after conversion to Christianity, some beliefs related to Mokos were kept. In northern Russia, there was a belief that during the Lent Mokos went from house to house supervising the spinners. It is thought that Mokos had a role similar to that of the Sudjajas (Sudjaje = the Fates). Since she was connected with spindle and distaff, it is assumed that Mokos's area of influence stretched to the cosmic plain, making her the goddess that controlled human destiny and cut the short thread of human life.

Another action related to Mokos was casting spells. The women that practiced sorcery in the 16th century Russia were called mokose. Aleksandra Bajic brings Mokosa in connection with Baba-Jaga, a witch from Russian fairy tales that lives in a cottage placed on chicken legs as foundations and helps boys and girls by giving them magic objects. A question arises, however, whether Mokos was originally a witch goddess or she became one after Christianization.

Mokos was a goddess of the Kiev pantheon. Her statue was erected by prince Vladimir in 980 AD on a hill above Kiev, but it was pulled down by the same prince eight years later, after he converted to Christianity. How was Mokos represented? In northern Russia she was imagined as a woman having a big head and long arms. Vollmer, the historian, mentions Mokos's statue representing a figure put together from parts of different animals. Owing to that, Mokos was considered to be the goddess of ugliness, pains, troubles and human passion, but this interpretation has no foundation in the traditional ways of representing Mokos.

What can we learn from etymological analysis of Mokos's name? The name of this goddess is most frequently connected with the word mek (= soft), so she could be related to something that is soft. Since she was the spinners' goddess and the protector of the sheep, it is most probable that the adjective "soft" refers to fleece. Mokos could also be connected with the adjective mokro (= wet), which makes some authors identify her with Majka Vlazna Zemlja. This identification is certainly based on one of Mokos's characteristics – she was also seen as the goddess of fertility. The rain was therefore sometimes referred to as "Mokos's milk". The term Mokos is also used in Finland, where it can usually be found as a surname. The Finns are thought to have taken this name over from the Slavs, or to be more precise, those whose last name is Mokos are thought to be of Slavic origin.

Mokos is sometimes identified with Vida, Svarog's wife. She was, along with Svarog, the creator of mankind, and was consequently connected with the white bee, Slavic mythical ancestor. The bee is therefore Mokos's holy animal, along with the sheep and the snake. Her plants are lime, flax and "kantaron". Lime is of course related to the first woman made of lime-wood, created by Mokos. According to Cajkanovic, flax is a plant frequently used in casting spells, whereas "kantaron" is used in treating problems connected with female reproductive organs.

Mokos's characteristics were transferred onto St. Petka. St. Petka is also the protector of women, and it is interesting to know that Vlach women frequently mention this saint while performing magic rituals. Some of them pray to St. Petka to help them perform the ritual, and she even appeared to a man to welcome him into a witch cult. Mokos's holy day is Friday – women must not spin on that day, otherwise Mokos will punish them. The festival dedicated to this goddess was celebrated some time between 25th October and 1st November, depending on which date happened to be Friday. As we know, St Petka's Day is celebrated on 27th October, and that holiday is fixed to that date, although it probably shouldn't be because Friday is dedicated to female deities Freya (Friday) and Venus (venerdi). On Mokos's holiday people would go to a lime-tree wood and make offerings usually consisting of herbs and various vegetables, but there is also a record that they sometimes sacrificed birds to this goddess.

## **Morana**

Morana was the Slavic goddess of winter and death. As the goddess of winter, she was never popular among the Old Slavs, which is understandable if we have in mind the climate in which they used to live. Morana was a long and cold winter, a winter that could bring death through famine and extreme cold, that could cause disease and massive death of the cattle. Her arrival was therefore always expected with fear and her departure was celebrated with a lot of noise and cheer. Her complete opposite was goddess Vesna, whom the people used to welcome with festivals and jubilation, at the same time joyfully witnessing the departure of

Morana – the winter. Numerous rituals were connected with seeing Morana off. People would most frequently make a doll representing this goddess and then ritually destroy it. They made the doll from straw or switches, and then beat it with their hoes. After that they either threw it into the water or burned it. There was another ritual related to Morana, that was performed in the month of March. That was the so-called mackare (maska = mask), when a masked group of people used to gather in order to scare Morana and drive her away.

Let us now deal with the relations between Morana and other Slavic deities. Stories concerning these relations are of obscure origin and disputable authenticity, but we will on this occasion take them as relevant sources on Slavic mythology, since they offer a wealth of information on Morana's nature. According to one of these stories, Dazbog, the Sun-god, went to the underworld called Nav in search of his wife Zlata Maja, but there instead of her he met Morana, who seduced him. Since after some time she became bored with Dazbog and found another lover – Jula Crnobog, Morana decided to poison Dazbog, but he was saved by Ziva. Then he burned Morana and banished her back to Nav. This story perfectly fits the process of the Sun's movement throughout the year, because the Sun, according to the belief of every pagan people, spends the winter in the underworld, called Nav by the Slavs. His mistress is then the winter herself, and she tries to prevent him from leaving the underworld by giving him the drink of oblivion. But Morana cannot rule forever, so at the end of the story Dazbog is released and she is destroyed. Another myth brings Morana in connection with Voden, making them a divine couple of the underworld. Voden (also called Moran) and Morana drown people in their Morana - dark waters, so the Slavs tried to propitiate them by sacrificial offerings. As a water goddess, Morana also appeared as Modruna, a witch that the Slavs living in the Urals believed to inhabit the ponds. She usually appeared as an ugly old woman, but to those who showed no fear before her she appeared as a beautiful young girl. The name of the Morava River has some similarities with the name Morana, another fact that supports the theory that Morana was a water deity. The argument is even stronger if we know that the Slavs thought of water as a hiding place of dark forces and a connection with the underworld – Nav.

Morana was described as a woman of dark hair and a terrifying appearance. A similar description was used for another creature of quite the same nature – Kuga (kuga = the plague). Kuga was probably just one of the aspects of Morana. Another was Mora – a female demon that attacked people by night and sat on their chest causing nightmares. Witches were also connected with Morana, like many other demonic beings. But we cannot claim that Morana was an entirely negative goddess. No pagan system has a deity with such characteristics, since the unrealistic division between the absolute good and absolute evil came only with Christianity. In Morana we have an example of how our ancestors worshipped even something that did not bring them good, but rather made them scared and terrified.

by Vesna Kakasevski

## Podaga

The island of Rujan on the Baltic Sea was one of the most important religious centers of the Old Slavs. Its inhabitants were well-known for their dogged perseverance with their old religion, refusing to convert to Christianity. On the island of Rujan, there were temples dedicated to Svetovid, Rudjevid, Peorevid and Porenućije, but apart from these gods, another god of an unusual name is mentioned – Podaga. It is not yet determined whether this god had his own temple, or his picture, like the picture of Svarozic, was in a temple of another god. Since the written sources do not mention the exact location of the picture, we are unable to draw any conclusion concerning the problem of Podaga's role – whether he had any special functions, or he was just one of the manifestations of a Slavic god. For that reason, we will, in our analysis of Podaga's nature, concentrate on the limited data based on a Helmold's text and on the etymological analysis of Podaga's name.

Of all the chroniclers that dealt with life and religion of the Old Slavs, only Helmold mentions this deity. He also refers to Podaga as Pion, and the text in its entirety says: "The Slavs have various forms of superstition. Idols of some of their gods are in their temples, like the statue of Pion, also called Podaga..." The excerpt from Helmold's work is therefore the only historical piece of information that we have on this god. What can we learn about Podaga in this way? Nothing apart from the fact that the Slavs used to worship a deity of that name and that the statue or the picture of him was placed in a Rujan temple. Consequently, all further analysis has to be reduced to etymological study of Podaga's name. Maretic, the researcher, identifies the name Podaga with the name Budigoj, since the latter is frequently mentioned in the Slavic languages. Since this conclusion is not thoroughly explained, we will only mention how Maretic interprets the name Budigoj, that is allegedly the same as the name Podaga. Budigoj is seen as the god of wakefulness (budan = "awake"), that is, the god of the awakened life. Louis Legé and Spasoje Vasiljev rightfully challenged this conclusion. Legé thought that the name Podaga was a consequence of sound metathesis, and that its original form was Pogoda. His theory can be supported by facts. A Polish historian named Dlugos mentioned a female deity whose name was Pogoda. Goddess

Pogoda was, according to Dlugos, the goddess of temperature. Accepting Legé's theory about the existence of a deity named Pogoda, Spasoje Vasiljev performed the following etymological analysis: according to him, the name Podaga is a compound consisting of two words – the preposition po and the root god, that is related to time or to a certain period of time. The root god can be found in Serbian word godina (= "year"), also used by the Croats, the Bosnians, the Macedonians, etc. Vasiljev therefore thinks that Pogoda was a deity related to a certain period of time, a kind of a deadline or time limit, or a period by the end of which something had to be performed. Since our ancestors were primarily focused on agriculture and since they organised their lives in accordance with the natural fertility cycles, Pogoda was, according to Vasiljev, connected with field work, hunting and fishing. All of these activities depend on the natural cycles, like seeds' germination, growth and ripening, or the cycles of animal life based on the periods of mating, procreation, migration, etc. The verb pogoditi (= "to guess") is also related to Pogoda's name, which is why we can bring this god in connection with the ability to guess the right time to sow, reap, hunt. This verb is also related to hunting, since hunting implies shooting and hitting animals with arrows, spears, harpoons, or bullets (gadjati = "to shoot", pogadjati = "to hit"). Gods of hunting frequently appear in various mythological systems of ancient Europe – there are Greek Artemis and Roman Diana – both were goddesses of hunting. There is also Uler, Nordic god of hunting and archery, Finnish Horagalis, etc. Apart from that, Pogoda could also have been a deity quite similar to Greek Chronos, but none of the interpretations given above is based upon historical facts, and we cannot rely on them in our analysis of Slavic mythology.

by Vesna Kakasevski