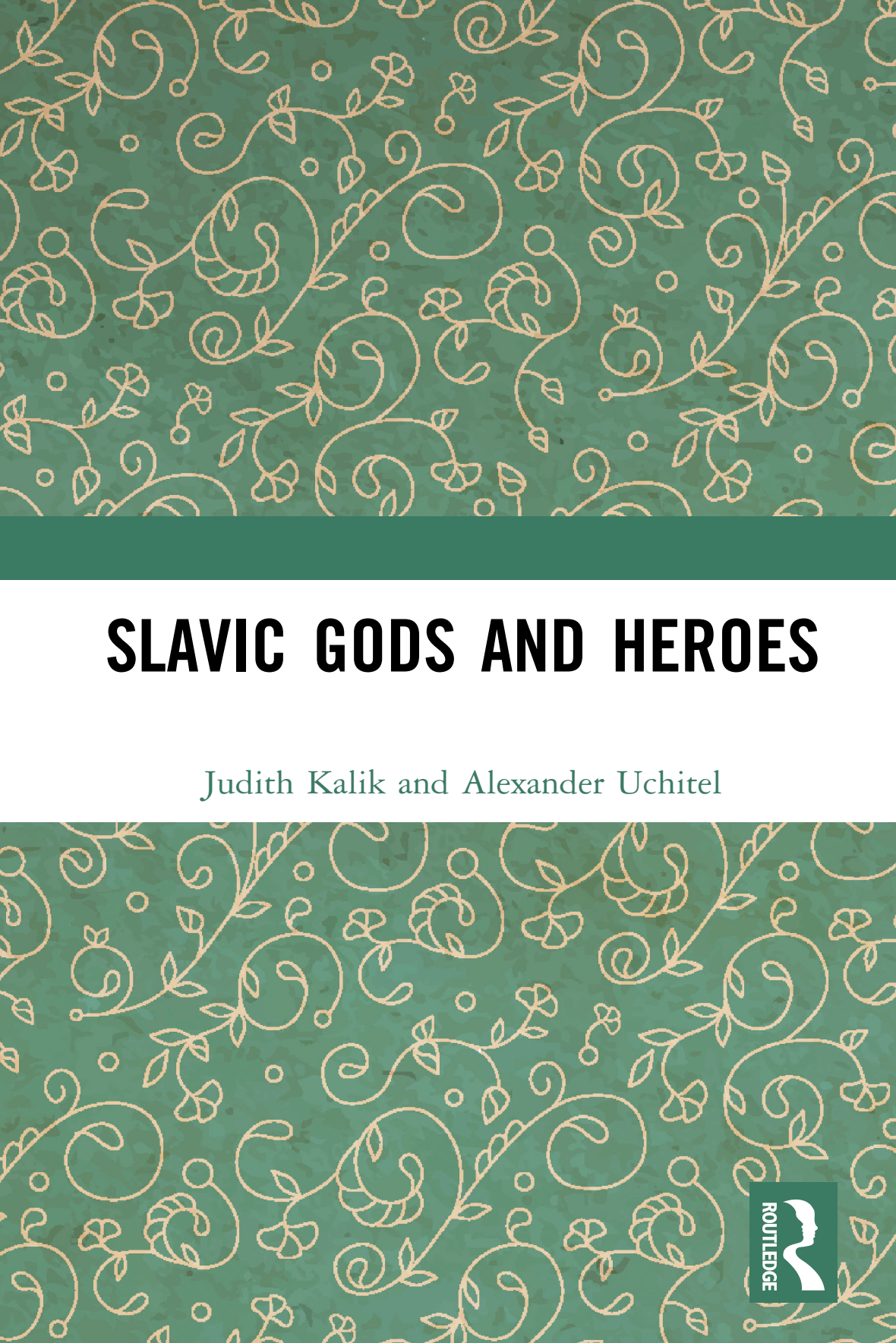




SLAVIC GODS AND HEROES

Judith Kalik and Alexander Uchitel



Slavic Gods and Heroes

This book offers a radical reinterpretation of the Slavic pagan religion made on the basis of a thorough re-examination of all reliable sources. What did Slavic pagan religion have in common with the Afro-American cult of voodoo? Why were no Slavic gods mentioned before the mid-tenth century, and why were there no Slavic gods at all between the Dnieper and the Oder? Why were Slavic foundation legends similar to the totemic myths of the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian Steppe, and who were Slavic Remus and Romulus? What were the Indo-European roots of Slavic hippomantic rituals, and where was the Eastern Slavic dragon *Zmey Gorynych* born? Answers to these and many other provocative questions can be found in this book.

Judith Kalik teaches East European history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has written extensively on the inter-religious encounters in Eastern Europe from the early Middle Ages to the early twentieth century.

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Preface

Interest in pre-Christian pagan religion and mythology swept over Europe in three waves. The first was an integral part of the Romantic movement of the first half of the nineteenth century generally, and of the 1848 “Spring of Nations” particularly. This event signaled a national awakening and the formation of national identities in Eastern Europe. The second wave rose in the mid-twentieth century and was connected to German Nazi ideology and its imitations in other countries. This ideology perceived Christianity as a Jewish influence, corruptive to the spirit of Aryan nations. The third and final wave came in the early twenty-first century. It originated in the anti-globalist movement, which has spread throughout Europe and is especially active in Russia, where Christianity is often portrayed as a European influence, foreign to the original Eurasian Russian civilization.

This work was neither inspired by the neopagan movement nor a reaction to its revival. Rather, it originated in a seminar course that Judith Kalik taught at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the 2011/12 academic year. Alexander Uchitel participated in this seminar as a guest lecturer.

A re-examination of the sources led to surprising conclusions, which are both destructive and constructive. We deconstruct the Slavic pagan pantheon, presenting Slavic gods as late and artificial constructions, heavily influenced by the Christian cultic figures. We also reconstruct the most ancient Slavic totemic myth on the basis of the foundation legends of various Slavic tribes.

In the course of our work, Judith Kalik was mainly responsible for the medieval Latin chronicles, while Alexander Uchitel was mainly responsible for the Greek, Scandinavian, Iranian, and Arabic sources, and all worldwide comparative materials. He also wrote an introductory chapter on ancient Slavs and their neighbors, Appendix 1, and proposed all etymologies. The treatment of the Slavic sources, as well as the conclusions about the nature of Slavic gods and heroes, are the results of our joint fruitful discussions.

The authors would like to thank our friend Tamar Duke-Cohan for her assistance in improving our English throughout the manuscript.



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Introduction

Slavic mythology does not exist. There is nothing comparable to the Icelandic Eddas,¹ the Irish “Mythological Cycle,”² or Finnish Kalevalic epic poetry³ in Slavic culture. The Church Slavonic medieval literature is entirely Christian, and the existing Serbian⁴ and Russian⁵ oral epic poetry glorifies the exploits of Christian heroes fighting “infidels.” We know nothing about either the family relationships of Slavic gods or about conflicts between them. Neither Slavic creation myths nor stories about the Slavic netherworld have survived. The contrast with other European cultures is striking and frustrating to those who harbor Slavic national feelings. Highly developed and complicated Germanic, Celtic, and Finnish pagan mythologies are well known and have served as inspiration for numerous artists, writers, and poets, beginning with the age of national awakening in the mid-nineteenth century. This situation—embarrassing for Slavs—proved fertile ground from which sprouted numerous forgeries of Slavic mythological compositions between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.

The first such forgery was the so-called “Slavic glosses,” which Czech scholar Václav Hanka added in 1827 to the thirteenth-century Latin encyclopedic dictionary *Mater Verborum*.⁶ These glosses included numerous names of Slavic deities, presented as equivalents of Greek and Roman gods. The forgery begins right at the front page of the illuminated manuscript. A medallion with the torso of a male youth is painted at the bottom of the page. It is accompanied by a gloss: *Estas Siva* – “Life” – in medieval Latin (classical *aestas*) and in West Slavic (Živa). The forger took the image inside the medallion as representing the Polabian goddess Živa (*Siwa dea Polaborum*), whom Helmold of Bosau mentioned in his twelfth-century *The Chronicle of the Slavs* (1.52).⁷ Hanka’s work is an example of a relatively elaborate forgery, using the existing medieval manuscript. Only meticulous examination of ink differences and traces of erasure enabled Czech scholars Adolf Patera and Antonín Baum to reveal the forgery.⁸ Later forgeries were more blatant and crude.

The next forgery was the *Veda Slovena* (Веда Словена), which the Bosnian Croat Stefan Verković published in 1874 in Belgrade. The book was presented as a collection of pagan myths that Bulgarian teacher Ivan Gologanov recorded in Thrace and Macedonia among Muslim Bulgarians (the so-called *pomaks*).⁹ Gologanov was most probably the real author of the text, which contained a strange

2 Introduction

mixture of Greek (Orpheus, Atlas), Indian (Vishnu, Shiva), Iranian (Yima), and Slavic (Ogne-bog) gods and heroes. *Veda Slovena* gained fame in the newly independent Bulgaria (since 1878), and Indian (“Aryan”) Vedic connections became a constant feature of later pseudo-Slavic forgeries.

The most famous and influential forgery was the twentieth-century *Book of Veles* (*Велесова Книга*). The cover story of its “discovery” sounds like a thriller. Alexander Kurenkov first published the *Book of Veles* in 1957 in San Francisco in the Russian-language magazine *Zhar-Ptitsa* (“Firebird”). Kurenkov received the manuscript from Yury Miroljubov, who immigrated to the United States from Brussels in 1953. Miroljubov claimed that during the Russian Civil War, a White Russian Army officer, Fedor Izenbek, found several inscribed wooden planks in the looted house of Prince Zadonski (there is no such princely family in Russia) near Kharkov. He is said to have shown these planks to Miroljubov in 1925 in Brussels. During the German occupation of Belgium, Izenbek died and the planks were lost. Miroljubov produced a photograph of only one such plank; in fact, a photocopy of the paper copy, not of the wooden plank itself. He claimed to have transcribed the text of the other planks. The text on the photocopy is written in Cyrillic characters connected from above by horizontal lines, like the modern Indian script Devanagari. The *Book of Veles* is written in a mixture of several modern Slavic languages, which are supposed to represent a “proto-Slavic” language. The book begins with a hymn in praise of the Pomeranian god Triglav (“Three-Headed”), who is presented as one god in three personae: Svarog, Perun, and Sventovit. Numerous other Slavic and Indian (Indra, Surya) gods are mentioned as well. Furthermore, the text tells a fantastic story about the migrations of the tribes of *Rusichi* (the supposed ancient name of Russians) during the tenth century BCE(!). Miroljubov likely wrote the *Book of Veles* himself in the early 1950s in San Francisco. Even though all serious scholars agree that the *Book of Veles* is a forgery,¹⁰ it still enjoys great popularity in neopagan and nationalistic circles in Russia. In 2015, a group of authors (none specialists in the field) published the three-volume “Expertise of the *Book of Veles*” in an attempt to prove its authenticity.¹¹

The latest (thus far) forgery of Slavic myths – the four-volume *Slavic-Aryan Veda* (*Славяно-арийские веды*), published in Omsk in 2005,¹² does not make a serious attempt at authenticity, although it is supposed to be the translation of a runic text written on golden plates(!). Curiously, the second volume of this publication contains the full text of an academic translation of the Icelandic *Ynglinga Saga*. The author of this translation is a Russian philologist who specialized in medieval Scandinavian literature, Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskii. The translation, however, is falsely ascribed in the book to Alexander Khinevich (one of the editors of *Slavic-Aryan Veda*). *Slavic-Aryan Veda* currently serves as the sacred book of the neopagan sect of Ynglists, which is active in Omsk.

Serious scholarly research on Slavic pagan religion ignored these forgeries. However, the scholars of the “Mythological School”¹³ tried to fill the vacuum that the absence of authentic pagan texts created by using medieval and early modern anti-pagan compositions written by Slavic clerics and mythological motives in

Slavic folklore. Both groups of sources are methodologically problematic. The anti-pagan Slavic compositions are often based on Byzantine prototypes, and names of Slavic gods appear there merely as translations of the names of Greek and even Egyptian gods. These identifications are important for clarifying the Slavic gods' functions, but the mythological subjects of these compositions have nothing to do with Slavic pagan mythology. As for Slavic folklore, the challenge is that there is no certainty when it originated. The same is true of mythical figures and mythological motifs mentioned in nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore. The most curious example of a relatively recent mythology is Father Frost (Дед Мороз, Russian Santa Claus) and his granddaughter *Snegurochka* (Snow Girl). Both characters figure in Russian fairy tales that Alexander Afanasyev collected in the nineteenth century, but there is no connection between the two in that version. Father Frost gives presents to a girl whose evil stepmother left her to freeze in the forest,¹⁴ and *Snegurochka* is a girl made of snow by a childless couple who then comes alive.¹⁵ They appeared together as a grandfather and granddaughter for the first time in 1937 in the Moscow House of Unions (*Dom Soyuzov*) in the children's New Year performance.¹⁶ Ever since then, they have become a permanent "mythological" pair in countless similar performances throughout the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The uncritical use of the above-mentioned two groups of sources produced several "phantom gods,"¹⁷ such as Belobog, Lada, Rod, etc. Belobog ("white god") was constructed on the basis of the existing Slavic god Chernobog ("black god") that Helmold of Bossau (Zcernoboch) mentioned.¹⁸ The assumption made was that if there is a black god, there should also be a white god to act as his counterpart.¹⁹

The goddess Lada was created from the meaningless refrain "*lado, lado*" in Slavic folk songs. The origin of the divine figure of Rod ("clan," *gens*) is particularly interesting.²⁰ This word appears in interpolations in the Slavic translations of the 39th Oration ("On the Holy Lights"), which the Byzantine theologian Gregory Nazianzenus composed on the occasion of the Epiphany of 381. The author contrasted several odd births of Greek pagan gods, such as Zeus, Dionysus, Aphrodite, etc., with the Christian Nativity. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Slavic scribes added to this list an explanatory note: "and this word also reached the Slavs, and they began to bring offerings to the newborn (*rod*) and to the birth givers (*rozhanitsy*)." In this context, the word *rod* is used in its original sense of a newborn child, and not as a personal name of a Slavic god.²¹ Rod appears in a capacity of the supreme god for the first time in the late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century Slavic commentary on the Gospels entitled "On the Blowing of the Spirit into Man" (О вдуновении духа в человека).²²

The fantasies of the "Mythological School" met strong reaction from such scholars as the Finnish Viljo Mansikka²³ and the Russian Yevgeny Anichkov.²⁴ After a thorough analysis of the sources, both reached the conclusion that there is practically no reliable information on East Slavic pagan religion, and that the reconstruction of a Slavic mythology is impossible. The Polish scholars Aleksander Brückner,²⁵ Aleksander Gieysztor,²⁶ and Andrzej Szyjewski²⁷

4 Introduction

followed a middle way, trying to reconstruct the pan-Slavic pagan pantheon on the basis of the relatively rich information on the West Slavic pagan religion found in medieval Latin chronicles. Finally, scholars of the so-called “Semiotic School,” Viacheslav Ivanov and Vladimir Toporov,²⁸ tried to reconstruct the Slavic mythology with the help of comparative Indo-European material. However, they uncritically accepted the conclusion of the “Mythological School” in their interpretation of the nature of Slavic gods.

The present study takes a radically different approach. In our view, previous scholars looked for Slavic mythology in the wrong place. Slavic pagan religion on the eve of the Christianization and Slavic mythology are not one and the same. The Slavic religion and its cult, as medieval chroniclers described them, were relatively recent innovations, heavily influenced by Christian culture, which was well known to pagan Slavs for centuries prior to their formal Christianization. Neither the pan-Slavic pantheon nor any remnants of ancient Slavic mythology can be discerned in these sources. However, the most ancient pan-Slavic totemic myths can be reconstructed on the basis of an entirely different group of sources, namely the foundation legends of various Slavic tribes. The fundamental error of previous scholars in this arena was their attempts to understand these stories as a part of local Slavic historical traditions. This resulted in fruitless attempts to identify the historical background of the legendary figures in the foundation myths.

The structure of this book reflects this innovative approach. It consists of three parts. Part I presents an introductory survey of Slavic culture and its position among neighboring ethnic groups. It analyzes the earliest evidences on Slavic pagan religion, found in sources from the sixth to tenth centuries. Part II deals with the Slavic gods mentioned in sources from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Part III is dedicated to the foundation legends of various Slavic tribes recorded in Czech, Polish, and East Slavic medieval chronicles.

The structure of the three parts differs. Part I is arranged by authors of Byzantine, Arabic, English, and German sources. Part II is organized by Slavic gods mentioned in Latin (German and Danish), Old Norse (Icelandic), and Slavonic sources (East Slavic). Part III is arranged by Slavic countries (Bohemia, Little Poland, Great Poland, Kievan Rus', and Croatia), whose foundation legends are recorded in their respective national chronicles.

In all three parts, careful attention is paid to the evaluation of the relative reliability of sources. The book is supplemented with two appendices. Appendix 1 is an attempt to reconstruct the Indo-European hippomantic ritual with the help of the comparative study of the Indian, Iranian, Greek, Roman, Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic evidence. Appendix 2 is dedicated to isolating the exact location of the myth of the dragon of the East Slavic folklore—*Zmey Gorynych*—arose.

Notes

- 1 The Elder (or Poetic) Edda and Younger (or Prose) Edda are thirteenth-century compositions written in Iceland in the Old Norse language. They serve as the main source for Scandinavian pagan mythology.

- 2 The early medieval Irish literary compositions known collectively as the “Mythological Cycle” provide the basis for reconstructing Celtic mythology. See Marie Henri d’Arbois de Jubainville, *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*, Paris, 1884.
- 3 Oral epic songs (the so-called *runot*) recorded in the nineteenth century in Finland and Karelia served as the basis for the literary composition of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* written in 1835–1849 by Elias Lönnrot. They were published in original form in 1908–1948 in a 33-volume edition, *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot*, by the Finnish Literature Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura). These songs contain rich mythological material, including creation and other pagan myths.
- 4 Serbian epic songs recorded in the nineteenth century concentrate on the battle of Kosovo in 1389, where the Serbian Kingdom was destroyed by the Ottoman Turks. See Woislav M. Petrovitch, *Hero Tales and Legends of the Serbians*, New York, 2007.
- 5 The heroes of the Russian epic songs (the so-called *byliny*), recorded in the nineteenth century, flourished in Kievan Rus’ in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. See Alex E. Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale: The Origins of Russian Heroic Poetry*, The Hague, 1973; Владимир Я. Пропп, *Русский героический эпос*, Москва, 1958.
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- 10 See Игорь Н. Данилевский, *Древняя Русь глазами современников и потомков (IX—XII вв.)*, Москва, 1999, pp. 314–326, 387–388; Олег В. Творогов, “Влесова книга,” *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы*, vol. 43, 1990, pp. 170–254; Андрей А. Зализняк, “О «Велесовой книге»,” *Фальсификация исторических источников и конструирование этнократических мифов*, eds. В. А. Шнирельман and А. Е. Петров, Москва, 2011, pp. 101–113; Лидия П. Жуковская, “Мнимая «древнейшая летопись»,” *Вопросы истории*, 1977, № 6, pp. 202–205.
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- 13 А. Н. Афанасьев, *Поэтические воззрения славян на природу*, Москва, vol. 1–3, 1865–1869; А. С. Фаминцын, *Божества древних славян*, С.-Петербург, 1884; Б. А. Рыбаков, *Язычество древних славян*, Москва, 1981; В. Rybakov, *Ancient Slavic Paganism*, Moscow, 1981.
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- 17 This term was cast by Nikolai Zubov in Николай И. Зубов, “Научные фантомы славянского Олимпа,” *Живая старина*, 1995, № 3 (7), pp. 46–48.
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6 Introduction

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Part I

Ancient Slavs



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1 Ancient Slavs and their neighbors

Slavic languages

Slavic languages belong to the Indo-European linguistic family. In this family, Slavic, Baltic, Indo-Iranian, Armenian, and Albanian form the so-called *satem* linguistic branch, in contrast to the Celtic, Germanic, Italic, Greek, and Tocharian languages, which belong to the so-called *centum* linguistic branch. *Satem* and *centum* mean “one hundred” in Avestan and Latin, respectively. This subdivision of the Indo-European languages is based on the phonetic development of proto-Indo-European palatalized velars (k', g', kh') into sibilants (s, z, zh) in the *satem* languages, and their survival as velars (k, g, kh) in *centum* languages. The earlier view that the subdivision of Indo-European languages into these two branches reflects the ancient split of the proto-Indo-European language into two protolanguages is no longer considered valid. Most scholars now presume that the phonetic changes took place independently in different language groups. However, Slavic and Baltic languages are closely related to each other through a common vocabulary and grammar. They form the Balto-Slavic linguistic entity. Several other important isoglosses connect the Balto-Slavic languages with the Indo-Iranian, Germanic, and Albanian languages. The latter is the only surviving representative of the paleo-Balkan languages, but it is not clear whether it represents the Illyrian or the Thracian language group. The proto-Slavic language was characterized by the existence of the reduced super-short vowels ĭ and ŭ, which are expressed in the Cyrillic script by the signs ѣ and ѓ and the nasal vowels ę and ǫ, which are expressed by the letters ѣ and ѓ. Super-short vowels are dropped in all modern Slavic languages except for Bulgarian, and nasal vowels survived only in modern Polish.

Slavs' homeland

The location of the original homeland of the ancient Slavs is unknown. Various proposals to identify various prehistoric archaeological cultures with the Slavs are usually associated with the national preferences of the scholars who present them. Poles like to identify the early Bronze Age Lusatian culture, which flourished on the territory of modern-day Poland as Slavic.

Ukrainians prefer to identify the so-called Antes, which are associated with the Pen'kovka archaeological culture in the mid-Dnieper region, as Slavs. Finally, the identification of the Adriatic Veneti with the Slavs is popular in modern-day Slovenia.

Most archaeologists now associate ancient Slavs with the Prague-Korchak culture,¹ which stretched as a long strip from the upper Dnieper to the Elbe through modern-day northern Ukraine, southern Belarus, Slovakia, southern Poland, and the Czech Republic. This association is the current favorite among most modern Slavic nations. However, an archaeological culture is, by its definition, merely a material cultural complex that does not necessarily correspond with any specific ethnic or linguistic entity. Thus, the material culture of the Prague-Korchak cultural horizon could simply reflect the trade-route connecting the Dnieper with the Elbe, which existed in the ninth century.² Medieval Polish chroniclers believed that the Slavs came to Poland either from Pannonia (modern-day Hungary)³ or from Carinthia (in modern-day Austria),⁴ but archaeologists unanimously reject these suggestions.

In 2001, Paul Barford⁵ and Florin Curta⁶ simultaneously proposed that the Slavs simply did not exist before the mid-sixth century, when they suddenly appeared in Byzantine sources during the reign of Justinian. According to these scholars' view, Byzantine authors labeled the heterogeneous tribes that began to make incursions into the Byzantine Danubian provinces during this time as "Slavs" (*Sklavenoi*), probably because they used the Slavic language as a *lingua franca*. This hypothesis explains the conspicuous silence in written sources about the Slavs before the mid-sixth century, the difficulty of ascribing a Slavic identity to any East European archaeological culture, and the remarkable uniformity of the Slavic language, which, as late as the tenth century, was understandable in Bulgaria, Moravia, and Kievan Rus'. However, this explanation does not solve the question of the origin of this Slavic language itself, which originally had to be spoken by some tribal group in some location.

Hydronymics

The largest concentration of Slavic hydronyms is to be found in modern-day Romania: Bistrița—"rapid," Cerna—"black," Crasna—"red," Belareca—"white river," Târnava—"thorny," Ialomița—"infertile," Dâmbovița—"of oaks," and many others. Their presence there is usually explained by the brief Slavic occupation of this country in the seventh to ninth centuries.⁷ This explanation is problematic because hydronymics are usually the most stable element of a toponymy.

Hydronymics found in all countries where Slavs currently form the majority show unequivocally that before the Great Migration Age of the fifth to eighth centuries, non-Slavic peoples inhabited them. The names of all the major rivers in the northern Pontic area (modern-day Ukraine) are of Iranian origin: Don—from the Iranian *dānu*—"stream," Dnieper—from *dānu-apara*—"far away river," Dniester—from *dānu-nadzyo*—"nearby river," etc. According to historical sources, several successive waves of Iranian nomads occupied this territory:

Cimmerians, Scythians (from the seventh century BCE), and Sarmatians (from the second century BCE). Turkic Bulgars replaced them in the seventh century CE. The Khazars (also of Turkic origin) defeated the Bulgars in 668, and the Bulgars then migrated in two directions: northwards to the Volga-Kama confluence, where they established the Volga-Bulgarian State, and westwards to the Balkans, where they founded Danubian Bulgaria.

The hydronymics of Belarus and Central Russia are predominantly Baltic. Many of them are derived from the Baltic root *nara*—"stream"; for example, the River Narev in Belarus, Lake Nero, Revers Nerl', and Nara in Central Russia. However, on the eve of the Slavic colonization, Central Russia was populated by Finnish peoples, who drove away the Baltic tribes some time before the Great Migration Age. These were the now extinct peoples of Meria, Muroma, and Meshchora. The only Baltic people who survived until the Slavic expansion were the Galindians (Slavic Голандъ) in the River Protva (a tributary of the Oka) valley. North-Western Russia was the homeland of Finnish peoples from great antiquity. These were the Votes (Boudinoi of Herodotus, Slavic Водъ) and the Vepsians (Vas of Jordanes, Slavic Вещь, Arabic Wisu, Wizzi of Adam of Bremen). The Votes are now nearly extinct (64 persons remain as of 2010), and the Vepsians are a diminutive ethnic group (numbering about 6,000) in Southern Karelia. Finnish hydronyms in Northern and Central Russia include Lake Ilmen' (from Finnish *ilma*—"air"), the River Volga (Karelian *valga*—"white), and the River Oka (Finnish *joki*—"river"). Numerous Iranian loanwords to be found in Finnish languages attest that Finnish and Iranian peoples were neighbors before the "Slavic wedge" separated them. Thus, most of the ethnic names of Eastern Finnish peoples are derived from Iranian words; for example, *martiya*—"man" (Mordva, Udmurts) or *marya*—"warrior" (Meria, Mari). In contrast, the Finnish word for slave—*orja*—is derived from the Indo-Iranian ethnic Arya.⁸

The Germanic tribe of the Vandals inhabited the territory of modern-day Poland before the Slavs. The Vandals left in their wake the names of Poland's major rivers: the Vistula (Polish Wisła)—from Old Norse *veisa*—"slime" with the diminutive suffix *-ula* and the Bug—from the Germanic *baug*—"winding." The Boii Celtic tribe lived in what is today the Czech Republic, and they gave to this country its ancient name, Bohemia. In the second-century BCE, the Germanic tribes of the Quadi and the Marcomani replaced them. The ancient inhabitants of modern-day Slovenia were the Veneti, whose linguistic affiliation is disputed. Their language either belonged to the Italic or the Celtic groups or was a separate language within the Indo-European family.⁹ Modern Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Montenegro are located in what once was Illyria, modern Bulgaria—in the lands that were ancient Thrace—and modern-day Slavic Macedonia is an area that was once part of the ancient Greek-speaking Macedonia.

Names of the Slavs and Slavic names for their neighbors

The name "Slavs" is derived from the Slavic *slovo*—"word," meaning that ancient Slavs called themselves "those who speak with words." Subsequently,

they called their western neighbors—*Nemcy*—“mute,” and this word survives to this day in various Slavic languages as the name for Germany (Polish *Niemcy*) and Germans (Russian *Nemtsy*). The Slavs called Finnish peoples *Chud'*—“strange.” They named the Celts and later also the Romans *Vlachs*—from the Celtic tribe of Volcae. In Polish, Italy is known to this day as *Włochy*. Germanic peoples called Slavs *Wends*—from the name of the Veneti Baltic tribe. The Veneti, known as Vends, survived up to the sixteenth century in what is today Latvia. Modern Finnish peoples still use this word as the name for Russia – Finnish *Venäjä* and Estonian *Venemaa*. The relationship between this word and the North Adriatic Veneti is unknown, although these two identical ethnic names conspicuously occupy two opposite ends of the Great Amber Road—the trade route that supplied amber from the Baltic to the Mediterranean as early as the mid-second millennium BCE.

Slavic migrations

In the sixth to eighth centuries, Slavs actively participated in the Great Migration, but only their southward expansion into the Balkans was documented in written sources. Byzantine historian Theophylact Simocatta described the Slavic penetration into the Roman province of Thrace during the reign of the Emperor Maurice (582–602),¹⁰ and the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote about Emperor Heraclius (610–641) inviting the Croats and the Serbs into the province of Dalmatia.¹¹

The Slavic expansion westward and eastward is known only because of its effect, which became evident by the ninth century. In the west, Slavs settled in modern-day Poland, the Czech Republic, and East Germany up to the River Elbe. Germanic tribes, which had migrated into the western provinces of the Roman Empire, vacated these territories. The Vandals, for example, migrated from modern-day Poland to southern Spain, where they left their mark in the name Andalusia (from the earlier name Vandalusia), and to North Africa, where they established the Vandalic Kingdom. In the east, Slavs gradually infiltrated and assimilated with the Baltic tribes of modern-day Belarus, the Finnish tribes of current European Russia, and the Iranian tribes who inhabited what has become northern Ukraine (in southern Ukraine, Turkic inhabitants replaced the Iranians).

As result of their migrations, the Slavs subdivided into three branches: Western, Eastern and Southern Slavs. Western Slavs now consist of Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks, East Slavs of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, and Southern Slavs of Slovenians, Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Bulgarians. From the purely linguistic point of view, there are only three South Slavic languages: Slovenian, Eastern South Slavic (Bulgarian-Macedonian), and Western South Slavic (Serbo-Croatian).

Slavic scripts

Western Slavs, Slovenians, Croats, and Bosnians use the Latin script; Eastern Slavs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbians, and Montenegrins write using the

Cyrillic alphabet. The latter is named after St. Cyril as a result of a misunderstanding. The Brothers Constantine (whose monastic name was Cyril) and Methodius of Thessalonica invented the so-called Glagolitic alphabet during their Pannonian mission in 863. This alphabet fell out of use after the Hungarian takeover of Pannonia in the late ninth or early tenth centuries. It remained in liturgical use only in Croatia until the seventeenth century and in the Dalmatian littoral until the mid-twentieth century. The Glagolitic script was a typical “missionary alphabet,”¹² constructed artificially with facultative use of some Greek, Coptic, and Hebrew letters. The Cyrillic alphabet is, in fact, simply the Greek alphabet, which was adopted for the Slavic language in Bulgaria during the reign of the Czar Simeon I (893–927). Signs for some Slavic sounds that do not exist in Greek were borrowed from the Glagolitic script.¹³

Slavic society

Ancient Slavic society seems to have been egalitarian. Byzantine historian Procopius defined it as a democracy:

the Slavs and the Antes are not ruled by one man [οὐκ ἄρχονται πρὸς ἄνδρὸς ἑνός], but they have lived from of old under a democracy [ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ], and consequently everything which involves their welfare, whether for good or for ill, is referred to the people [ἐξ κοινὸν].¹⁴

If it is legitimate to extrapolate backward, based on the social terminology of the East Slavic eleventh-century law code *Russkaya Pravda*,¹⁵ free tribesmen with full rights were called *liudi*—a word related to the German *Leute* and the Greek *ἐλεύθερος*, and clients without property and political rights were called *smerydy*—a word related to the Old Persian *martiya*—“man” or “mortal.” All important decisions were made in a tribal assembly of the *liudi*, called *veche*.

Ancient Slavs practiced slash-and-burn agriculture, which explains their semi-nomadic way of life, since a clearing in the forest, which was called *lędŭ* (ладѹ, modern Polish *ląd*) in Slavic, fertilized by the ashes of burned trees, could be cultivated for no more than two consecutive years. The cultivator then had to move to another clearing.

In Slavic languages, practically all terms related to political power are loan-words. The West Slavic *pan* and the South Slavic *ban* (“lord”) are derived from the name Avarian Khan Bayan (562–602). The Bulgarian noble title *boliarin* (боларинѣ) and its Russian equivalent *boyarin* (боѣринѣ) came from the Turkic Bulgarian title *boilar*. The common Slavic term *kŭnęzŭ* (кѣназѣ)—“prince”—and the Russian *vitiāzʹ* (витазѣ)—“knight”—are both derived from the Scandinavian *konung* and *viking* (through the intermediate Baltic form *vitingas*). The Polish *król* and the Czech *král* (“king”) are based on the name Charlemagne (Frankish Karl). The Bulgarian (and later also Russian) *tsarʹ* (царѣ) is a shortened form of the Roman name (and later title) Caesar.

The lack of political organization made Slavs easy prey for slave traders, and the term “Slavs” began to serve as the word for “slaves” in Western European languages,

as well as in Spanish Arabic and Byzantine Greek. Medieval Jews called Slavic countries Canaan because of the biblical prophecy “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” (Genesis 9:25). It is possible that this identification of Slavs with slaves influenced the formation of Slavic ethnic terms. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, at least, claims that the term Serbs originated from the Latin word *servi*—“slaves.”¹⁶ Even if this is merely slander, it shows how closely Slavs were associated with slaves in the eyes of their neighbors in the tenth century. It is possible that attempts to monopolize the slave trade served as the background for the establishment of early medieval Slavic states.

Slavic states

Non-Slavic ruling dynasties established all early medieval Slavic states. The early Moravian state was founded by the Frankish merchant Samo in 623. Although a time gap of about 170 years separates Samo’s state from the establishment of Great Moravia by Prince Mujmír in the 820s, Moravian society probably underwent a radical transformation during this interim period under Frankish influence. Turkic Bulgars founded the Bulgarian state in 681, and the Turkic dynasty of Asparukh ruled there until 971. Scandinavian Varangians (Old Norse *væring*—“sworn companions”) founded the East Slavic state of Rus’ in 862. The name of this state is derived from the Old Norse word *roðer*—“rowers”¹⁷ (the modern Finnish name for Sweden—Ruotsi—also represents a transformation of this word). Finns and Eastern Slavs called the Scandinavians “rowers,” since they passed through their countries by river on paddling boats (the so-called *monoxyles*) on their way “from the Varangians to the Greeks.” The origin of the Vlastimirović dynasty, which ruled Serbia from 831, is unknown, but the so-called “Unknown Archon,” who led the Serbians into the Byzantine province of Dalmatia in the seventh century,¹⁸ can possibly be identified as a son of Dervan, the Duke of the West Slavic Sorbs, a subordinate to Samo,¹⁹ whose name is Germanic (Middle English *derven*—“labor”).²⁰ As was the case with Moravia, there was a gap of about 200 years between the Unknown Archon and the establishment of the historical Serbian state in the early ninth century. The Trpimirović dynasty ruled Croatia from about 845, but a seventh-century Croatian, *archon* Porgas, led Croats into Dalmatia.²¹ Porgas, a name of Iranian origin, was derived from the Avestan *pouru-gâo*—“rich in cattle.” Its Iranian origin is not surprising, since the earliest evidence of ethnic Croats (in the forms XOPOYAΘ[ON] or XOPOAΘOΣ) is found on the so-called “Tanais Tablets”—two second-century CE Greek inscriptions from the Greek colony of Tanais in the Don River delta.²² Branimir, who ruled Croatia in 879–892, was called either the “Duke of the Croats” or the “Duke of the Slavs” in several Latin inscriptions,²³ which probably means that the originally Iranian Croats were still regarded as the ruling class of Croatia, at least to the end of the ninth century.²⁴ Only the founder of the early Polish state, Mieszko I (960–992), has a perfectly Slavic pedigree, stretching back five generations (Chościsko, Piast, Ziemowit, Lestko, and Ziemomysł). However, it was the earliest Polish chronographer, Gallus Anonymus, who recorded this impressive genealogy in the early

twelfth century.²⁵ Mieszko, in contrast, called himself *Dagome iudex*—"Dagome the judge"—in his agreement with Pope John XV. Dagome is a Scandinavian name, and its presence in the earliest document related to Poland caused embarrassment to some Polish historians, because it seemed to indicate that the Piast dynasty in Poland could have been of Scandinavian origin.²⁶

The Christianization of the Slavs

All early Slavic states voluntarily accepted Christianity in the ninth to tenth centuries, mainly for political reasons, because of their alliances with various European Christian states. In 862, the first Slavic mission of the brothers Constantine (St. Cyril) and Methodius traveled from Byzantine Thessalonica to Pannonia, which was under Moravian rule at that time. It held crucial importance for the Christianization of the Slavs and eventually became the source of all Slavic Christianity. Moravian Prince Rastislav was an ally of the Byzantine Empire against the Franks and Bulgaria. He asked the Byzantine Emperor Michael III and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, to dispatch missionaries to his realm. However, this mission met strong resistance from the Archbishop of Salzburg, Adalwin, who saw Great Moravia as being under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Constantine and Methodius had to travel to Rome in 867 and appear before Pope Adrian II in order to defend their mission, as well as their use of the Slavic language for liturgy. The brothers were successful, but Constantine had died in Rome in 869 after taking monastic vows under the name of Cyril. Methodius returned to Great Moravia (which included Bohemia, Pannonia, Silesia, Slovakia, and Little Poland), where he continued his missionary work unobstructed until his death in 885. However, Rastislav's successor, Prince Sventopulk (Свѣтопълкъ), expelled Methodius' disciples from Great Moravia and replaced them with German clergy from the Salzburg diocese. This attempt to appease the Franks was unsuccessful, and Sventopulk fell in battle against the King of East Francia (Germany), Arnulf, in 892. Soon afterward, the Great Moravian state came under attacks from pagan Hungarians who settled in Pannonia. Thus, Christianity was wiped out of this country, remaining only in Bohemia, which became an independent principality under the rule of the Přemyslid dynasty.

At the beginning of the Pannonian mission in 862, the Bulgarian Czar Boris I was at war with the Byzantine Empire. Peace between them was concluded in 863 on condition that the Bulgars accept Christianity. Initially, the Bulgarian Church was subordinate to Constantinople, its clergy was Greek, and Greek served as the language of the liturgy. This provoked fierce resistance among the Bulgarian pagan nobility, which rebelled against the Czar in 865. After suppressing the rebellion, Boris sent emissaries to Rome in 866 in an attempt to gain ecclesiastical independence from Constantinople. In 870, the Bulgarian Church did indeed become an independent archbishopric. Disciples of St. Methodius, expelled from Great Moravia in 885, found refuge in Bulgaria. There, they established two ecclesiastical schools, at Ohrid and at Preslav. At Ohrid, the Glagolitic script first invented by St. Cyril in Pannonia was introduced, but at Preslav the Pannonian

refugees, together with their Bulgarian counterparts, invented the new Slavic script based upon the Greek alphabet, and erroneously called Cyrillic between 885 and 895.²⁷ The new script soon gained predominance in Bulgaria and later spread to the East Slavic Kievan Rus' and Serbia.

Serbian Prince Mutimir accepted Christianity from Byzantium in 870, seeking a Byzantine alliance against Saracen (Arabic) incursions on the Adriatic coast. Greek initially served as the liturgical language, but in the early thirteenth century the Serbian Church adopted the Slavonic liturgy and the Cyrillic script from Bulgaria.²⁸

The process of the Christianization of Croatia is unclear. Branimir was the first Croatian duke recognized by a Pope in 879, and the Croatian Church used Latin for its liturgy during the tenth century.²⁹ However, in the eleventh century, the Glagolitic script and the Slavonic liturgy spread from Ohrid to Croatia.³⁰

The founder of the Polish state, Duke Mieszko I, accepted Christianity in 966 after his marriage with Dobrava, daughter of Boguslav I the Cruel, Duke of Bohemia, which had been Christianized by St. Methodius a century earlier.

Two contradictory stories about the Christianization of the Kievan Rus' in 988 are found in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*. The first story about Kievan Prince Vladimir's "choice of faith" tells that the Prince invited to Kiev emissaries from Byzantium, Germany, Moslem Volga-Bulgaria, and Jewish Khazaria in order to hear their arguments regarding their respective religions. After listening to them, Vladimir chose Byzantine Greek Christianity. According to the second story – the so-called "Chersonesus (Korsun') Legend" – Vladimir attacked and conquered a Byzantine stronghold in the Crimean peninsula called Chersonesus, where he demanded to receive the sister of Emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII, Anna, in marriage. The emperors agreed on condition of Vladimir's baptism, but the Prince accepted this offer only after he was miraculously cured of temporary blindness. However, the Christian liturgy and scriptures reached Kiev not from Byzantium, but from Bulgaria in Slavonic translations and in Cyrillic script.

The problem is that Bulgaria under the rule of Samuel Comitopulus was at war with Byzantium in 988, and in 986 Samuel decisively defeated the Byzantine army. Since the Byzantine sources keep silent about the Christianization of the Rus' in 988, it is possible that Prince Vladimir received Christianity from Bulgaria before his Crimean campaign, which he conducted, in this case, as an ally of Czar Samuel. *The Russian Primary Chronicle* tried to conceal the so-called "Bulgarian footprint" in the history of the Christianization of Russia, since Vladimir switched alliances after the Byzantine offer of the hand of Anna in Chersonesus.

Thus, the Pannonian mission of Constantine and Methodius served as a starting point for the Christianization of all Slavic states, as can be shown in Chart 1.

Only Slavic Polabian and Pomeranian tribes in what is now East Germany, which lacked state organization, fiercely resisted Christianization, since it was associated among them with foreign invasion. The Saxon King of East Francia (Germany), Henry I the Fowler, first conquered the Polabian Slavs in 928–929. Emperor Otto I the Great did the same to the Pomeranian Slavs in 950–955. Both tribal groups were forcibly Christianized, but in 983, the Great Slavic Revolt

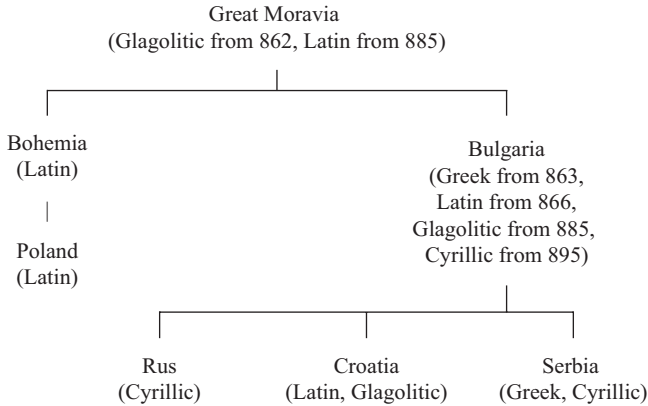


Chart 1 Christianization of the Slavs

wiped out German rule and with it Christianity in all Slavic lands east of River Elbe. These territories were re-conquered and re-Christianized only in 1147 in the course of the so-called Wendish Crusade, which Saxon and Danish troops conducted under the leadership of Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony. The last Slavic pagan stronghold – the Island of Rügen – was conquered by the Danish King Valdemar I in 1168. Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs were gradually Germanized and only two ethnic groups of Lusatian Sorbs in East Germany and Kashubians on the Polish Baltic coast preserved their Slavic character.

After the Great schism of 1054, the Slavic nations split between the Greek Orthodox East and the Roman Catholic West. All Eastern Slavs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs, and Montenegrins became Greek Orthodox, while all Western Slavs, Slovenians and Croats turned to Roman Catholicism. The only Slavic nation that embraced the Islam were the Bosnians. This happened probably since prior to the Ottoman conquest in 1463, the Bosnians belonged to the obscure Bosnian Church, which was regarded as heretical both by Rome and Constantinople.³¹

Notes

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- 2 Александр В. Назаренко, *Древняя Русь на международных путях: Междисциплинарные очерки культурных, торговых, политических отношений IX–XII веков*, Москва, 2001.
- 3 *Chronica Poloniae maioris*, ed. Brygida Kürbis, Monumenta Poloniae Historica nova series, Vol. 8, Warszawa, 1970; *Kronika wielkopolska*, Kazimierz Abgarowicz (translation), Brygida Kürbis (ed.), Kraków, 2010. prologue.

- 4 *Magistri Vincentii Chronica Polonorum*, ed. Marian Plezia, Monumenta Poloniae Historica, nova series, vol. 11, Kraków, 1994; Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.3.
- 5 Paul M. Barford, *The Early Slavs: Culture and Society in Early Medieval Europe*, London, 2001, pp. 27–44.
- 6 Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 118–119, 335–350.
- 7 István Bóna, “From Dacia to Erdőelve: Transylvania in the Period of the Great Migrations (271–896),” *History of Transylvania, vol. 1: From the Beginnings to 1606*, eds. László Makkai and András Mócsy, New York, 2001, pp. 218–245.
- 8 Тамаз В. ГамкRELИДзе, Вячеслав С. Иванов, *Индоевропейский язык и индоевропейцы. Реконструкция и историко-типологический анализ праязыка и протокультуры*, vol. 2, Тбилиси, 1984, p. 924.
- 9 Jadranka Gvozdanović, “On the linguistic classification of Venetic,” *Journal of Language Relationship*, 2012, pp. 33–46.
- 10 *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, an English translation with introduction by Michael and Mary Whitby, Oxford, 1986, 1.7, 3.4, 6.2–11, 7.2–7, 8.3–6.
- 11 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 31–32.
- 12 The other examples are the three Transcaucasian alphabets (Armenian, Georgian, and Albanian) created by the Armenian missionary Mesrop Mashtots in the fifth century and the Old Permic alphabet created by the Russian missionary Stephan Khrap in the fourteenth century.
- 13 See Paul Cubberley, “The Slavic Alphabets,” *The World’s Writing Systems*, eds. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, New York-Oxford, 1996, pp. 346–350.
- 14 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 7.14.22.
- 15 *Правда Русская*, под редакцией Б. Д. Грекова, Москва-Ленинград, vol. 1: Тексты, подгот. к печати В. П. Любимов и др., 1940, vol. 2: Комментарии, сост. Б. В. Александров и др., 1947, vol. 3: Факсимильное воспроизведение текстов, 1963.
- 16 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 32.
- 17 See Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200*, London-New York, 1996; Алексей Толочко, *Очерки начальной руси*, Киев- С-Петербург, 2015.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Sava S. Vujić, Bogdan M. Basarić, *Severni Srbi (ne)zaboravljeni narod*, Beograd, 1998, p. 40.
- 20 Guus Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 11), Leiden-Boston, 2013, p. 93.
- 21 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 31.
- 22 Ante Škegro, “Two Public Inscriptions from the Greek Colony of Tanais at the Mouth of the Don River on the Sea of Azov,” *Review of Croatian History* 1 (1), 2005, pp. 9–28.
- 23 *Namentragende Steinschriften in Jugoslawien vom Ende des 7. Bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Mihaljčić, L. Steindorf, and M. Helmann, Wiesbaden, 1982, pp. 7, 17, 33.
- 24 J. V. A. Fine, “Croats and Slavs: Theories about the Historical Circumstances of the Croats’ Appearance in the Balkans,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 26, 2000, pp. 205–218; Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500–1250*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 140–141.
- 25 *Gesta Principum Polonorum: The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, trans. Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer, Budapest, 2003, 1.2–3.

- 26 Brygida Kürbis, "Dagome iudex. Studium krytyczne," *Początki państwa polskiego – Księga Tysiąclecia*, vol. 2, Poznań, 1962, pp. 362–423.
- 27 Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500–1250*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 215–216.
- 28 Ibid. pp. 389, 393–394.
- 29 Ibid. pp. 197–199.
- 30 Ibid. pp. 263–265.
- 31 See J. V. A. Fine, *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation. A Study of the Bosnian Church and Its Place in State and Society from the 13th to the 15th Century*, Boulder, CO-New York, 1975; Šanjek, *Les chrétiens bosniaque et le mouvement cathare, XIe–XVe siècles*, Brussels-Paris-Louvain, 1976.

2 The earliest evidence of Slavic religion

References to Slavic pagan religion before the end of the tenth century are found in occasional remarks that Byzantine, Arabic, English, and German authors noted in Greek, Arabic, and Latin. They are found in a variety of literary compositions: three historiographical narratives, a letter, and a travel report. Although brief and fragmentary, the evidence gleaned from these sources covers the entire Slavic world, including the Southern, Eastern, and Western Slavs.

Procopius, *The Gothic War*

The earliest evidence on Slavic religion comes from Procopius' *The Gothic War*, written in the mid-sixth century. This Byzantine historian was a native of Caesarea in Palestine and served as a legal advisor to Belisarius, a military commander in the service of Emperor Justinian (527–565). As a historian, Procopius is an astonishing example of an almost Orwellian “double-thinker”. Officially, he wrote the *History of Justinian's Wars*, glorifying the emperor's great achievements, while simultaneously writing the *Secret History of Justinian*, where he depicted the very same emperor as a monster. Modern historians tend to prefer the official history, since Procopius personally participated in all of Belisarius's campaigns, and his writing is therefore that of an eyewitness. They generally dismiss the *Secret History* as a collection of gossip, motivated by personal hatred. The *History of Justinian's Wars* consists of eight books and is divided into three parts: the *Persian War* (527–532, 540–551) in two books, the *Vandal War* (533–534) in two books, and the *Gothic War* (535–540, 541–553) in four books. Procopius belonged to the secular Greek historical tradition, which was heavily influenced by ancient Greek historiography. He therefore wrote in classical Attic Greek.

The religious beliefs of the Southern Slavs are briefly described in the seventh book of his *History of Justinian's Wars* or in the third book of *The Gothic War*. Slavic incursions into Byzantine Thrace provide the context:

They [Slavs and Antes] believe that one god, the maker of the lightning (ἀστραπῆς δημιουργόν), is alone lord of all things, and they sacrifice to him cattle and all other victims; but as for fate, they neither know it nor do they in any wise admit that it has any power among men, but whenever death

stands close before them, either stricken with sickness or beginning a war, they make a promise that, if they escape, they will straightway make a sacrifice to the god in return for their life; and if they escape, they sacrifice just what they have promised, and consider that their safety has been bought with this same sacrifice. They reverence, however, both rivers and nymphs and some other spirits (δαίμόνια), and they sacrifice to all these also, and they make their divinations in connection with these sacrifices.¹

Procopius's "the maker of the lightning" is usually identified with the East Slavic (Kievan) Perun—the only known Slavic god of lightning. There is, however, no evidence substantiating this identification for the simple reason that the above passage is the only reference to the religion of the Southern Slavs. None of the South Slavic pagan gods are mentioned in any later sources. It is true that the word *perun* is the common Slavic word for lightning, but the god of the thunderstorm could have been worshiped among Southern Slavs under a different name. Cults of the thunderstorm gods as supreme deities were widespread among peoples practicing rain-dependent agriculture: the Hittite Tarhunt, the Greek Zeus, the Roman Jupiter, the Lithuanian Perkūnas, the Finnish Ukko, etc. However, the supreme gods of the Celtic and Germanic peoples were gods of wisdom: Lugh and Odin, both identified with the Roman god Mercury.

The South Slavic nymphs that Procopius mentioned are the so-called *vila*, which are depicted in South Slavic folklore as beautiful winged young girls living in mountains and clouds. East Slavic water nymphs are called *rusalki*. This word is derived from the Latin *rosalia*, which was an ancient Roman pagan festival of roses, celebrated in May. This festival reached the Eastern Slavs in the demotic Greek form, proving that this belief came from the Balkans before or after the Christianization of the Eastern Slavs.

The other Slavic spirits (δαίμόνια) in the above passage are the South Slavic *vodenjak*, the West Slavic *wodnik*, or the East Slavic *vodianoy*—all names for the male water spirit living in rivers, common Slavic *leshny*, the woodland spirit living in forests, and common Slavic *domovoy*, the protective house spirit. All these supernatural creatures are known solely from Slavic nineteenth-century folklore, but Procopius's evidence shows that the Southern Slavs believed in some of their prototypes as early as the sixth century.²

St. Boniface, *A Letter to King Ethelbald of Mercia*

St. Boniface was an eighth-century English missionary in Frankish Germany. He was born as Winfrid in the Saxon Kingdom of Wessex in about 675. In 716, he left England to serve as a Christian missionary among the pagan Germanic tribes that Pepin II and Charles Martel had recently subdued. He made several visits to Rome, was appointed as Papal Legate in Germany in 738, and as Archbishop of Mainz in 745. St. Boniface was martyred in 754 at the hands of pagan Frisians. He was buried in the Abbey of Fulda, which one of his disciples had founded in 742. His extensive correspondence with three popes, his German

disciples, and his English compatriots were collected and edited soon after his death by his successor as the Archbishop of Mainz, St. Lullus.

The only reference to the religious practices of the pagan Slavs (Wends) is found in his letter to Ethelbald, King of Mercia (717–757). St. Boniface reprimanded the king for his disgraceful sexual behavior, contrasting it with several examples of high respect paid to female chastity even among the pagans:

The Wends, who are the vilest and lowest race of men, have such high regard for the mutual bond of marriage that the wife refuses to survive her husband. Among them a woman is praised who dies by her own hand and is burned upon the same pyre with her husband.³

Thietmar of Merseburg confirmed the existence of widow ritual self-immolation among the Western Slavs in the eleventh century, attributing this custom to the pagan Poles:

In the days of his father [Mieszko I, father of Bolesław the Brave], when he still embraced heathernism, every woman followed her husband on the funeral pyre, after first being decapitated.⁴

In his famous account of the boat burial of a Rus' chieftain in the mid-Volga region, tenth-century author Ahmad ibn Fadlan described the same ritual in a possibly Eastern Slavic context:

When the above-mentioned man had died, his relatives said to his slave girls: "Who will die with him?" Thereupon one of them answered: "I." Then the relations of the deceased charged two girls to watch her and go with her wherever she went. Indeed, they even washed her feet with their own hands. The relatives of the deceased began to occupy themselves with the preparations for the funeral ceremonies, to have garments cut out for him, and to prepare whatever was necessary. The slave girl meanwhile drank all day long and sang joyfully, and enjoyed herself in view of the future.

When the day had come on which he and the maiden should be cremated, I put in an appearance at the river where the bark lay. I saw that this already had been hauled up on land. There were four props set up for the boat, of birch and other wood, and around the boat had been built a large structure like a large scaffold of wood. Then they hauled the ship further up, until it was placed inside the structure.

...

Thereupon an old woman came, whom they call the angel of death, and spread the draperies mentioned over the couch. She had held the oversight over the sewing of the garments of the deceased and their completion. This old woman kills the girl. I saw that she was an old giantess, fat and grim to behold.

... The maiden who wished to be put to death went here and there, and entered each of the tents where the head of each tent had intercourse with her, saying: "Say to thy lord, I have done this out of love of thee."

On Friday, in the afternoon, they brought the maiden to a structure, which they had erected like a doorframe. She put both her feet on the palms of the men, and was lifted up into this doorframe, and said her piece. Then they let her down again. Thereupon they put her up a second time. She repeated what she had done the first time, and then they let her down, and let her go up a third time. Again, she did as she had done on the first two occasions. Then they gave her a hen. She cut off its head and cast it away. They took the hen and laid it in the boat. Thereupon I asked the interpreter what her action meant. He said: "Behold, I see my father and mother"; the second time she said: "There I see my deceased relatives sitting"; the third time she said: "There I behold my lord sitting in paradise, and paradise is fair and green, and around him are men and servants. He calls me; bring me to him."

Then they led her to the boat. She took off the two armlets that she wore and gave them to the old woman they call the angel of death, who was to kill her. Then the slave girl took off two anklets that she had and gave them to the two maidens who had waited on her, and who were the daughters of the old woman known as the angel of death.

Then people lifted her onto the boat, but did not yet let her go into the tent. Hereupon came men with shields and slaves and gave her a bowl of mead, whereupon she sang and drank it. The interpreter said to me: "With this she is bidding goodbye to her friends." Then she was given another beaker. She took it and sang for a long time, while the old woman was urging her to finish the goblet, and to go into the tent where her lord lay.

I saw then how disturbed she was. She wished to go into the tent, but put her head between the tent and the side of the boat. Then the old woman took her by the head, made her go into the tent, and also entered with her.

Whereupon the men began to beat their shields with the staves so that her shrieks would not be heard, and the other maidens become terrified. Then six men went into the tent, and all had intercourse with the girl. Then they placed her beside her dead lord; two men seized her by the feet and two by the hands. Then the old woman placed a rope in which a bight had been made, and gave it to two of the men to pull at the two ends. Then the old woman came to her with a broad-bladed dagger and began to jab it into her ribs and pull it out again, and the two men strangled her until she was dead.⁵

Outside the Slavic world, the immolation of widows is attested archaeologically for the first time in the second millennium BCE in the Bronze Age Andrusovo culture in Western Siberia, which was associated with Indo-Iranian (Aryan) peoples.⁶ This could be the ultimate origin of the famous Indian Sati ritual, which survived into the modern age. Herodotus describes similar practices in the fifth century BCE in northern Thrace:

Those who dwell above the Crestonians⁷ do as follows: each man has many wives, and when any man of them is dead, a great competition takes place among his wives, with much exertion on the part of their friends, about the question of which of them was most loved by their husband; and she who is

preferred by the decision and so honored, is first praised by both men and women, then her throat is cut over the tomb by her nearest of kin, and afterwards she is buried together with her husband; and the others are exceedingly grieved at it, for this is counted as the greatest reproach to them.⁸

During the Great Migration Age, Procopius described a similar custom among the Germanic tribe of Heruli:

And when a man of the Eruli died, it was necessary for his wife, if she laid claim to virtue and wished to leave a fair name behind her, to die not long afterward beside the tomb of her husband by hanging herself with a rope. And if she did not do this, the result was that she was in ill repute thereafter and an offence to the relatives of her husband.⁹

Since the Heruli conquered Thrace in the sixth century and established their kingdom on the Danube, Thracian influence on their customs is possible. Ancient Slavs also lived in proximity to Thrace, but immolation of widows among them has only Indo-Aryan parallels. Therefore, the ancient proto-Indo-European background common to Indo-Aryans, Thracians, and Slavs cannot be excluded.

Ahmad ibn Fadlan, *Travel-Report*

Ahmed ibn Fadlan was secretary of the embassy that the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir dispatched in 921 from Baghdad to Bolghar—the capital of Volga-Bulgaria—at the request of the Khan Almış. The purpose of the mission was to provide religious instruction to the Bulgars, who had recently converted to Islam. The embassy took the ancient “Fur Road” route, which connected Sassanid Persia with the Kama River basin, passing to the east of the Caspian Sea via Sogdiana and Chorasmia. On his return, ibn Fadlan wrote an extensive report for the caliph, which contains valuable firsthand information on the easternmost parts of Eastern Europe during the tenth century. The report was buried in the Abbasid state archives and remained unknown to the general public until Zeki Velidi Togan (Ahmet-Zaki Validov) discovered it in 1923 at Mashhad in Persia. Velidi was one of the leaders of the short-lived Bashkir Republic in 1917 and later of the Soviet Bashkir autonomy, but in 1920 he joined the anti-Bolshevik Muslim resistance in Central Asia. After the Bolsheviks’ victory there, Velidi fled to Iran, where he discovered the thirteenth-century manuscript, containing ibn Fadlan’s report, in the Mashhad library. Velidi copied the manuscript and brought his copy to Germany, where he began to prepare it for publication. Meanwhile, in 1935, the Soviet Academy of Sciences, learning of the existence of this manuscript and of its high value for the study of Russian history, asked the Iranian government to obtain a photocopy. A. P. Kovalevsky prepared the Russian edition of the text simultaneously with Validi’s work on the German edition. Kovalevsky’s edition was delayed because of his arrest in 1938. Velidi’s German edition therefore appeared in 1939,¹⁰ a few months before the Russian edition with an associated facsimile.¹¹

Ibn Fadlan describes meeting a group of itinerant merchants from Rus' on the bank of the Volga River. These were probably Scandinavians from the predominantly Slavic state of Kievan Rus'.¹² Ibn Fadlan's description of their funerary rites is contradictory: on the one hand, there is the boat burial that is typical of Vikings; on the other hand, the immolation of widows discussed in the previous section also appears. Ibn Fadlan described the religious practices of these Rus' merchants as follows:

When their boats come to this anchorage, each one of them goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk, and mead, and betakes himself to a tall wooden pole set upright, that has a face like a man. Around it are small images and behind these are long, tall poles driven into the earth. And he comes to the great image and prostrates himself before it. Then he says: "O my lord, I have come from a far country and have with me so many slave girls for such a price, and so many sable pelts," until he has enumerated all the goods which he has brought for sale. Then he continues: "I have brought offering to thee." Then he lays down what he had brought before the wooden image and continues: "I wish that thou shouldst provide me with a merchant who has many *dinars* and *dirhams*, and who would buy from me at the price I desire, and will raise no objections to me to aught what I may say." Then he departs.

If he has difficulties in his trading, and the days of his stay are prolonged, then he makes a second and a third offering. Should difficulties again arise over what he hopes to attain, he then brings a gift to each of these little figures, and begs them to intercede, saying: "These are the wives, daughters, and sons of our lord." And so he continues to approach each image, one after the other, and to beg them and implore them to intercede, and prays before them in abasement.

His dealings often go on more easily, and he sells everything he has brought with them. Then he says: "My lord has fulfilled my desire. I must reply him." He gathers a number of sheep and oxen, slaughters them, gives away a part of the meat as alms, and brings the remainder and casts it before that great wooden image and before the little wooden images which stand around it. He hangs the heads of the cattle, or those of the sheep, on poles, which are erected in the earth. In the night the dogs come and devour all, and he who has made this sacrifice says: "Verily my lord is content with me, and he has eaten up my gift."¹³

It is not clear which gods these merchants worshiped: Scandinavian, Slavic, or local East Finnish. The description of the cultic images in the form of wooden poles with human faces points toward a third possibility. Such objects were known in the region from antiquity. A wooden pole with human features was found at Shigir in the Middle Urals near Yekaterinburg. Radiocarbon analysis dates this so-called Shigir idol to the ninth millennium BCE, making it the oldest wooden statue in the world.¹⁴

Scandinavians in Eastern Europe easily adopted cults of local gods. In the Rus'-Byzantine treaties quoted in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, they took oaths in the names of Slavic gods,¹⁵ and it is possible that they used the local East Finnish shrine in Volga-Bulgaria for cultic purposes as well. In such a case, ibn Fadlan's report adds little to the subject of Slavic religion.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus was the Byzantine Emperor between 913 and 959. The epithet *porphyrogenitus* means "born in purple," emphasizing the legitimacy of his succession rights, which were, in fact, problematic. Constantine was the son of his father's, Leo VI, concubine, and he was deprived of imperial dignity for 25 years (from 920 to 945) by the usurper Romanus Lecapenus. Between 948 and 952, Constantine wrote a political treatise known as *De administrando imperio* ("On the Administration of the Empire") as instruction for his son and successor, Romanus II. It was originally entitled in Greek "To [my] own son Ronanos" (Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ῥωμανόν). It survived in a copy from the late eleventh century, which was made for Caesar John Doukas by his secretary after Alexius Komnenus' takeover in 1081. Constantine did not write most of the text (sections 13–48) himself. These sections consist of three parts: (1) the origins and expansion of Islam (sections 14–22); (2) events in the Western Mediterranean (Spain and North Africa) before and after the Islamic conquest (sections 23–26); and (3) four geopolitical "files" dealing with Italy (sections 27–28), the Balkans (sections 29–36), the northern Pontic area (sections 37–42), and Transcaucasia (sections 43–46). The first two parts are derived mainly from Theophanes' *Chronographia* written in 810–815. Leo VI, Constantine's father, likely wrote the third part for his son shortly before 913.¹⁶ The Balkan and northern Pontic files contain valuable information on the Slavic peoples of Croatia (sections 30–31), Serbia (section 32), and Moravia (section 41), but the only reference to the religious practices of the Rus' is found in the introductory part of the treatise (sections 1–13). This part, which deals with Byzantine-Pecheneg relations, was written by Constantine himself. Therefore, this reference reflects the contemporary realities of the mid-tenth century.

Constantine relates that the Rus' merchant-warriors on their way "from Varangians to Greeks" through the Volkhov-Dnieper river system perform certain rituals on an island in the Dnieper:

After traversing this place, they reach the island called St. Gregory, on which island they perform their sacrifices because a gigantic oak-tree stands there; and they sacrifice live cocks. Arrows, too, they peg in round about, and others bread and meat, or something of whatever each may have, as is their custom. They also throw lots regarding the cocks, whether to slaughter them, or to eat them as well, or to leave them alive.¹⁷

The Island of St. Gregory is the modern-day Khortitsa Island on the lower Dnieper, downstream of the Dnieper cataracts. It served as a cultic center at least

from the Chalcolithic Age, and an impressive collection of Scythian stone sculptures is preserved in the so-called “Scythian Camp” in the central part of the island. As in the case of ibn Fadlan, it is not clear whose cult Constantine described: Scandinavian, Slavic, local Iranian, or Pecheneg. The oak tree is often associated with the storm god among many European peoples.¹⁸ In Greece, a sacred oak at Dodona was dedicated to Zeus; Celts worshiped “Celtic Zeus”¹⁹ (probably their storm god Taranis) in the form of a tall oak; the name of the Baltic storm god Perkūnas is derived from the word for oak (related to the Latin *quercus*); Donar’s (German storm god) oak at Geismar in Hessen was cut down by St. Boniface; and a sacred oak grove was dedicated to the god Prove at the Slavic town of Starigrad (Oldenburg) in Wagria (Holstein).²⁰

Ibn Fadlan and Leo Deacon also mention sacrifices of hens in the Rus’ context.²¹ Since this kind of sacrifice is unknown in Scandinavia, it is probably of Slavic origin.

In any case, the sacral significance of Khortitsa Island continued up to the early modern age. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Cossack capital, *Sich Zapariz’ka*, was founded there, and thus the island became the symbolic core of Ukrainian national identity.

Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*

Widukind was a Benedictine monk of noble Saxon origin living at the Abbey of Corvey in the Duchy of Saxony (in modern Westphalia). He wrote his chronicle, entitled *Deeds of the Saxons* (*Res gestae saxonicae*), between 967 and 973. Widukind’s main purpose was to justify the transition of power from the Franks to the Saxons and to glorify the Saxon Ottonian dynasty. The chronicle consists of three books. The first book begins with the legendary migration of the Saxons from Lower Saxony to Thuringia during the Frankish conquest of Thuringia with Saxon support in 531–532. The book continues up to the reign of Henry I the Fowler (912–936), the first Saxon King of East Francia (Germany) and the founder of the Ottonian dynasty. The second book describes events from the election of Otto I the Great as King of Germany in 936 to the death of his wife Edith in 946. The third book continues the story of the reign of Otto I until his death and the election of his son Otto II as king in 973. Widukind supported and praised the Slavic wars of Henry I (1.36) and Otto I (2.3–4, 20–21, 30; 3.42, 50–55, 66–69), but surprisingly he never mentioned the Christianization of the Slavic tribes.

The only existing reference to the Slavic bronze cultic statue appears in the description of the siege and conquest of a fortified town of the Slavic tribe of Wagri in modern Holstein in 968:

On his victorious return to the fatherland, the duke [Hermann] brought forth an idol of Saturn made of bronze, which he had found among the other spoils in the fort, as a great spectacle for his people.²²

Saturn was the Roman god of agricultural abundance associated with “the golden age of Saturn,” but which Slavic god is referenced here is unknown. The forged

“Czech glosses” in *Mater verborum* identify Saturn with the Slavic Sitivrat (“sieve-turner”), but he is, of course, a nonexistent “phantom god.”²³ Pagan Anglo-Saxons worshiped the god Sætere, whom Jacob Grimm regarded as of Slavic origin, on the basis of Widukind’s passage and Hanka’s “glosses,” which he considered genuine.²⁴ Sætere is more likely simply an Anglo-Saxon form of Roman Saturn, and, considering that the Slavic Wagri lived in Holstein in close proximity to ancient Anglia, it is possible that they borrowed this god from their Germanic neighbors. On the other hand, if the town taken by Duke Hermann can be identified as the Wagrian capital Starigrad (Oldenburg), a century and a half later Helmold of Bosau called this town’s chief god Prove.²⁵ However, in all likelihood, the statue that Duke Hermann found in the town was simply a Roman bronze statue taken by the Wagri as booty during one of their incursions into the territory of one of the former Roman provinces. The same can be said of the Greek bronze statue of Apollo taken by Vladimir I of Kiev in Byzantine Chersonesus in 988.²⁶

Leo the Deacon, *History*

Byzantine historian Leo the Deacon was born at Caloe—a small town in western Asia Minor—but spent most of his life in Constantinople. In 970, he was ordained a deacon and served at the palace church. Leo wrote his *History* in 10 books during the last decade of the tenth century. The narrative covers the reigns of Romanus II (959–963), Nikephorus II Phokas (963–969), John I Tzimiskes (969–976), and the first half of the reign of Basil II (976–1025) up to 992. Leo wrote in classical Greek and was heavily influenced by ancient Greek historians, including the use of the Thucydidean dating system of military campaigns by “winters and summers.” In the case of John Tzimiskes’s Bulgarian campaign, Leo serves as an eyewitness.

Leo mentioned the religious practices and beliefs of the Rus’ in the context of the decisive defeat that John Tzimiskes inflicted on the Kievan Grand Prince Sviatoslav in Bulgaria in 971. The historical background for this episode was as follows. In 966, the Byzantine Emperor Nikephorus II Phokas hired the Varangian warrior Sviatoslav of Kiev to conquer Bulgaria on behalf of the Byzantines in return for 15,000 pounds of gold. Sviatoslav did indeed invade Bulgaria in 967, conquered the country, and installed Boris II, who was previously held as a hostage in Byzantium, there as czar. In 968, Sviatoslav returned to Kiev, which was being threatened by a Pecheneg attack at the time, but in 969 he suddenly reappeared in Bulgaria with the intention of reconquering it for himself. Sviatoslav succeeded in his plan, and, with his Pecheneg and Hungarian allies, defeated the Bulgarians and their Byzantine allies, captured Czar Boris, and established himself in the town Peryaslavets on Danube. In December 969, Nikephorus II was killed in a palace coup and replaced by John I Tzimiskes. In 970, Sviatoslav crossed the Balkan Mountains and attacked the Byzantines, but was defeated and retreated. In 971, John Tzimiskes undertook a counteroffensive, besieged Sviatoslav in Dorostolon (modern Silistra), decisively defeated him in three battles, and forced him to capitulate. Leo describes what happened in the Rus’ camp after the last battle, in July of 971:

When night fell, since the moon was nearly full, they [the Rus'] came out on the plain and searched for their dead; and they collected them in front of the city wall and kindled numerous fires and burned them, after slaughtering on top of them many captives, both men and women, in accordance with their ancestral custom. And they made sacrificial offerings by drowning suckling infants and chicken in the Istros [Danube], plunging them into the rushing waters of the river.²⁷

As in the previous examples of ibn Fadlan and Constantine Porphyrogenitus' descriptions of the religious practices of the Rus', it is unclear whether this passage reflects Scandinavian or East Slavic pagan religion. Both ibn Fadlan and Constantine attributed the chicken sacrifice to the Rus', and human sacrifices are mentioned both in Scandinavia and in the Slavic context by many authors, including at Kiev in the time of Sviatoslav's successor, Vladimir.²⁸ It is also possible that the sacrifices to the Danube reflect the cult of rivers that Procopius mentioned.

In another passage later in the text, Leo describes the beliefs of the Rus' in the afterlife:

This also is said about the Tauroscythians [Rus'], that never up until now had they surrendered to the enemy when defeated; but when they lose hope of safety, they drive their swords into their vital parts, and thus kill themselves. And they do this because of the following belief: they say that if they are killed in battle by the enemy, then after their death and the separation of their souls from their bodies they will serve their slayers in Hades. And the Tauroscythians dread such servitude, and, hating to wait upon those who have killed them, inflict death upon themselves with their own hands. Such is the belief that prevails among them.²⁹

No other author mentions such beliefs among the Slavs. However, suicidal behavior in cases of military defeat is well known among the Vikings in Scandinavia.

Notes

- 1 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 7.14.23–24.
- 2 See E. E. Левкиевская, "Низшая мифология славян," *Очерки истории культуры славян*, ответственный редактор О. В. Белова, Москва, 1996, pp. 175–195.
- 3 *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, translated with an introduction by Ephraim Emerton, New York, 1940, no. 52 [73], p. 128.
- 4 *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, translated and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester-New York, 2001, 8.3 (p. 362). On this author, see Chapter 4, "Thietmar of Merseburg, *The Chronicle*."
- 5 *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*, translated with commentary by Richard N. Fire, Princeton, 2006, pp. 67–70. On this author, see Chapter 2, "Ahmad ibn Fadlan, *Travel-Report*."
- 6 Елена Е. Кузьмина, *Откуда пришли индоарии?*, Москва, 1994; Elena E. Kuz'mina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians*, ed. J. P. Mallory, Leyden, 2007.
- 7 Thracian tribe living south of the Strymon River.

- 8 Herodotus 5.5, translated by George Rawlinson.
- 9 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 6.14.1.
- 10 *Ibn Fadlan's Reisebericht*, ed. by A. Z. Validi (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes B. 24. N 3), Leipzig, 1939.
- 11 Путешествие Ибн-Фадлана на Волгу, под редакцией И. Ю. Крачковского, Москва- Ленинград, 1939 (edited and translated by Andrey P. Kovalevsky, but his name was deleted from the publication).
- 12 Stephen E. Flowers, *Ibn Fadlan's Travel-Report: As It Concerns the Scandinavian Rûs*, Smithville, TX, 1998.
- 13 *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*, translated with commentary by Richard N. Fire, Princeton, 2006, pp. 65–66.
- 14 N. M. Chairkina, Y. V. Kuzmin, G. S. Burr, "Chronology of the perishables: first AMS 14 °C dates of wooden artefacts from Aeneolithic-Bronze Age waterlogged sites in the Trans-Urals, Russia," *Antiquity* 87, 2013, pp. 418–429.
- 15 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, pp. 74, 77 (945), 90 (971).
- 16 For this analysis, see James Howard-Johnston, "The *De administrando imperio*: A Re-examination of the Text and a Re-evaluation of its Evidence about Rus," *Les centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, eds. M. Kazanski, A. Narcessian and C. Zuckerman, Paris, 2000, pp. 301–336.
- 17 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 9 (pp. 60–61).
- 18 See Г. Ю. Ивакин, "Священный дуб языческих славян," *Советская этнография*, 1979, № 2, pp. 106–115.
- 19 Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes*, 2.8.
- 20 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, I.84 (pp. 218–219).
- 21 *The History of Leo Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, introduction, translation, and annotation by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan with assistance of George T. Dennis and Stamatina McGrath, Washington, DC, 2005, 9.6.
- 22 Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*, translated with an introduction and notes by Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, Washington, DC, 2014, 68 (p. 143).
- 23 See Introduction, this volume, p. 3.
- 24 Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, translated from the fourth edition with notes and appendix by James Steven Stallybrass, vol. 1, London, 1882, pp. 248–249.
- 25 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, I.84 (pp. 218–219).
- 26 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 116.
- 27 *The History of Leo Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, introduction, translation, and annotation by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan with assistance of George T. Dennis and Stamatina McGrath, Washington, DC, 2005, 9.6.
- 28 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 93.
- 29 *The History of Leo Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, introduction, translation, and annotation by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan with assistance of George T. Dennis and Stamatina McGrath, Washington, DC, 2005, 9.8.

3 Conclusions

No Slavic divine name is mentioned in any of the early sources discussed above; Slavic names of the South Slavic god of lightning of Procopius and of the Wagrian Saturn of Widukind remain unknown. Only three authors definitely wrote about the Slavs: Procopius—about the Southern Slavs, St. Boniface—about Western Slavs (Wends), and Widukind—also about the West Slavic Wagri in modern Holstein. The other three authors discussed in this section wrote about the Rus', whose ethnic identity is questionable, and described their customs not in their home territory, but abroad: in Volga-Bulgaria (ibn Fadlan), the Pecheneg area (Constantine), and Danube-Bulgaria (Leo). All three authors writing about the Rus' mention chicken sacrifices. Widows' self-immolation is mentioned by St. Boniface and ibn Fadlan, and their evidence is corroborated by later sources (Thietmar). However, such practices as boat burial and suicide of defeated warriors are certainly Scandinavian and not Slavic, while the sacred oak on Khortitsa Island and cultic images on a bank of Volga belonged most probably to local non-Slavic cults. Procopius's evidence is especially important, since this is the only reference on the religion of the Southern Slavs, and it confirms the early existence of lower mythological figures, such as nymphs and spirits, known from modern folklore, in their religious beliefs. However, the belief in "one god" that Procopius attributed to the Slavs is a typically Christian "monotheistic" interpretation of primitive religions without a developed polytheistic pantheon of gods, which was attributed later to pagan Turks and Mongols. Is it a coincidence that no Slavic gods were mentioned in the early sources? Were there any Slavic gods at all before the mid-tenth century? We'll try to answer this question in Part II of this study.



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Part II

Gods



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4 Sources

Slavic gods are mentioned in sources from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries that German, Danish, Icelandic, and East Slavic authors wrote. They wrote in Latin, Old Norse, Church Slavonic, and Old Eastern Slavic languages, and their compositions belong to a variety of literary genres: letters, chronicles, sagas, hagiography, and epic poetry. The information on Slavic gods and their cults that they provide is rich. However, unlike the sources surveyed in Part I (from the sixth to the tenth centuries), this information is restricted to the western and eastern edges of the Slavic world: the Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs in modern East Germany and in East Slavic Kiev. No information about the gods of the Southern Slavs, the East Slavic tribes of modern-day Russia and Belarus, and of predecessors of modern West Slavic nations such as the Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks is available. Before presenting the evidence on specific Slavic gods, the nature and historical value of these sources is first examined.

Documentary evidence

Bruno of Querfurt, A Letter to King Henry II

Bruno of Querfurt's letter to the King of Germany (1002–1024) and the future Roman Emperor (from 1014), Henry II, written in 1008, is one of the most important historical documents of the early eleventh century. It provides unique firsthand evidence on the Kievan Rus' under the rule of Vladimir the Saint, on Hungary, Poland, Pechenegs, and the pagan Slavic Liutici.¹

Bruno was a German missionary. In 1003, Pope Sylvester II appointed him to head the mission to the peoples of Eastern Europe. In the years that followed, Bruno visited the newly Christianized countries of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and Kievan Rus'. In Kiev, he was consecrated as Bishop of Pechenegs. In late 1008, Bruno proceeded from there to the country of the pagan Prussians, but was martyred at the hands of Lithuanians on the border of Rus' in the following year.² He was canonized soon after his death. Bruno was closely associated with the court of Emperor Otto III, where he served as chaplain from 997. Otto III was the son of the Byzantine princess Theophano, and therefore adopted an "imperial" ideology and saw himself as the protector of Christianity. He maintained close

relations with Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland as natural allies against the pagan Slavic tribes residing between the Oder and the Elbe. These tribes rebelled against the Empire in 983 and renounced Christianity. Bruno of Querfurt wholeheartedly supported the alliance with Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland. Otto III died in 1002, however, and his successor as King of Germany, Henry II, abandoned his predecessor's policy, and chose rather to ally himself with the pagan tribal union of Liutici against the Polish Christian King, Bolesław I the Brave. Bruno vehemently opposed this policy reversal, and his letter to Henry II is dedicated mainly to criticizing the king for his alliance with pagans against Christians.

The Magdeburg Charter

Written in late 1107 or 1108, the so-called *Magdeburg Charter* is, in fact, a circular letter. It was composed by six bishops (of Magdeburg, Merseburg, Naumburg, Meissen, Havelberg, and Brandenburg) and three counts (of Ballenstedt, Groitsch, and Thuringia) from eastern Germany. The letter was dispatched to clergy (the Archbishop of Cologne, the Bishops of Halberstadt, Paderborn, Minden, Aachen, and Liège, the Abbot of Corvey, the Archdeacon of Tournai, and the Provost of St. Donatian in Bruges), secular rulers (the Duke of Lower Lorraine and the Count of Flanders), and the philosopher Tanchrad in Rheinland and Flanders. The senders passionately pleaded the addressees for help against the pagan Slavs. They called for a crusade and requested settlers.³ This document has great historical significance, since it signaled the beginning of what later became known as the *Drang nach Osten*—"Push Eastwards"—the German settlement movement in Eastern Europe. The letter is known as the *Magdeburg Charter* because of the central role that the city of Magdeburg played both in the process of the German colonization east of the Elbe and in the Christian missionary activity in the same area. As a result, most of the towns in eastern Germany, Poland, and Lithuania adopted the Magdeburg Law. However, the military program that the *Magdeburg Charter* initiated took 40 years to materialize, finally culminating in the so-called Wendish Crusade of 1147.

The *Magdeburg Charter* consists of two parts: *narratio*—the narrative account of the atrocities that the pagan Slavs perpetrated against the German Christians—and *petitio*—the petition or plea for help.

Historiography

Medieval historiography is known as chronography since medieval historical compositions are usually called chronicles. These chronicles were written in Latin in the Catholic West (including Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary), in Greek in Byzantium, and in Church Slavonic in Rus'. All show influences from the Greek and Roman historiographic traditions. From the Greek tradition, these sources inherited the emphasis on recent and mainly military history. From the Roman annalistic tradition, they copied the annalistic form of writing. The descriptions of the "barbarians" in Herodotus' fourth book (dedicated to the Scythians), directly,

or via his Roman epigones, such as Caesar's description of Gaul and *Germania* of Cornelius Tacitus, clearly also influenced these chroniclers. While showing ancient influences, medieval historiography also displays innovations including biblical allusions, such as beginning the narrative with the creation of the world, the so-called teleological concept of history—the sense of purpose imposed by the divine will on the historical process—derived from the *Ecclesiastic History* by Eusebius of Caesaria, and the belief in miracles. The level of historical research proper, such as critical cross-examination of the sources, was lower in the Middle Ages than it had been in classical antiquity. The annalistic principle was employed mechanically, creating “empty years” when nothing happened from the point of view of the chronicler. The sense of personal authorship was also low; medieval chroniclers did not hesitate to interpolate large portions from their predecessors into their compositions without indicating their sources.

The Icelandic sagas belong to the independent Scandinavian historical tradition. In the thirteenth century, on the eve of the Norwegian takeover of the country in 1262, republican Iceland with its direct Athenian-style democracy became the locus of a unique school of writing in the local Old Norse language. The historical prose narratives called sagas (“what is said”) were a part of this cultural flowering. These sagas were, basically, records of an oral historical tradition. There were two kinds of historical sagas: kings' sagas—records of Norwegian and Danish rulers—and family sagas—records of the stories of several prominent Icelandic families.

Thietmar of Merseburg, The Chronicle

Thietmar was of noble Saxon descent and served as the Prince-Bishop of Merseburg in 1009–1018. He wrote his chronicle in eight books in 1012–1018. The narrative covers the rule of five Saxon kings and emperors of the Ottonian dynasty, between 911 and 1018. The first three books are dedicated to the reigns of Henry I the Fowler (912–936), Otto I the Great (936–973), and Otto II the Red (973–983). These three books are largely derived from earlier chronicles: the *Deeds of the Saxons* by Widukind⁴ and the *Annals of Quedlinburg*.⁵ The fourth book is dedicated to the reign of Otto III (983–1002) and books six to eight deal with the first half of the reign of Henry II (1002–1024). Books four to eight are likely original to Thietmar. Unlike most other medieval literary compositions, the original manuscript of Thietmar's chronicle has survived. It is written in eight different hands, showing that Thietmar dictated the text to scribes. The manuscript was held in Dresden, where it was heavily damaged when the city was bombed in February 1945.

In contrast to his childhood friend, Bruno of Querfurt, Thietmar opposed Otto III's policy of *renovatio imperii* (“renewal of the empire”) and supported Henry II's alliance with the pagan Slavic tribes against Poland. These differences in political views did not lead to personal enmity between the two, and they continued to maintain cordial relations until Bruno's death. It is particularly important to note that the peaceful relations with the pagan Slavs gave

Thietmar the opportunity to observe their pagan cults unobstructed, and not in the context of war and destruction, as was the case with all later authors.

Adam of Bremen, History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen

The Prince-Archbishop of Hamburg, Adalbert, invited Adam of Bremen to that city in 1066, where he served as the capitular responsible for the cathedral school. He wrote his “Deeds of Bishops of the Hamburg Church” (*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*) between 1073 and 1076. The composition consists of four books: the first two deal with the history of the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen from 788 to 1045; book three is a biography of Archbishop Adalbert; and book four is a geographical description of Northern Europe. The ecclesiastic history of Hamburg-Bremen is based mostly on earlier chronicles. The Danish King Sven II Estridson (1047–1076), whose court Adam attended shortly after his arrival in Bremen, provided most of the information on Scandinavia (including the earliest account of the Vikings’ discovery of North America). Finally, Adam of Bremen was able to base the biography of his patron archbishop on his own experience.⁶ Adam of Bremen witnessed difficult times for the diocese of Hamburg. Henry II’s alliance with the pagan Liutici broke down in 1033 during the rule of Conrad II, founder of the Salian dynasty of German kings and Roman emperors. Its location on the Elbe made Hamburg a frontier outpost, subject to Slavic incursions. The internal situation of the Slavic tribes between the Elbe and the Oder also changed. In 1057, the Obodrite Prince Gottschalk accepted Christianity, and, acting in alliance with the Danish King Sven Estridson and Bernard II, Duke of Saxony, subjugated the northwestern part of the Liutici territory, where the diocese of Mecklenburg was established. The Liutici revolted against the Obodrite rule in 1066. They killed Gottschalk, while his wife Sigrid, daughter of King Sven, was driven out of Mecklenburg naked. John the Scot, Bishop of Mecklenburg, was captured and sacrificed to gods at the cultic center of the Liutici, the town of Radagost (Rethra). The Liutici even invaded Hamburg, and consequently its archbishop had to transfer his see to Bremen. As retaliation, Burchard II, Bishop of Halberstadt, raided and destroyed Rethra in 1068.⁷

Helmold of Bosau, The Chronicle of the Slavs

Helmold of Bosnau was most probably the son of the German settlers in the district of Segeberg in Holstein. Count Adolf II invited these settlers to Segeberg after the German conquest of this region in 1139. He was a close associate of the Bishops of Oldenburg (Slavic Starigrad), Vicelin, and Gerold, under whose patronage he served from 1156 on as parish priest at Bosau on Great Plön Lake. Living among the Slavs in the Slavic country of Wagria, Helmold of Bosnau was the only German chronicler who knew Slavic, and in 1172 he wrote the only German chronicle entirely dedicated to the Slavs, *Chronica Slavorum*—“The Chronicle of the Slavs.” The narrative consisted of two books. The first surveys the attempts to Christianize the Slavs from about 800 to 1168, and the second covers events between 1168 and 1171. The first 24 chapters of book one are derived

from the chronicle of Adam of Bremen, and the rest is based on Helmold's personal experience. The central event of the chronicle is the so-called Wendish Crusade of 1147—the German conquest of the Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs.

After the downfall of Edessa in Northern Syria in 1144, Bernard of Clairvaux preached for the Second Crusade. The Saxon nobility was reluctant to go to the Holy Land. They were ready, however, to conduct a military campaign against the neighboring pagan Slavs. In March 1147, Pope Eugenius issued a bull approving their plan for an alternative crusade in Slavic lands east of the Elbe. In June of that year, the Obodrite Prince Niklot launched a preemptive attack on Adolf II's Wagrian possessions. In late summer, the crusaders succeeded in pushing Niklot out of Wagria, and Adolf II withdrew from the war, making peace with Niklot. The other Saxon and Danish knights, under the command of Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, besieged the Obodrite stronghold of Dobin and the Liutici's fort, Demmin. After initial successes in fighting the Danes, Niklot agreed to accept Christianity and concluded a peace treaty with Henry the Lion. Margraves Conrad I of Meissen and Albert the Bear of Brandenburg continued the siege on Demmin, and after taking the fort they proceeded to Pomerania and besieged Szczecin (Stettin), where the forces of Mieszko III the Old, Duke of Great Poland, joined the crusaders. At this point, however, Ratibor I, Duke of Pomerania, and Adalbert, Bishop of Wolin, succeeded in persuading the crusaders that Szczecin was already a Christian town, and they should therefore terminate the hostilities.

The diocese of Oldenburg was established in 1149, in the aftermath of the Wendish Crusade, and its clerics found themselves in the precarious position of being caught between their Slavic flock, whom they were supposed to convert to Christianity, and their secular and ecclesiastic lords and masters, who were striving for spoils and revenue. Helmold of Bosau was generally sympathetic with the Slavs, and did not approve of Henry the Lion's policy of extermination, which he did not hesitate to criticize, even going so far as to attack the Archbishop of Hamburg, Hartwig, who was his ecclesiastic superior.

Saxo Grammaticus, The History of the Danes

The first Danish national historian, Saxo Grammaticus, was secretary to the Bishop of Roskilde (1158–1192) and the Archbishop of Lund (1178–1201), Absalon. He wrote his *History of the Danes* (*Gesta Danorum*) between 1185 and 1208. This composition differs from the German chronicles discussed so far. It is a national history of the Danish people and begins with a summary of the Danish national historical tradition, including purely mythological material, which occupies the first nine books of the composition. Books 10 to 16 deal with the kings of Denmark from Gorm the Old (936–958) to the first half of the reign of Canute VI (1182–1202), up to 1186. Book 14, comprising nearly one-quarter of the entire text, occupies a special position in the chronicle. It deals mainly with the so-called Northern Crusade—the 1168 Danish military expedition against the last Slavic pagan stronghold, the Island of Rügen—which Bishop Absalon conducted during the reign of King Valdemar I the Great (1146–1182).

The historical background of this event was as follows. After the abdication of King Erik III in 1146, the country was divided between Sven III, Canute V, and Valdemar I. The latter became sole ruler of Denmark only in 1157 after a prolonged civil war. He was the posthumous son of Canute Lavard, Duke of Schleswig, who had been murdered in 1131 by his cousin Magnus the Strong, son of King Niels (1104–1134). In order to consolidate his power and secure the legitimacy required for the smooth succession of his son Canute VI (see Chart 2), Valdemar I sought to obtain permission for the canonization of his father, Canute Lavard, from Pope Alexander III (1159–1181). The idea of a crusade against the “heathen” Slavs of Rügen was promoted as an argument to convince the Pope to agree to the canonization. In 1169, Alexander III did indeed issue a letter of agreement together with a declaration of Rügen as a Danish ecclesiastical province. Canute Lavard was canonized in 1170 at Ringsted Abbey.⁸ Saxo Grammaticus accompanied Bishop Absalon on the Northern Crusade, and serves therefore as an eyewitness for the description of the Slavic temples and cults on the Island of Rügen.

The Knytlinga Saga

The Knytlinga Saga is one of the king’s sagas dedicated to Danish history. It was written between 1235 and 1258, probably by Olaf Thordarson (Óláfr Þórðarson), who participated in the Danish conquest of Rügen in 1168. The

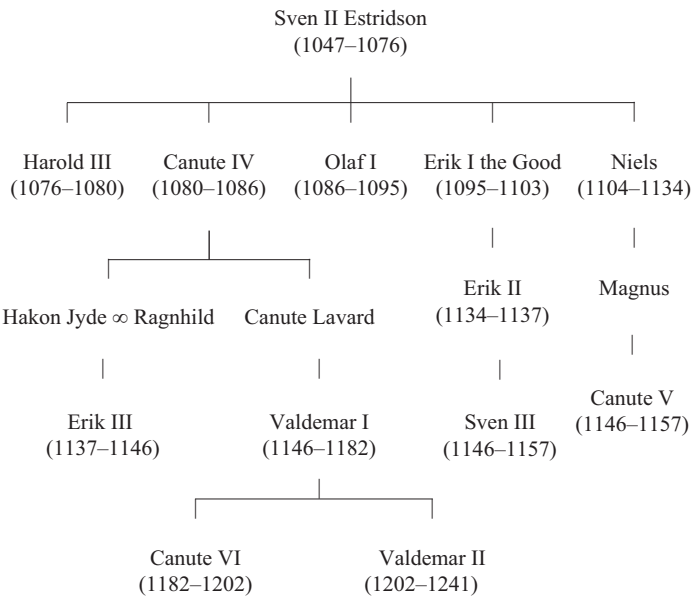


Chart 2 Danish kings, descendants of Sven II Estridson

composition is called “Story of Canute’s Descendants,” although it covers the reigns of Danish kings from Harold the Bluetooth (958–985) to Canute VI (1182–1202), including four other Canutes: Canute the Great (1018–1035), Canute IV the Saint (1080–1086), Canute Lavard, and Canute V Magnusson (1146–1157). However, its name probably refers to Canute the Saint, who occupies a central position in the narrative.⁹ As does Saxo Grammaticus; *The Knytlinga Saga* also describes the Danish Northern Crusade against the Slavs, providing some additional details.

The Russian Primary Chronicle

The Russian Primary Chronicle, originally entitled *Tale of Bygone Years* (*Повесть временныхъ лѣтъ*), was written by Slavs in Slavic. The chronicle has survived in two manuscript copies: the Laurentian Codex written in 1377 by monk Lawrence at Suzdal’ and the Hypatian Codex written in the mid-fifteenth century in the Hypatian monastery at Kostroma. In 1908, Aleksey Shakhmatov reconstructed the history of this chronicle.¹⁰ According to his analysis, which is still valid, the earliest version of the chronicle, conventionally known as the “most ancient Kiev compilation,” was composed in 1039 in Kiev. In 1073, Nikon, a monk at the Kiev Crypt Monastery, modified this compilation. Shakhmatov terms this version “the first compilation of the Crypt Monastery.” In 1093 the Hegumen of the Crypt Monastery, John, basing his work on the previous compilation, composed the so-called “primary compilation,” which partly survived in the *First Novgorod Chronicle* of the mid-thirteenth century. Nestor, chronicler and hagiographer of the Crypt Monastery, composed the first edition of the *Primary Chronicle* in its present form at about 1113. Nestor added several excerpts from the Byzantine chronicles of John Malalas and George Hamartolus to the “primary compilation,” including an account of the Pannonian mission of St. Cyril and Methodius, the Rus’-Byzantine treaties of 907–971, and several other fragments. Sylvester, the Hegumen of St. Michael Monastery in the village of Vyduichi near Kiev, prepared the second edition of this chronicle in 1116, which was later copied in the Laurentian Codex. The third and final edition was made in 1118 for the Prince of Novgorod, Mstislav Vladimirovich, and it was copied in the Hypatian Codex.

The chronicle begins with the biblical story of Noah’s sons. Dated events are surveyed from 852 to 1110. The chronology before the mid-tenth century is unreliable, being an imposition of the Byzantine chronological scheme upon the East Slavic oral historical tradition. To make the chronology work, continuous narratives were artificially divided into annual entries.

Hagiography

Hagiography, or lives of saints, is a typically medieval literary genre. It originated from the late Roman *Acta Martyrum*—“Acts of Martyrs”—real or imaginary

protocols of trials against Christian martyrs in the age of persecutions of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Ancient Greek and Roman biographies also served as a model for medieval hagiography, but the most important guiding principle for medieval hagiographers was the so-called *imitatio Christi*—"imitation of the Christ"—modeling the lives of saints after Gospel stories. Medieval hagiographic compositions were very schematic and generally included topics such as ominous births, miracles, temptations, passions, and often a martyr's death. Nevertheless, lives of saints, especially those written closely to the hero's lifetime, often contain valuable historical information.

The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania

St. Otto of Bamberg was a native of Mistelbach in Franconia (in modern-day Bavaria). In 1101, he was appointed Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, and in 1102 he became Bishop of Bamberg in Bavaria. In 1123, Bolesław III the Wrymouth, the Duke of Poland, who completed the conquest of Pomerania in 1121, invited Otto to act as a missionary in order to Christianize the pagan inhabitants of this province. Otto had already had some experience in Poland, in the service of the Duke Władysław I Herman, when in 1085 he arranged the duke's marriage to Judith, sister of Emperor Henry IV.

This was the third attempt to Christianize Pomerania. The first attempt to convert Pomeranian Slavs to Christianity was made in 946, when the Emperor Otto I established the diocese of Havelberg, during the German conquest of this country. However, the Pomeranians renounced Christianity after the Great Slavic revolt of 983. In 1002, the Polish Duke Bolesław I the Brave conquered Pomerania and established the diocese of Kołobrzeg (Kolberg), but in 1005 the Pomeranians rebelled and expelled the Poles. Otto arrived in Pomerania in 1124 and succeeded in Christianizing several Pomeranian towns. After his departure in the next year, however, the Pomeranians returned to their pagan cults. In 1128, Otto came to Pomerania again at the invitation of the Pomeranian Duke Wartislaw I. This time, he managed to arrange a formal proclamation of the acceptance of Christianity by the Pomeranian nobility in their gathering at Usedom. It is difficult to estimate the true measure of St. Otto's success. The Pomeranian diocese of Wolin was established in 1140, after his death, by his successor, Bishop Adalbert, under the auspices of the Duke Ratibor I, who gained Pomeranian independence from Poland in 1138. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the assault of German and Polish knights on Pomerania during the Wendish Crusade of 1147. After persuading the crusaders to lift the siege on Szczecin in 1148, Ratibor I attended the Imperial Diet at Havelberg, where he had to swear to being a Christian. After his return to Bamberg, Otto retired to the St. Michael Abbey, where he died in 1139. Pope Clement III canonized St. Otto in 1189. Six hagiographies were dedicated to his life, and three of them contain valuable information about the pagan gods and cults of the Pomeranians.

Ebo

Ebo was a monk in St. Michael Abbey at Bamberg, where he likely met St. Otto shortly before the latter's death. Ebo wrote his *Life of Otto* in three books in 1151. The first book is dedicated to the early life of St. Otto and to the founding of the St. Michael Abbey; the second book describes Otto's first missionary journey to Pomerania and the earlier unsuccessful attempts to Christianize this country; and the third and final book deals with Otto's second missionary journey. Ebo's main source of information was a priest named Udalric, who was a close friend of Otto and his companions during their second missionary journey. Therefore, Ebo's account of this second journey is based on eyewitness accounts and is more reliable than his description of the first Pomeranian mission, which was based on hearsay, and includes descriptions of many miracles.

Herbord

Herbord entered the St. Michael Abbey in 1145, six years after St. Otto's death. He certainly knew Ebo's *Life of Otto*, but never quoted from it because of personal enmity between him and Ebo, related to internal strife within the abbey. Abbot Helmeric was forced to resign in 1160 because of Herbord's opposition, while Ebo sided with the resigning abbot. Herbord was also dissatisfied with the unreliable account of St. Otto's first mission in Ebo's hagiography. Herbord wrote his *Life of Otto* in 1158 in the form of a dialogue between Tiemo, the abbey's prior, and Sefrid, a monk who accompanied St. Otto in his first missionary journey. The composition consists of three books: the first deals with Otto's activities before his Pomeranian mission; the second with his first journey; and the third with the second journey and, surprisingly, with St. Otto's childhood. The account of the first journey is based on Sefrid's firsthand testimony, but Herbord's description of the second journey largely depends on Ebo's narrative. Thus, Ebo and Herbord complement each other as sources about the pagan Pomeranians: Herbord's account of Otto's first journey is more reliable than Ebo's, while Ebo is the more valuable source for Otto's second journey.

Wolfger of Prüfening

The third *Life of Otto* was written a few years after Herbord's hagiography by Wolfger,¹¹ a monk of the Prüfening Abbey near Regensburg, an abbey that St. Otto founded in 1119. This composition has little value as a historical source, being almost entirely based on the earlier hagiographies that Ebo and Herbord wrote. Nevertheless, it contains a few episodes that are missing in both earlier compositions. The sources of these additions are unknown, and the author probably relied on an oral tradition about St. Otto that circulated among monks of Prüfening.

Poetry

The Tale of Igor's Campaign

The Tale of Igor's Campaign (Слово о плъкоу Игоревѣ) is a masterpiece of East Slavic medieval poetry. The poem describes the failed campaign of Igor Sviatoslavich, Prince of Novgorod-Seversk, against the Polovtsy (Qıpçaq) tribes in the lower Don region in 1185, Igor's captivity, and his subsequent escape. In 1795, Aleksey Musin-Pushkin discovered the fifteenth-century manuscript in the library of the Spaso-Yaroslavsky monastery at Yaroslavl'. He published the poem in 1800 with help of philologists Aleksey Malinovsky and Nikolay Bantysh-Kamensky, but the original manuscript was destroyed in the 1812 Moscow Fire, during the French occupation of the city. The obscure circumstances surrounding its discovery, the manuscript's early disappearance, and many historical oddities in the text itself soon raised doubts as to the poem's authenticity. In 1852, the *Zadonshchina*—an epic poem about the victory of the Great Prince of Moscow Dmitry Donskoy over the Golden Horde Khan Mamai in 1380—was published. There was no doubt about the authenticity of this fifteenth-century composition, which contains many passages in common with *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. As a result, it was suggested that the *Tale* was an eighteenth-century forgery based on the text of the *Zadonshchina*. The references to the Crimean Goths,¹² of the Principality of Tmutarakan',¹³ the use of the ethnic *rusichi* for Russians,¹⁴ and, above all, the positive view that the text expresses regarding the Slavic pagan gods—a view typical to post-Renaissance Western Europe—buttressed the arguments for the eighteenth-century origin of the *Tale*. However, in 2008, the leading Russian linguist Andrey Zalizniak strongly defended the authenticity of the poem on purely linguistic grounds.¹⁵ He claimed that the language of the *Tale* is in genuine East Slavic medieval vernacular, the only other instances of which are found in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries' birch-bark documents that had been found in archaeological excavations in Novgorod in the 1950s. Generally speaking, historians are more skeptical about the *Tale* than linguists. Without entirely ruling out the possibility of a forgery, Zalizniak remarks that the forger had to be a genius, able to reconstruct the phonetics and morphology of medieval East Slavic correctly—a genius who was unlikely to exist in the eighteenth century. Because of the controversy, evidence from *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* regarding Slavic gods should be used with caution.

Notes

- 1 See Wojciech Falkowski, "The Letter of Bruno of Querfurt to King Henry II," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien (Jahrbuch des Instituts für Frühmittelalterforschung der Universität Münster)* 43, 2009, pp. 417–438.
- 2 *The Annals of the Holy Roman Empire. The Annals of Quedlinburg*, translated and annotated by Grzegorz Kazimierz Walkowski, Bydgoszcz, 2014, 1.2. This is, in fact, the first reference to the Lithuanians (Lituae).

- 3 See Giles Constable, "The Place of the Magdeburg Charter of 1107/8 in the History of Eastern Germany and the Crusades," *Vita Religiosa im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Franz J. Felten and Nikolas Jaspert with collaboration of Stephanie Haarländer, Berlin, 1999, pp. 283–299.
- 4 See Chapter 2, "Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*."
- 5 *The Annals of the Holy Roman Empire. The Annals of Quedlinburg*, translated and annotated by Grzegorz Kazimierz Walkowski, Bydgoszcz, 2014.
- 6 See Hans-Werner Goetz, "Constructing the Past. Religious Dimensions and Historical Consciousness in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hamburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*," *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen, 2006, pp. 17–50.
- 7 *Annales Augustani*, ed. G. H. Pertz (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, scriptores, vol. 3), Hannover, 1839, year 1068 (p. 128).
- 8 See Karsten Friis-Jensen, "In the Presence of the Dead: Saint Canute the Duke in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*," *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen, 2006, pp. 195–215.
- 9 See Carl Phelpstead, "Pilgrims, Missionaries and Martyrs: The Holy in Bede, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Knyttlinga saga*," *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen, 2006, pp. 51–79.
- 10 Алексей А. Шахматов, *Разыскания о древнейших русских летописных сводах*, С-Петербург, 1908.
- 11 For the identification of his name, see H. Fichtenau, "Wolfger von Prüfening," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 51, 1937, pp. 313–357.
- 12 Crimea was annexed by Russia in 1783.
- 13 The existence of this principality on the Taman' peninsula was used in the eighteenth century as justification for Russian territorial claims in this region.
- 14 The ethnic *ruskiye* ("Russians") is, in fact, an adjective meaning literally "those who belong to Rus'." It is regarded as pejorative in Russian nationalistic circles, which prefer the substantive *rusichi*, derived solely from the *Tale of Igor's Campaign*.
- 15 Андрей А. Зализняк, «Слово о полку Игореве»: взгляд лингвиста, Москва, 2008.

5 Svarozhich

The Slavic god called Svarozhich is first mentioned in Bruno of Querfurt's letter to Henry II, King of Germany. The context was Bruno's passionate protest against the king's alliance with the pagan Liutici tribal union against Christian Poland:

But, if it is permitted to speak thus without losing the king's grace: Is it good to persecute a Christian people and hold a pagan people in friendship? What concord hath Christ with Belial (2 Corinth. 6:15)? What communion hath light with darkness? In what way can the devil Zuarasiz [Svarozhich] and the duke of saints, your and our Maurice, concur? On what battle line do the sacred lance and the diabolic banners (*vexilla*), which are nourished with human blood, go forth together? Do you not think it a sin, O king, when a Christian head is sacrificed under the banner of the demons—a thing which is horrible even to say?¹

Quoting St. Paul, Bruno compares Svarozhich with the biblical Belial (Hebrew *Beli-ya'al*—"worthless"), who became the personification of the devil in the Christian tradition. The author contrasts him with St. Maurice—the patron saint of the Holy Roman Empire. The sacred lance that Bruno mentions is the lance that pierced the side of Jesus on the cross, according to the Gospel of John (19:31–37). It came into the possession of the Holy Roman Emperor during Otto I's reign, and Otto III, whom Bruno admired, presented a replica to Bolesław I, Duke of Poland, his ally and Henry II's enemy. Later writers confirmed that pagan Slavs used sacred banners and other images of gods on the battlefield. Thietmar of Merseburg thus describes the allied army of the Liutici joining Henry II's forces:

After this, the Liutizi joined us. They came, with images of their gods preceding them, on the day before we were to have arrived at the river Oder.²

Saxo Grammaticus also provides the Slavic name of sacred banners that the Rani employed on the Island of Rügen:

They only kept banners and standards to defend the tower situated above the gate. Among these was one known as *stanitza*, conspicuous in its size and color, to which the people of Rügen paid as much veneration as almost all the other deities were accorded for their majesty . . . so addicted were they to this false belief that for them the power inherent in this paltry piece of cloth surpassed the efficacy of a king's might.³

Bruno does not indicate the tribal affiliation of Svarozhich, attributing his cult to the Liutici in general. However, the Liutici was a federation comprised of four tribes: the Redarii, the Circipani, the Kessini, and the Tollensi. Thietmar, who was better acquainted with the Liutici than Bruno, specifically attributes Svarozhich to the Redarii. He also describes the temple of Svarozhich in the Redarii's capital, the town of Riedegost (Slavic Radagost), in detail:

In the region of the Redarii, there is a burg called Riedegost which has three corners and three doors. It is surrounded everywhere by a great forest which the inhabitants hold to be inviolable and holy. Two of its doors offer entry to all. The third door faces east and is the smallest. It opens on to a path leading to a lake that is located near by and is utterly dreadful in appearance. In the burg, there is nothing other than a skillfully made wooden shrine supported on a foundation composed of the horns of different types of animals. Marvelous sculpted images of gods and goddesses adorn its walls, so it seems to the observer. Inside, stand gods made by human hands, each with a name inscribed and frightfully clothed with helmets and armor. Among them, Svarozyc [Svarozhich] occupies the first place and all the heathens honor and worship him above the others. Their banners may never be removed from this place except in time of war and then only by warriors on foot.⁴

Remains of a similar wooden Slavic temple were excavated in 1973 in Groß Raden near Sternberg.⁵ However, since this site belonged to one of the Slavic tribes of the Obodrites' federation, it cannot be identified as the Radagost of the Redarii.

The very existence of pagan temples in the Slavic lands between the Oder and the Elbe is exceptional for the pagan cults of Northern Europe. Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, Slavic, and Finnish cults were essentially open-air cults of sacred groves and springs. They stand in a sharp contrast to the Mediterranean cults, which were characterized by temples. Adam of Bremen⁶ and Snorre Sturlason's⁷ descriptions of the pagan temple at Uppsala were never confirmed archaeologically, and should be regarded as imaginary.⁸ However, Slavic temples in various places in modern eastern Germany, which are supported by both archaeological remains and eyewitness accounts in written sources, certainly existed. They were most probably constructed as a direct result of influence from the Christian churches built in this region during the brief and forced Christianization of the Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs in 928–983.

Adam of Bremen offers his own description of such a temple, but he calls the god Redigast, and the town Rethra:

Among them [Slavs] the Retharii, centrally located, are the mightiest of all. Their city, very widely known as Rethra, is a seat of idolatry. There a great temple was erected to the demons, the chief of whom is Redigast. His image is of gold, his bower bedecked with purple. The city itself has nine gates and is surrounded on all sides by a deep lake. A wooden bridge, over which approach is allowed only to those who would make sacrifices or seek oracular advice, affords a means of crossing. For this there is, I believe, a meaningful explanation:

fitly the

“Styx imprisons with its ninefold circles.” (Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.439)

the lost souls of those who serve idols.

This temple they say is a four-day journey from the city of Hamburg.⁹

Since Radagost means “glad for guests” in Slavic, this is more likely the name of the town, rather than that of the god. Thietmar’s evidence is preferable than Adam’s, since the latter never visited the site and wrote after the Liutici’s rebellion against the Obodrites’ rule and the subsequent sack of Radagost, as is evident from the following passage:

Cutting off his [John, Bishop of Mecklenburg] head, the barbarians fixed it on a spear and offered it to their god Redigast in token of their victory. These things were done in the chief city of the Slavs, Rethra, on the fourth day before the Ides of November [November 10, 1066].¹⁰

Helmold of Bosau repeats Adam’s confusion between the divine name and the name of the town, and he also erroneously attributes this god to the Obodrites (“Abodrites”), probably because of the temporary Obodrite control of Rethra in 1057–1066:

Besides the groves and the household gods in which the country and towns abound, the first and foremost deities are Prove, the god of the land of Oldenburg; Siva, the goddess of the Polabi; Redigast, the god of the land of the Abodrites.¹¹

Since Helmold’s personal experience was restricted to his homeland of Wagria (“land of Oldenburg” in modern Holstein), he probably derived information regarding other Slavic tribes from Adam of Bremen. Thus, the confusion between the divine name and the place name produced the “phantom god” Redigast, who took his place in the imaginary “Slavic pantheon.”¹²

Svarozhich is also the only Slavic god mentioned in both the West Slavic context and in East Slavic sources. An anonymous fifteenth-century East Slavic author interpolated the following into the fourteenth-century anti-pagan composition, *Word of a Certain Christ-Loving Person* (Слово нѣкоего Христолюбца). The interpolation claims that “they [pagans] pray to the fire, whom they call Svarozhich (и огневи молять же ся, зовуще его сварожичьмъ).”¹³ However, given the purely local nature of all other Slavic gods, the author of this interpolation could well have learned the name Svarozhich from Western sources. The Eastern Slavic translator of the Byzantine chronicle of John Malalas created yet another “phantom god,” Svarog,¹⁴ on the basis of Svarizhich, whose name he erroneously interpreted as a patronymic. The original Greek text of John Malalas reads:

So when Hermes came to Egypt, Mestrem [Hebrew Miṣrayim] of the family of Ham then reigned over the Egyptians for 39 years arrogantly.

After him Hephaistos reigned over Egyptians for 1,680 days, that is, for four years and 38 days. For the Egyptians then did not know how to measure years, but they called the cycle of the day “years.” They called Hephaistos a god, for he was also a fighting man with mystic knowledge. He fell with his horse when he had gone into battle and was left with a limp from his wound.

Hephaistos issued a law that Egyptian women were to be monogamous and to live chastely, while those who were caught in adultery were to be punished. The Egyptians were grateful to him, since this was the first law on chastity which they received.

Hephaistos through a mystic prayer received tongs from the air for manufacture of implements from iron. Thus he became dominant in wars. They deified him, since he had legislated for chastity and he had procured food for men by the manufacture of implements and in war had given them power and safety; for before his day men had fought with clubs and stones.¹⁵

This text is based on the *Egyptian History* that the Egyptian priest Manetho wrote in Greek in the third century BCE.¹⁶ Here, the Greek Hephaistos corresponds with Memphis’s supreme god Ptah, and the Slavic translator replaced him with Svarog. Thus, Rybakov’s speculations about the “age of Svarog” and the “laws of Svarog” have nothing to do with Slavic mythology.¹⁷ The identification of “Svarog” with Hephaistos is based on the identification of Svarozhich as the god of fire, which corresponds more to the Roman Vulcan than to the Greek Hephaistos. Let us try to clarify from where this identification arose.

The Slavic etymology of the name of Svarozhich is unknown. It is tempting to connect Svarog to the Sanskrit *svarga*, one of the eight *lokas*—“planes”—or the second heaven of Indian mythology. This etymology, however, is unlikely for several reasons. First, the Slavic tribes were in contact with northern Iranians, and not directly with Indians. In Iranian languages, the Indian *svar-* became *hvar-*. One example of this is the Old Persian word *hvarna*—“(royal) splendor.” Second,

even this dubious Iranian connection presumes an East Slavic origin for this divine name, which is in itself unlikely. Third, the original form derived from Indian *svarga-* is supposed to be the nonexistent Svarog, and the not securely attested Svarozhich. The most likely source for the West Slavic divine name Svarozhich is from the Old Germanic **svartaz* (Old Norse *svart*, modern German *schwarz*)—"black"—which could be transformed into Svarozhich through the metathesis of *t* and *z*: **svartaz* > **svarzat* > *svarožič*. If this identification is correct, the Slavic Svarozhich could be the same as Chernobog—"black god"—which Helmold of Bosau mentioned without specifying any specific tribal affiliation:

The Slavs, too, have a strange delusion. At their feasts and carousals they pass about a bowl over which they utter words, I should not say of consecration but of execration, in the name of the gods—of the good one, as well as of the bad one—professing that all propitious fortune is arranged by the good god, adverse, by the bad god. Hence, also, in their language they call the bad god Diabol, or Zcerneboch [Chernobog], that is, the black god.¹⁸

The "phantom god" Belobog—"white god"—was constructed on the basis of Helmold's "good god" in this passage. Helmold did not connect his "Redigast," whom he found in Adam's chronicle, with the "black god," Chernobog, about whom he knew from his own experience. The confusion between Svarozhich and Adam of Bremen's place name can possibly be explained as the replacement of an earlier Germanic name with its Slavic equivalent after the sack of Radagost (Rethra) in 1068.

The later Slavic word for devil—*chort*—is derived from the same Germanic root *svart-* ("black") as the name Svarozhich. Therefore, it is possible that this god, either under his Germanic or Slavic name, was simply the Slavic interpretation of the Christian devil. This figure in Christian mythology was introduced to the Polabian Slavs during their forced Christianization in 928–983, because of Christian iconography, where he is usually painted in black and is surrounded with hell's flames. The latter feature probably transformed him into the god of fire in eyes of the Slavs. If this interpretation is correct, Bruno's comparison of Svarozhich with the biblical Belial and Helmold's equation of Chernobog with the devil are not just meaningless examples of Christian demonization of pagan gods, but the correct indication of the true nature of this god.

Notes

- 1 Bruno of Querfurt, "The Letter of Bruno of Querfurt to King Henry II: On His Alliance with the Pagans," *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, series nova, vol. 4/3, ed. H. Karwasińska, Warszawa, 1973, pp. 97–106, translated by W. H. North (https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/mars/assets/Bruno_of_Querfurt_Letter_to_Henry_II_for_MARS_website.pdf).
- 2 *Ottoman Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, translated and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester-New York, 2001, 6.22 (p. 252).

- 3 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.15 (pp. 1284–1287).
- 4 *Ottoman Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, translated and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester-New York, 2001, 6.23 (p. 253).
- 5 Ewald Schultdt, Manfred Jährg, *Groß Raden: ein slawischer Tempelort des 9./10. Jahrhunderts in Mecklenburg*, (Schriften zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte 39), Berlin, 1985.
- 6 Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, English translation by F. J. Tschan, New York, 2002, 4.26 (p. 207).
- 7 Snorre Sturlason, *Heimskringla, or the Lives of the Norse Kings*, edited with note by Erling Monsen and translated into English with the assistance of A. H. Smith, New York, 1990, 1.5, 10 (pp. 4, 7).
- 8 Magnus Alkarp and Neil Price, “Tempel av guld eller kyrka av trä? : markradarundersökningar vid Gamla Uppsala kyrka,” *Fornvännen, Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research* 100 (4), 2005, pp. 261–272.
- 9 Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, English translation by F. J. Tschan, New York, 2002, 2.21 (p. 66).
- 10 Ibid. 3.51 (p. 157).
- 11 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.52 (p. 159).
- 12 See Zdzisław Rajewski, “Problem Radgoszczy i Svarozycza,” *Przegląd zachodni* 4, 1948, pp. 321–325.
- 13 See E. В. Аничков, *Язычество и Древняя Русь*, Москва, 2009, pp. 66–100 (discussion), 448–458 (variants of text).
- 14 On Svarog, see A. Байбулин, “К восточнославянским данным о Свароге,” *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 5–6, 1981, pp. 57–60; Vatroslav Jagić, “Mythologische Skizzen. I. Svarog-Svarozic. II. Dazbog-Dabog,” *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 4, 1880, pp. 412–427; J. Otrębski, “Slavischer Svarog,” *Die Welt der Slaven* 16, 1971, pp. 151–154.
- 15 *The Chronicle of John Malalas*: a translation by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, Melbourne, 1986, 1.15 (p. 10).
- 16 Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3C, Leiden, 1958, No. 609, Fr. 5 (pp. 82–83).
- 17 Б. А. Рыбаков, *Язычество древних славян*, Москва, 1981; B. Rybakov, *Ancient Slavic Paganism*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 145–146.
- 18 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.52 (p. 159).

6 Sventovit

Sventovit was worshiped in the town of Arkona on the northern tip of Wittow Island (now a peninsula), which is attached to the larger Rügen Island, off the Pomeranian coast of the Baltic Sea. The original inhabitants of Rügen were probably the Celts. In the first century CE, the Rugii Germanic tribe arrived at Rügen from Rogaland in Southern Norway, in the process bequeathing their name to the island. In the fourth century, the Rugii migrated southward to Rugiland on the upper Tisza in Pannonia. The Pomeranian Slavic tribe of Rani then populated the vacated territory. Sventovit is the only Slavic god whose Christian origin is explicitly mentioned in the sources.

Helmold of Bosau describes the origin of the cult of Sventovit in this way:

For a record of great antiquity tells how in the time of Ludwig II there went out from Corvey monks remarkable for their sanctity who in their thirst for the salvation of the Slavs exposed themselves to dangers and death for the sake of making known the word of God. After wandering through many of the Slavic provinces, they came to the people called the Rani, or Rugiani, who dwell in the midst of the sea. With them error was at home and idolatry had its throne. Full of confidence, however, these missionaries preached the word of God and won over the whole island. They also founded there an oratory in honor of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and in commemoration of Saint Vitus, who is the patron of Corvey. God afterwards permitted affairs to change. The Rani fell away from the faith, forthwith drove out the priests and worshipers of Christ, and turned religion into superstition. Putting a creature above the Creator, they worship as god, Saint Vitus, whom we recognize as a martyr and servant of Christ. Not a barbaric state under heaven abominates Christians and priests more. They glory only in the name of Saint Vitus, to whom they have with the most elaborate rites even dedicated a temple and an image, attributing to him in particular a primacy of divinity. Oracular responses are there sought also by all the provinces of the Slavs and annual sacrifices dully performed. Even merchants who happen to come into these parts are not given leave either to buy or to sell until there has been laid before the god of the Rani whatever is most valuable in their merchandise. Then only may the merchants expose their goods in the market place.

The Rani revere their flamen not less than they do their king. From the time when first they renounced the faith to this very day the Rani have persisted in this superstition.¹

Louis (Ludwig) II was the Carolingian King of East Francia (Germany), reigning in 843–876. Benedictine monks from Corbie Abbey in Picardy founded the Corvey Abbey in Westphalia in 815. This abbey was originally named Nova Corbeia—“New Corbie.” In 836, the remains of St. Vitus were transferred from the Abbey of St. Denis near Paris to Corvey, and this saint’s cult rapidly spread throughout Germany. In the second passage dealing with the same matter, Helmold attributes the appearance of the cult of St. Vitus in the Island of Rügen to the earlier age of the Emperor Louis I the Pious (814–840), the founder of Corvey:

A vague report has it that Louis, the son of Charles, had of old dedicated the land of the Rugiani to Saint Vitus in Corvey. Louis was the founder of that monastery. Preachers going out thence are said to have converted the nation of the Rugiani, or Rani, to the faith, and to have founded there an oratory in honor of Vitus, the martyr, to whose veneration the province was dedicated. Afterwards, however, when the Rani, who are also called Rugiani, under changed circumstances strayed out of the light of truth, their error became worse than the first. For the Rani began to worship as God Saint Vitus whom we confess as a servant of God, making a very great image for him, “and served the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:25).” So strong did this superstition become among the Rani, that Svantovit, the god of the land of the Rugiani secured a primacy among all the divinities of the Slavs, as being illustrious in victories, most efficacious in oracular responses.²

Saxo Grammaticus tells the same story about the transformation of the Christian saint into the pagan Slavic god, but he dates it to the still earlier age of Charlemagne (768–814), when the Corvey Abbey did not yet exist:

When Charlemagne had at one time taken Rügen by assault and commanded its inhabitants to pay tribute to St. Vitus of Corvey, who had died an illustrious martyr’s death, the islanders, anxious to claim back freedom after their vanquisher’s decease, exchanged thralldom for superstition and erected within their community an effigy which they proposed to call St. Vitus. With contempt for the monks of Corvey, they started to transfer the amount they gave in tribute to this native cult, maintaining that they were quite satisfied with their local Vitus and were not obliged to render homage to a foreign equivalent.³

Modern scholars rejected this version of the story regarding the origins of Sventovit’s cult because of evidentiary inconsistencies and its anachronistic character. Neither Louis I, nor Louis II, to say nothing about Charlemagne, ever

conquered Rügen Island. The monks of Corvey, in their attempt to secure a foothold on Rügen after the Danish takeover of the island in 1168, likely fabricated the story.⁴

The problem that yet remains is that none of the proposed alternative etymologies of this divine name are particularly convincing. Rybakov's proposal to interpret this theonym as Svetovid (Свѣтовидъ)—“the image of the world”⁵—is suspect, since all the sources express the first part of this name with the nasal vowel свѣтъ—“holy”—and not свѣтъ—“world.” As for the second part of the name, most scholars interpret it as *vit—“lord”—but this word is not found in any Slavic language, and it is reconstructed solely on the basis of divine and personal Slavic names containing this component. Facing this problem, Michał Łuczyński proposed that the component –vit in Slavic divine and personal names be connected to the adjectival suffix –ovit- (like in Polish *jadowity*—“poisonous”—from *jad*—“poison”).⁶ But it is difficult to understand how this suffix could be used to construct theonyms. The personal name Vitslav (“Vit’s glory”—the name of three Princes of the Rani in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries) proves that the component *vit* is not a suffix. In our view, the transformation of the Christian saint into the pagan god is the most acceptable of the options. Though the contradictory chronology of Helmold of Bosau and Saxo Grammaticus is erroneous, their statements regarding the Christian origin of Sventovit deserve serious attention.

Otto I did not conquer the Rani during his Pomeranian campaign of 950–955. On the contrary, the Rani were allies with the emperor against the Danish-Obodrite coalition and participated, on the German side, in the decisive battle of Raxa (Recknitz) in 955.⁷ The Rani were more interested in this alliance than Otto I, since it secured for them the very necessary assistance of the Holy Roman Empire against the threat of Danish conquest. In this context, the Rani could have nominally accepted Christianity and become acquainted with the cult of St. Vitus, which was widespread in Germany from 836, when his relics were transferred from the Abbey of St. Denis in France to New Corvey Abbey in Germany. The very existence of pagan temples on Rügen⁸ suggests that the Rani, like the Redarii, were familiar with Christian churches. Widukind of Corvey did not mention their Christianization at that time simply because he displayed no interest in the Christianization of any Slavic tribes in the region. However, after the Great Slavic Revolt of 983, which the Liutici-Obodrite alliance led, the Rani were cut off from the empire and could freely renounce Christianity. It may be that despite this, the cult of St. Vitus survived among them.

The common disbelief in the veracity of the chroniclers’ version is based on the a priori assumption regarding the ancient roots of the Slavic pagan gods, which is unsupported. As we have seen, none of them was ever mentioned before the end of the tenth century. In any case, it can be observed that the Slavic theonyms with a –vit component (Sventovit, Rugevit, Porevit, and Gerovit) were restricted to the tribal territory of the Rani (including the town of Wolgast on the mainland, where Gerovit was worshipped). However, according to Helmold of Bosau, the cult of Sventovit was widespread among many other Slavic tribes located far from Rügen:

Among the multiform divinities of the Slavs, however, Svantovit, the god of the land of the Rugiani, stands out as the most distinguished: he is so much more effective in his oracular responses that out of regard for him they also are accustomed every year to select by lot a Christian whom they sacrifice in his especial honor. To his shrine are sent fixed sums from all the provinces of the Slavs toward defraying the cost of sacrifices. The people are, moreover, actuated by the extraordinary regard for the service of the fane, for they neither lightly indulge in oaths nor suffer the vicinity of the temple to be desecrated even in the face of an enemy.⁹

Even on the Rügen Island itself, the cult of Sventovit is mentioned in Arkona only, while in other parts of the island—at the Rani’s capital, Korenitsa, and on the Jasmund peninsula—two different pantheons of gods were worshipped. Helmold’s passage, quoted above, can be understood only if the other gods with the *-vit* component were local manifestations of St. Vitus.

Saxo Grammaticus describes the statue of Sventovit at his temple at Arkona in detail:

Within the shrine stood a huge effigy, its size surpassing the height of any human figure, and it was amazing to look upon in that it possessed four heads and necks, two of which looked over its chest, two over its back. They were so arranged that, before and behind, one head appeared to direct its gaze to the right, the other to the left. They were fashioned with shaved beards and cropped hair, so that you would have thought the sculptor had tried hard to imitate the Rügen style of head adornment. In its right hand the idol carried a horn embellished with various types of metal, into which the priest who was versed in the god’s rituals would once a year pour wine, and from the appearance of the liquid would predict the degree of plenty in the coming year. The left arm was bow-shaped, for the artist had shown it bent back into the statue’s side. The god was represented with a tunic extending to its shins; these were made from different species of wood and were attached at the knees, with the join so well hidden that the point of connection could scarcely be detected except by minute scrutiny. The feet were to be seen touching the floor, but the base on which they stood was hidden beneath ground level. Not far away the deity’s bridle and saddle were on view, together with a great many of its divine accoutrements. People’s astonishment at these was enhanced by the sight of a remarkably large sword, whose scabbard and hilt, quite apart from the exceptional beauty of the engraving, were set off by the silver sheen of their surface.¹⁰

This description bears a close resemblance to the existing stone statue known as the “Zbruch idol,” found in 1848 in the Zbruch River in Podolia (in Ukraine) on the Eastern Slavic territory. The statue was presumably drowned in the river after Vladimir the Saint Christianized this region in 988. This is the only known Slavic stone sculpture, and its close connection to Sventovit’s image is difficult

to explain, given the purely local nature of all other Slavic gods. However, the Ukrainian scholars Aleksey Komar and Natalia Khamaiko proposed in 2011 that the “Zbruch idol” is an early nineteenth-century forgery produced by the Polish romantic poet Tymon Zaborowski, whose estate was located in the village of Zbrizh, near the place where the statue was found.¹¹ This proposal would nicely explain the connection between the statue and Saxo Grammaticus, whose description of Sventovit may simply have served as a model for the sculptor.

Notes

- 1 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.6 (pp. 60–61).
- 2 Ibid. 2.108 (p. 276).
- 3 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.13 (pp. 1282–1285).
- 4 Th. Schildgen, *St. Vitus und der slavische Swantowit in ihrer Beziehung zu einander*, Münster, 1881; П. Курінний, “Святовіт,” *Визвольний шлях* 6, 1954, pp. 57–64; Václav Machek, “Die Stellung des Gottes Svantovit in der altslavischen Religion,” *Orbis Scriptus: Festschrift für Dmitrij Tschizewskij zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. D. Gerhardt, München, 1966, pp. 491–497; J. Metlewicz, “O Świętym Wicie i Światowicie,” *Biblioteka warszawska* 4, 1845, p. 335; Gustaw Pobłocki, “Świtowid czy Swianty Wid,” *Gryf* 2, 1910, pp. 92–94; Janina Rosen-Przeworska, “Sur la genese de ‘Światowid’ déité slave à quarter visages,” *Archeologia Polona* 13, 1972, pp. 111–145; Leo Weber, “Nachträgliches Svantevit,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 29, 1931, pp. 207–208.
- 5 Б. А. Рыбаков, *Язычество древних славян*, Москва, 1981; B. Rybakov, *Ancient Slavic Paganism*, Moscow, 1981, p. 128.
- 6 Michał Łuczyński, “Staropolskie teonimy *Svętovitъ, *Jarovitъ, *Rujevitъ, *Borovitъ: deadiectiva czy composita?” *LingVaria. Półrocznik wydziału polonistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 10 (2), 2015, pp. 109–119.
- 7 Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*, translated with an introduction and notes by Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, Washington, DC, 2014, 3.54.
- 8 Leo Weber, “Svantevit und sein Heiligtum,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 29, 1931, pp. 70–78.
- 9 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.52 (p. 159).
- 10 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.3 (p. 1277).
- 11 А. Комар, Н. Хамайко, “Збручський ідол: пам’ятник епохи романтизму?” *Ruthenica* 10, 2011, pp. 166–217.

7 Rugevit

The Rani's capital, Korenitsa (from the Slavic *koren'*—"root"), which Saxo Grammaticus called Karenz, is located in the southern part of the island (modern-day Garz). It had its own pantheon, consisting of a triad of gods: Rugevit, Porevit, and Porenut. Saxo Grammaticus describes the temple of Rugevit and its seven-faced statue:

The largest shrine was surrounded by its own forecourt, but both spaces were enclosed with purple hangings instead of walls, while the roof gable rested only on pillars. Therefore, our attendants tore down the curtains adorning the entrance area and eventually laid hands on the inner veils of the sanctuary. Once these had been removed, an idol made of oak, which they called Rugevit, lay open to the gaze from every quarter, wholly grotesque in its ugliness. For swallows, having built their nests beneath the features of its face, had piled the dirt of their droppings all over its chest. A fine deity, indeed, when its image was fouled so revoltingly by birds! Furthermore, in its head were set seven human faces, all contained under the surface of a single scalp. The sculptor had also provided the same number of real swords in scabbards, which hung on a belt at its side, while an eighth was held brandished in its right hand. The weapon had been inserted into its fist, to which an iron nail had clamped it with so firm a grip that it could not be wrenched away without severing the hand; this was the very pretext needed for lopping it off. In thickness the idol exceeded the width of a human frame, and its height was such that Absalon, standing on the toes of its feet, could hardly reach its chin with the small battle-axe he used to carry.

The men of Karenz had believed this to be the god of war, as though it were endowed with the strength of Mars.¹

The passage about swallows' nests and birds' droppings is derived from Lactantius² and Arnobius³ early fourth-century Christian anti-pagan polemic compositions. Two components make up this god's name: the first is Rügen Island and the second is St. Vitus. Therefore, the name probably means Vitus of Rügen. *The Knytlinga Saga* calls this god Rinvit,⁴ presuming his alternative name was

*Ranevit—Vitus of Rani. Saxo Grammaticus claims that Rugevit was the god of war and identifies him with the Roman god Mars. Like Sventovit of Arkona, he was probably yet another manifestation of the Christian St. Vitus.

Notes

- 1 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.39–40 (pp. 1304–1307).
- 2 Ibid. pp. 1306–1307, n. 283; Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, 2.4.
- 3 Arnobius, *Adversus nationes*, 6.16.
- 4 *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, Odense, 1986, p. 168.

8 Porevit, Porenut, and Turupid

Two other members of the triad worshipped at Korenets were Porevit and Porenut. They shared one temple in this town, where each had his own sacred precinct. Saxo Grammaticus offers the following description of these temples and the gods' five-headed images:

Absalon's workforce now stretched their hands all the more eagerly towards the image of Porevit, worshipped in the temple close by. On it were implanted five heads, though it had been fashioned without weapons. After that effigy had been brought down, they assailed the sacred precinct of Porenut. Its statue displayed four faces and a fifth was inserted in its breast, with its left hand touching the forehead, its right the chin.¹

The identification of Porenut with the East Slavic Perun is without foundation. Both divine names Porevit and Porenut do indeed contain a common first component—*pore*—which is most likely the Slavic word *pora*—"season." However, the second component of Porevit is already familiar to us—St. Vitus—probably meaning "Seasonal Vitus." The meaning of the second component of the name Porenut is obscure.

The Knytlinga Saga calls Korenets Gratz, and, according to its account of the local triad, Rinvit corresponds to Saxo Grammaticus' Rugevit, Puruvit—to Porevit—but the third god is called Turupid instead of Porenut.

It is difficult to explain the discrepancy between the two sources. Maybe this god had two alternative names. The most similar theonym to Turupid—Tharapita—is found in Estonia. This god is mentioned in the *Livonian Chronicle of Henry* (*Heinrici Cronicon Lyvoniae*) written in 1225–1227, where Tharapita is presented as the chief god of Ösel (Saaremaa) Island, whose cult originated in Vironia (Virumaa), in northeastern Estonia:

They [two priests] baptized three villages within Vironia. There was there a mountain and a most lovely forest in which, the natives say, the great god of the Oeselians, called Tharapita, was born, and from which he flew to Oesel.²

Tharapita's name is usually explained as the Estonian manifestation of the Scandinavian thunderstorm god Thor. The second component—*pita*—is obscure, but Urmas Sutrop proposed that it is related to the Finnish word *pitkä*—"tall." His interpretation of the first component as the common Uralic *t3r3 (which is not found in Finnish languages) as "high, upper" is less convincing.³ The presence of this Estonian god on Rügen is probably evidence to the maritime ties between this island and Saaremaa, and if his identification with Thor is correct, Turupid was also the thunderstorm god. However, it remains unclear whether Turupid of *The Knytlinga Saga* should be identified with Saxo Grammaticus' Porenut.

The Knytlinga Saga also provides some additional information about the functions of the gods of Korenitsa (Gratz):

Next morning the king went to the place called Gratz and had three idols cut down, called Rinvit, Turupid and Puruvit. These idols caused strange things to happen: if any man had intercourse with a woman inside the town, the two were stuck together like dogs and were unable to get free until they left the town.⁴

The sexual allusions of this passage point to the possibility that a fertility cult of some kind existed. Since Rugevit-Rinvit was the god of war, and Povenut-Turupid was the thunderstorm god, Porevit-Puruvit may have been a fertility god. Alternatively, if Porenut was not the Slavic name of the Estonian Turupid, Porevit and Porenut could have been a pair of male and female fertility gods.

Notes

- 1 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.41 (pp. 1306–1307).
- 2 *The "Chronicle of Henry of Livonia"*, translated and edited by James A. Brundage, Madison, 1961 (revised 2003), 4.24.5 (pp. 193–194).
- 3 Urmas Sutrop, "Taarapita: the Great God of the Oeselians," *Folklore* (Tallinn) 26, 2004, pp. 27–64.
- 4 *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, Odense, 1986, p. 168.

9 Pizamar and Chernoglav

The third pantheon of Rügen Island—the pantheon of the Jasmund peninsula in the eastern part of the island—is also described in *The Knytlinga Saga*:

The fifth god was called Pizamar, from a place called Jasmund, and was destroyed by fire. There was also Tjarnaglofi [Chernoglav], their god of victory who went with them on military campaigns. He had moustache of silver and resisted longer than the others but they managed to get him three years after.¹

The second component of the name Pizamar—*mar*—is almost certainly the Slavic word *mir*—“world”—found in such Slavic names as Vladimir, Vlastimir, Branimir, Jaromir, etc. The form *mar* is found in the Rani’s dialect; three successive princes of this tribe (between 1181 and 1285) bore the name Jaromar. In Scandinavian languages, this component was also expressed as *mar*, as in the name of the Danish King Valdemar I, so called in honor of his maternal great-grandfather, Vladimir I of Kiev. However, the meaning of the first component of the name Pizamar is obscure, and this god’s function is likewise unknown. The second god’s name, Tjarnaglofi, has a transparent Slavic etymology—Chernoglav—“Black Head.” According to *The Knytlinga Saga*, he was a god of war, like Rugevit in neighboring Korenitsa, but it is also possible that his image was derived from the Christian devil, much the same as Chernobog and Svarozhich, discussed above.

Note

- 1 *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, Odense, 1986, p. 169.

10 Prove and Podaga

The most reliable information about Slavic gods to be found in Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum* concerns his homeland, Slavic Wagria—modern-day Holstein. Helmold described a sacred grove at Starigrad (Oldenburg) and a temple at Plune (Plön), both of which he visited in person:

It happened that on our journey we came into a forest, which is the only one in that country, for it all stretches out in a plain. Among very old trees we saw there the sacred oaks which had been consecrated to the god of that land, Prove. There was a courtyard about them and a fence very carefully constructed of wood and having two gates. For, besides the household gods and the idols with which each village abounded, that place was the sanctuary of the whole land for which a flamen and feast days and a variety of sacrificial rites had been appointed. On the second weekday the people of the land were wont to assemble there for holding court with the ruler and with the flamen. Entrance to this courtyard was forbidden to all, except only to the priest and to those wishing to make sacrifices, or to those in danger of death, because they were never to be denied asylum. For the Slavs show such a reverence for their holy things that they do not allow the neighborhood of a fane to be defiled by blood even in the time of war. They admit oaths with greatest reluctance; for among the Slavs to swear is, as it were, to foreswear oneself, because of the avenging wrath of the gods. The Slavs have many forms of idol worship, for they are not all agreed upon the same superstitious customs. Some display in the temples fantastically formed images, as, for example, the idol at Plune [Plön], the name of which is Podaga; other deities live in the woods and groves, like Prove, the god of Oldenburg; of these no effigies are fashioned. They also carve out many deities with two, three, or more heads. But they do not deny that there is among the multiform godheads to whom they attribute plains and woods, sorrow and joy, one god in the heaven ruling over the others. They hold that he, the all powerful one, looks only after heavenly matters; that the others, dispatching the duties assigned to them in obedience to him, proceeded from his blood; and that one excels another in the measure that he is nearer to this god of gods.¹

As we have seen, different gods were worshipped in two towns of the Wagri: Prove at their capital, Starigrad, and Podaga at Plune near Bosau, where Helmold served as a priest. The two cults differed in form; a sacred oak grove was dedicated to Prove, whereas Podaga's effigy was venerated inside his temple. The difference reflects the ancient Slavic open-air cults of sacred groves and springs, on the one hand, and the newly constructed temples introduced most probably under Christian influence, on the other. Helmold also mentions two- and three-headed cultic statues. A two-headed wooden idol² was indeed found on Fischerinsel Island on the Tollensesee Lake in Mecklenburg in the territory of the Slavic tribe of Tollensi (Dolency—from Slavic *dolina*—"valley"), a tribe that belonged to the Liutici union. Pomeranians worshipped the three-headed god, Triglav, in Szczecin (Stettin) in modern-day Poland.³ Helmold also attributes a belief in one supreme god to the Slavs, as did Procopius 600 years earlier.⁴

The cult of the oak was often associated with the thunderstorm gods among many European peoples,⁵ but the identification of Prove with the East Slavic Perun is without foundation. The most similar theonym is found only in the Hittite pantheon, where warrior god Pirwa is known, but this does not necessarily mean that there was any connection between the two.⁶ There is no reliable etymology for the name of Podaga, and his function is also unknown.⁷ Polish fifteenth-century chronicler Jan Długosz mentions Pogoda—"weather"—among his "Polish gods,"⁸ and it is possible that Helmold's Podaga is a misspelling of this Slavic word, but Długosz's "pantheon" is probably his own artificial construction, and this evidence is hardly reliable.

Notes

- 1 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.84 (pp. 218–219).
- 2 See Elke Gringmuth-Dallmer and Adolf Hollangel, "Dwogłowe bóstwo słowian," *Z otchłani wieków* 37, 1971, pp. 271–274; Д. Я. Телегин, "Двоголове старословянське божество," *Памятники України*, 1972, № 3, p. 46.
- 3 See Chapter 11.
- 4 See Chapter 2, "Procopius, *The Gothic War*."
- 5 See Chapter 2, "Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*."
- 6 See Paul Diels, "Prove," *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 40, 1925, p. 156.
- 7 See G. A. Il'inskii, "Podaga," *Mélanges de philologie offerts à J. J. Mikkola*, Helsinki, 1931, pp. 45–46.
- 8 *Joannis Długossii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, eds. Ignatius Żegota Pauli and Aleksander Przezdziecki, vol. 1, Kraków, 1867, 1.3. (p. 70).

11 Triglav

As we have seen, multi-headed images of gods were common among the Western Slavs: Helmold of Bosau and Saxo Grammaticus mentioned two-, three-, four-, five-, and seven-headed gods. However, only one god that the Pomeranians worshipped in Szczecin (Stettin) carries a name that explicitly means “three heads”—Triglav. This god, his temple, image, and cult are described in St. Otto of Bamberg’s hagiographies. In his account of St. Otto’s second missionary journey, this saint’s earliest hagiographer, Ebo, also explains the three-headed nature of Triglav as the lord of three worlds—heaven, earth, and the netherworld:

Stettin, their most extensive town, which was larger than Julin [Wolin], included three hills in its circuit. The middle one of these, which was also the highest, was dedicated to Triglav, the chief god of the pagans; its image had a triple head and its eyes and lips were covered with golden diadem. The idol priests declared that their chief god had three heads because it had charge of three kingdoms, namely, heaven, earth and the lower regions, and that its face was covered with a diadem so that it might pretend not to see the faults of men, and might keep silence.¹

St. Otto’s later hagiographer, Herbord, described the pagan temples of Stettin in more detail in his account of St. Otto’s first missionary journey:

Now there were in the town of Stettin four temples, of which the principal one was built with marvelous care and skill. It had sculptures within and without and from the walls projected images of men, birds and beasts, the appearance of which was so natural that they might have been thought to be living and breathing; another thing especially remarkable was that owing to the care that had been taken by the painters over their work the colors of the images outside could not be dimmed or washed off either by snow or rain. Into this temple the people brought, in accordance with the ancient custom of their ancestors, the stores and arms of their enemies which they captured, and whatever spoils they took by land or by sea, as they were directed to do by the law relating to the giving of a tenth. They had placed here gold and silver bowls with which their nobles and great men were accustomed to predict

events and to feast and drink, and which on festival days might be brought out as from a sanctuary. They had also preserved there for the honor and adornment of their gods horns of wild bulls covered with gold and interspersed with gems, some for use as drinking cups and others as musical instruments; swords also and knives and much valuable furniture which was rare and beautiful in appearance. . . . Now there was a three-headed image which had its three heads on one body and was called Triglav. . . . There were three other temples which were held in lower estimation and were less ornamented. Only seats and tables had been built round on the inside as the people were accustomed to hold councils and meetings there, for on certain days and hours they used to come to these temples either to drink or to play, or to transact serious business. There was also there a large and shady oak tree with a delightful fountain underneath, which the simple-minded people regarded as rendered sacred by the presence of a certain god, and treated with great veneration.²

Both accounts are reliable since they are based on eyewitness testimonies of two of Otto's companions on his missionary journeys: Udalric served as Ebo's source about the second journey, and Sefrid was Herbord's for the first. Less reliable is Ebo's account of St. Otto's first journey to Pomerania, where he ascribed a golden image to Triglav:

When the temples and the idol images had been destroyed by Otto, the sacrilegious priests carried away by stealth outside the province the golden image of Triglav which was chiefly worshipped by the people, and continued it to care of a certain widow who lived in a small country house where it was likely to be looked for.³

Since the Pomeranians already twice were forced to accept Christianity before St. Otto's mission—in 946–983 by Otto I, and in 1002–1005 by Bolesław I—it is fairly possible that Triglav was simply a Slavic pagan manifestation of the Christian Holy Trinity. In the forged *Book of Veles*, Triglav occupies the position of the supreme “pan-Slavic” god, replacing in practice the Christian Trinity.

Notes

1 Ebo and Herbordus, *The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, 1060–1139*, translated by Charles H. Robison, London, 1920, Ebo 3.1. (p. 91).

2 Ibid. Herbord 2.32 (pp. 78–79).

3 Ibid. Ebo 2.13 (p. 89).

12 Gerovit

On his second missionary journey of 1128, St. Otto also visited the town of Wolgast, which Herbord called Hologost. Although located on the mainland, this town belonged originally to the Rani.¹ The Obodrite Prince Henry conquered it in 1123, following which the Pomeranian Duke Wartislaw took it in 1128—the year of St. Otto’s mission. Ebo calls the pagan god worshipped there Gerovit:

Otto, however, being fervent in spirit, could not be enticed from the carrying out of his good design, and having sought the archbishop’s blessing, set out the next day for the diocese of Havelberg, which had at that time been completely ruined by the incursions of the heathen that there remained in it hardly any one who bore the Christian name. On the very day of his arrival flags were placed around the town, which was engaged in celebrating a festival in honor of an idol called Gerovit.²

Ebo also identifies this god as a god of war:

One of them [Christian priests] named Dietricus, who was in advance of them and had already approached the doors of the temple, not knowing where to turn, boldly entered the shrine itself and, seeing a golden shield fastened to the wall which had been dedicated to Gerovit the god of war, and which they considered it unlawful to touch, he seized the shield and went forth to meet them [local citizens]. They, like ignorant peasants, thought that their god Gerovit was advancing to meet them, and retired stupefied with amazement and fell to the ground.³

Herbord repeats this information, probably basing himself on Ebo’s account:

There was there hanging on the wall a shield of great size and of marvelous workmanship, covered with sheets of gold, which no human being might touch, because there was in it something sacrosanct and which betokened their pagan religion, so that it would never be moved out of its place save only in time of war. For, as we afterwards found, it was dedicated to their god Gerovit and the people were confident of success in every battle in which it went before them.⁴

The name Gerovit is usually interpreted as Yarovit, where the first component is the Slavic word *yary*—“fierce.” However, identification of this god with Yarilo—a personification of male potency in Slavic folklore—is unsupported. Yarilo was mentioned for the first time at the end of the eighteenth century, and his image was clearly constructed on the basis of St. George, whom the Slavs called Yuri. Since Wolgast was Rani’s continental foothold, Gerovit most likely was the local manifestation of St. Vitus, just like several other Rani gods (Sventovit, Rugevit, and Porevit), and his name means “Fierce Vitus,” which is appropriate for the god of war.

Notes

- 1 Fred Ruchhöft, “Die Grenzen der sächsischen Marken im Gebiet der Ostseeslawen im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert,” *Baltische Studien* NF 87, 2001, pp. 7–23.
- 2 Ebo and Herbordus, *The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, 1060–1139*, translated by Charles H. Robison, London, 1920, Ebo 3.3. (p. 112).
- 3 Ibid. Ebo 3.8 (p. 117).
- 4 Ibid. Herbord 3.4 (p. 135).

13 Pripegala

In the description of the atrocities that the Slavs committed, *The Magdeburg Charter* mentions a Slavic god called Pripegala without indication of his tribal affinity:

Their priests, moreover, whenever they giveth themselves to reveling (Deut. 21.20) on the appointed days, say: “Our Pripegala wants heads. It is fitting to make sacrifices of this sort.” Pripegala, as they say, is Priapus and shameless Beelphegar (Num. 25.3, 5). Then, when the Christians have been beheaded before the altars of their desecration, they hold basins full of human blood and say, yelling with horrible voices: “Let us keep the day of joy (Tob. 13.10). Christ is vanquished; our most victorious Pripegala has won.”¹

The name of this god contains a second component—*gala*, which is the Baltic word *gail*—“fierce”²—present in many Lithuanian names, such as Jogaila, Skrigaila, and Švitrigaila. Therefore, it is possible that Pripegala was a god of the Baltic Prussians, which the authors of *The Magdeburg Charter* confused with the Slavs. Alternatively, he could be a Baltic god originally, later adopted by one of the West Slavic tribes. In any case, his identification with Priapus—the Greek god of male potency—and with the biblical Ba'al-Peor (Beelphegar)—associated with ritual prostitution—suggests that Pripegala was a fertility god.³

Notes

- 1 Giles Constable, “The Place of the Magdeburg Charter of 1107/8 in the History of Eastern Germany and the Crusades,” *Vita Religiosa im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Franz J. Felten and Nikolas Jaspert with collaboration of Stephanie Haarländer, Berlin, 1999, p. 297.
- 2 Aleksander Brückner, *Starożytna Litwa. Ludy i bogi. Szkice historyczne i mitologiczne*, Olsztyn, 1984, p. 32.
- 3 See Aleksander Brückner, “Pripegala,” *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 6, 1882, pp. 216–223; G. A. Il'inskii, “Pripegala,” *Prace filologiczne* 12, 1927, pp. 416–420; M. Žunkovič, “Pripegala,” *Staroslovan* 1, 1913, pp. 67–68.

14 “Vladimir’s gods”

Eight years prior to its Christianization in 980, Vladimir I initiated a reform of pagan religion in Kiev, establishing a new state pantheon of six gods.¹ This event is thus described in *The Primary Chronicle*:

Vladimir then began to reign alone in Kiev, and he set up idols on the hill outside the castle with the hall: one of Perun, made of wood with a head of silver and mustache of gold, and others of Khors, Dazh’bog, Stribog, Simar’gl, and Mokosh’. The people sacrificed to them, calling them gods, and brought their sons and their daughters to sacrifice them to these devils. They desecrated the earth with their offerings, and the land of Rus’ and this hill were defiled with blood.²

This is the only literary description of cultic reform in the Slavic pagan religion, suggesting that this religion was an artificial construct that had only been created on the eve of Christianization. Vladimir I established himself as the Grand Prince of Kiev after a prolonged civil war against his brother Yaropolk in 978–980. His religious reform was probably aimed at achieving reconciliation with some portion of Kiev’s population. The heterogeneous composition of the pantheon of “Vladimir’s gods” shows that the pantheon consisted of two divine triads—the Slavic (Perun, Dazh’bog, and Stribog) and the Iranian (Khors, Simar’gl, and Mokosh’). Both triads included sun gods—the Slavic Dazh’bog and the Iranian Khors—which proves that these were originally two different pantheons. The Slavic triad probably represented the Eastern Slavic tribe of Poliane, dwelling in the Kiev region, but the existence of the Iranian triad is surprising, since Turks replaced the Northern Iranian nomads in the northern Pontic area several centuries earlier.³ These gods could possibly have been borrowed either from the originally Iranian Slavonized Antes or from the Iranian Alans through the Tmutarakan’ principality on the Taman’ peninsula, which Sviatoslav conquered in 965. Let us examine these six gods individually.

Perun

The word *perun* (перунъ) is a common Slavic word for a thunderbolt. It is most probably etymologically related to the Hittite word *peruna*—“rock.” The semantic

change may have occurred in the Slavic languages because of the ancient Slavs' identification of Stone Age artifacts, which they occasionally found, as thunderbolts fallen from the sky. The common Slavic nature of this word does not mean that Perun was a pan-Slavic god. The name of Procopius's Slavic "maker of the lightning" (ἄστραπῆς δημιουργὸν)⁴ is unknown, and South Slavic toponyms containing the *perun* component could have been derived from the Slavic word for thunderbolt, rather than from the theonym. The proposed identification of Perun with the West Slavic gods Prove and Porenut are speculative. Perun was unknown even in East Slavic Novgorod, where his cult was established in 980 by Dobrynia, Vladimir's uncle, whom Vladimir had sent to Novgorod in order to implement his cultic reform.⁵ Only at Kiev is the cult of Perun known to have existed already in 945, in the context of a ceremony concluding the Rus'-Byzantine treaty that the Grand Prince Igor conducted:

In the morning, Igor' summoned the envoys, and went to a hill on which there was a statue of Perun. The Russes laid down their weapons, their shields, and their gold ornaments, and Igor' and his people took oath (at least, such as were pagans), while the Christian Russes took oath in the church of St. Elias, which is above the creek, in the vicinity of the Pasyncha square and the quarter of the Khazars.⁶

The relationship between Perun and the Lithuanian thunder god Perkūnas is complicated.⁷ In spite of the similarity of their names, these two words are etymologically unconnected. The Baltic Perkūnas is derived from the common Indo-European word for oak—**perkwu*—and is related to the Latin *quercus* ("oak") and the Sanskrit *parjanya* ("rain"). This god is first mentioned in a thirteenth-century Slavic interpolation into a translation of John Malalas' chronicle⁸ and in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (*Livländische Reimchronik*) written in High German by an anonymous author in the late thirteenth century.⁹ The name Perkūnas was borrowed into Finnish in the form *perkele*—"devil"—and into Erzia (one of the two Mordovian languages) as Pur'gine-paz—"thunder god." The Erzia evidence is particularly significant since the Eastern Finnish peoples lost contact with the Baltic tribes after the Eastern Slavic eighth-century colonization of modern-day Russia. Even more significant is that the similar theonym Perkōn appears in a first-century Greek inscription in Thrace (IGBulg I², 283 bis):

Ἡρώει Περκωνει

Μένανδρος Ἀμύντορος

Menandros son of Amyntor to Perkōn, the hero.¹⁰

This inscription accompanies the image of the so-called "Thracian horseman," which frequently appears on gravestones in the Roman Danubian provinces

and in Bythinia in Asia Minor from the third century BCE to the third century CE. The iconography of the Christian St. George slaying a dragon is based upon these images.

Thus, the theonym Perkūnas/Perkōn/Pur'gine/Perkele appears in the north-western, northeastern, and southern periphery of the Slavic world. Erzia Pur'gine could have been borrowed from Baltic languages, but Thracians never had any contacts with the Baltic peoples, and the presence of a common divine name among them can be only explained through the existence of a Slavic intermediary. All this means that *Perkun was most probably the original ancient name of the Slavic personification of an oak tree, associated also with lightning—Procopius's "maker of the lightning." As we have seen, sacred oaks are known to have existed on opposite edges of the Slavic world: on Khortitsa Island (the Island of St. Gregory)¹¹ on the lower Dnieper and at Starigrad (Oldenburg) in Wagria (Holstein).¹² However, because of the cultic significance of oak for the Slavs, the original word for oak became taboo and was replaced with the word *dqbū* (джбу) in Slavic languages. As result, the divine name Perkun, which became incomprehensible, was also replaced among the East Slavic tribe of Poliane with the similar, common Slavic word for a thunderbolt—*perun*. The chronology of the appearance of the god Perun in *The Russian Primary Chronicle* is instructive in this respect. Perun is mentioned for the first time in the Rus'-Byzantine treaty of 907,¹³ but this treaty is an artificial construction of the chronicler, modeled on the basis of the later treaties.¹⁴ In the first historical Rus'-Byzantine treaty of 911, Perun is not mentioned,¹⁵ and in practice he appears for the first time in the Rus'-Byzantine treaty of 944 (twice).¹⁶ This seems to mean that Perun was invented between 911 and 944 in the first attempt to create the pantheon in Kiev after the Varangians' conquest of this town, when it replaced Novgorod as the capital of the Rus' state.

Khors

Khors is the conventional transliteration of a theonym that is spelled in *The Russian Primary Chronicle* as Khūrsū (Хърсѹ), or Khrūsū (Хръсѹ) in *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*.¹⁷ This name is most probably derived from the Persian (Farsi) *χoršīd*—"sun"¹⁸—which originated from the Avestan *hvarə ǵšaēta*—"radiant sun"—through the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) form *χvaršēt*. *Hvarə ǵšaēta* was the Old Iranian sun god, and the sixth Yasht of Avesta is dedicated to him. There, he is called "undying, shining, swift-horsed radiant sun" (*hvarə ǵšaēta ameša raēva aurvat-aspa*). However, in the later Iranian religion of the Parthian and the Sassanid age, Mithra replaced *Hvarə ǵšaēta* as the solar deity. The Eastern Slavs most probably borrowed this deity together with two others from the North Iranian tribes of the northern Pontic area. Nothing is known about the solar cult among the Scythians or the Sarmatians, but, according to Herodotus, the Central Asian Massagetae worshipped the sun:

The sun is the only god whom they [Massagetae] worship; they sacrifice horses to him; the reasoning is that he is the swiftest of the gods, and therefore they give him the swiftest of mortal things.¹⁹

In 165 BCE, the Huns (Chinese Xiongnu) defeated the Messagetae, who then migrated westward.²⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus in the fourth century CE regarded the northern Pontic Alans as their descendants.²¹ In the traditional pagan mythology of Ossetians—the sole existing North Iranian people closely related to the Alans—the figure of the solar deity Xur, who is etymologically related to the Slavic Khors, has survived.²² *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* confirms the solar nature of Khors, calling the path of the sun “the path of Great Khors”²³ (665).

In a fourteenth-century Slavic Christian apocryph, *Conversation of Three Hierarchs* (*Беседа трех святителей*), Khors is called “Jewish” (жидовинъ):

Hellenic elder Perun and Jewish Khors are two angels of lightning.

This caused some speculations about a possible Khazarian origin for the Khors,²⁴ but the *Conversation* is a translated composition,²⁵ and in the Greek original Apollo corresponded to Perun, and the biblical Nachor (Naḥor) to Khors.²⁶

Dazh'bog (Dazhd'bog)

Dazh'bog (Дажьбогъ) is the Slavic counterpart of the Iranian Khors among “Vladimir's gods.” The second component of his name is the common Slavic word for god—*bog*—which is a very old loanword from the Old Persian *baga* of the same meaning. The meaning of the first component is not clear; it seems to be an imperative of the Slavic verb “to give,” but it is difficult to explain how an imperative verbal form could form a theonym. The general meaning of the name seems to be “giving god” or the like.²⁷

The identification of Dazh'bog as a solar deity is based on the Slavic translation of John Malalas's chronicle, where this god's name is used as a translation for the Greek Helios. However, the idea that Dazh'bog was Svarog's son based on the same text has nothing to do with Slavic mythology. Malalas presents Helios as Hephaistos' son,²⁸ whose name was translated into Slavic as Svarog simply following the Egyptian Memphite mythology, where the sun god Ra (Helios) was regarded as Ptah's (Hephaistos) son.²⁹

In *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, this god is called Dazhd'bog (Даждьбогъ), and princes are presented as “Dazhd'bog's grandsons.”³⁰ According to Anichkov, the *Tale's* author did not have all the princes in mind, but only the princes of Chernigov, descendants of Oleg Sviatoslavich.³¹ This means that Daz'bog was originally the tribal god of the East Slavic tribe of Severiane, which was dominant in the Chernigov region, and that Vladimir included him in his pantheon as a symbol of his rule over this region.

Stribog

Stribog (Стрибогъ) concludes the Slavic triad of "Vladimir's gods." With Dazh'bog, his name shares the Slavic word *bog* ("god") as a second component. The first component is obscure, and none of the etymologies proposed so far is convincing.³² Stribog is mentioned in *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* in the following context:

Now winds, Stribog's grandsons,
In [the guise of] arrows waft from the sea
Against the brave troops of Igor!³³

This passage is usually interpreted to mean that Stribog was the god of winds, but Anichkov proposed that the expression "Stribog's grandsons" (Стрибожи внуци) refers to listeners of the song, and not to the winds.³⁴ Thus, according to Anichkov, Stribog, like Dazh'bog, was the local god of some East Slavic tribe, whose identification depends on the locale of the poem's original composition.

Let us recapitulate the information about the Slavic triad in "Vladimir's gods." According to the traditional view, this triad was composed of gods of the forces of nature: thunderstorm (Perun), sun (Dazh'bog), and winds (Stribog), but according to Anichkov these were local gods representing different components of Vladimir's realm: Kiev (Perun), Chernigov (Dazh'bog), and an unidentified locale (Stribog). Both views are not necessarily contradictory since local gods naturally had some functions. However, Anichkov's view is more convincing, given the local nature of all other Slavic gods discussed so far.

Simar'gl

The name of Simar'gl (Симарьгль)³⁵ is derived from the Persian Simurgh, which is not a god, but a mythological gigantic bird. Its name, in turn, goes back to the Avestan *mərəγō saēnō*—"bird *Saēnō*"—which is first mentioned in Yasht 14.41. According to Yasht 12.17 (dedicated to the god Rashnu, judge of the gods), this bird nested on a cosmic tree in the middle of the sea:

O holy Rashnu! art on the tree of the Saēna-bird, that stands in the middle of the sea Vouru-Kasha, that is called the tree of good remedies, the tree of powerful remedies, the tree of all remedies, and on which rest the seeds of all plants.³⁶

In Pahlavi literature, this creature appears under the name Sēnmuruy and later Sēnmurw. The Book of Bundahishn describes it as a bat combining features of a bird, dog, and muskrat:

Tenth [group], one hundred and ten species (*sardak*) of birds; flying creatures such as the Sēnmurw bird, the Karšipt, the eagle, the Kahrkas which they call the vulture, the crow, the Arda, the crane, and the tenth is the bat.

There are two of them which have milk in the teat and suckle their young, the Sēnmurw bird and the bat which flies in the night; as they say that the bat is created of three races (*sardak*), the race (*ayina*) of the dog, the bird, and the musk animal; for it flies like a bird, has many teeth like a dog, and is dwelling in holes like a musk-rat.³⁷

In Ferdowsi's late tenth-century or early eleventh-century Persian epic *Shahnameh*, the Simurgh bird saved and nourished the hero Zal, who was born albino and was abandoned by his father in the mountains.³⁸ Later, Esfandiyar, an enemy of Zal's son Rostam, killed the Simurgh, which is described as an evil monster.³⁹ However, when Rostam was wounded in his battle with Esfandiyar, Zal invoked the Simurgh by burning its feather, and the bird, which apparently was still alive, appeared, cured Rostam, and helped him to kill Esfandiyar.⁴⁰

The coexistence of benevolent and evil images of Simurgh in the poem, as well as the reappearance of Simurgh after his supposed death, led some scholars to assume that two birds with the same name were presumed to exist.⁴¹ However, it is also possible that Ferdowsi may have arranged existing Iranian legends that contradicted each other in order to create a continuous narrative. The contradictory image of Simurgh, sometimes benevolent, sometimes evil, shares these features with the Sumerian mythical bird Anzu, which is both benevolent and helpful in the Sumerian *Lugalbanda* epic,⁴² but is an evil monster in the Sumerian *Lugal-e* epic⁴³ and in the Akkadian *Anzu*⁴⁴ epic. Images of both an evil and a benevolent Anzu and Simurgh are linked by several common features.⁴⁵ The slaying of Anzu is regarded as one of the 12 labors of Ningirsu in *Lugal-e*, and the slaying of Simurgh is one of the seven labors of Esfandiyar in *Shahnameh*; a story where Simurgh saves a baby is also attributed to Anzu by the third-century Roman author Claudius Aelianus (Aelian):

When Euechorsos was king of the Babylonians, the Chaldeans predicted that a grandson would be born to his daughter, and he would deprive his grandfather of his kingdom. Fearing this thing, and if I may utter something of a joke, he acted as Acrisius toward his daughter [Danae, Perseus's mother]; for he ordered the strictest of watches kept over her. But yet the daughter (for fate had outsmarted the Babylonian king) gave birth to the child, having become pregnant by some uncertain man. But out of fear of the king, the guards threw the infant headlong from the citadel where the daughter was imprisoned. In truth, an eagle, seeing the falling infant with its very sharp eyes, before he could be dashed against the ground, flying under received him on his back, and transporting him to some garden put him down with the utmost care. Moreover, he who cared for the garden, when he saw the beautiful little boy, loved him, and reared him; and he, called Gilgames, was the king of the Babylonians.

If anyone regards this as a legend, I, after testing it to the best of my ability, concur in the verdict. I have heard however that Achaemenes the Persian, from whom the Persian aristocracy are descended, was nursed by an eagle.⁴⁶

Although this story does not appear in the cuneiform Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the Gilgamesh epic, there is little doubt that the eagle of Aelian is no other than Anzu, since his Euechorsos is most probably the Sumerian Enmerkar, King of Uruk, and the unnamed father of Aelian's Gilgamos is Lugalbanda, Anzu's friend. Of course, according to the canonical version of the Gilgamesh epic, Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, was not Enmerkar's daughter, but a goddess, but Aelian seems to be reporting an uncanonical version of this story. Aelian's attribution of the Zal legend to Achaemenes (Old Persian Haṣāmaniš), the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, is interesting because it directly links Anzu with Simurgh, and shows that Ferdowsi's account goes back at least to the Achaemenid age.

On the basis of the *Bundahishn*'s description of Senmurw as a composite creature, Camilla Trever identified a bird with a dog's head in Sassanian art as Senmurw.⁴⁷ This composite creature appears in reliefs, silverware, and textiles. Trever traced this image back to Scythian art, where the winged dog appears as early as the fifth century BCE at the Semibratny tumulus in the Kuban' region. This is, however, an isolated appearance, and its Scythian origin is disputed. The Scythian griffin, which is a winged lion with a bird's head, appears more frequently both in the Pazyryk tumuli in the Altay region and in the Scythian royal burials in the northern Pontic region.

Herodotus also describes these creatures' function in Scythian mythology as "gold-guarding griffins" (χρυσοφύλακες γρῦπες), from whom the one-eyed Arimaspes (Ἀριμασποί) were stealing gold.⁴⁸ Arimaspes is a genuine Scythian word containing the Iranian *aspa*—"horse"—as a second component, but we do not know what name the Scythians used for the griffins. The East Slavic theonym Simar'gl shows that the North Iranian Sēnmuruy existed, and the New Persian Simurgh originated from this form, not from the Pahlavi Sēnmurw.

The late medieval author of the Slavic anti-pagan composition *Word of a Certain Christ-Loving Person* (Слово нѣкоего Хриstopлюбца) did not recognize this name, and interpreted Simar'gl as two gods: Simŭ (Симъ) and Rīglŭ (Рѣгль).⁴⁹

Mokosh'

Mokosh' (Мокошь) is the only goddess among "Vladimir's gods," and her name has no generally accepted etymology. The most similar word to this name is Moksha, which is the name of a river, a tributary of the Oka, and also the name of one of the two Mordovian peoples in the middle Volga region (mostly in the River Moksha basin). This led to the widespread view that Mokosh' was an Eastern Finnish goddess. However, no such goddess exists in the pantheon of the Mokshan pagan religion. Additionally, the middle Volga area and the Mordovian peoples were outside the rule of Kievan Rus' during Vladimir's reign (and for

a significant time period after it). No attention has been paid so far to a possible Iranian origin for the word Moksha.⁵⁰ All ethnics of the Eastern Finnish peoples are of Iranian origin, including the second Mordovian people, the Erzia, whose name is derived from the Old Persian *aršan*—"hero." Note that the Erzia name of the River Volga Rav is also of Iranian origin and derives from the Avestan word *ravan*—"stream."⁵¹ In Sanskrit, *Mokṣa* means "redemption"—release from the *saṃsāra* cycle of death and rebirth—and this concept became the central theological subject of the "heretical" teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. An Iranian equivalent for this word is unknown, and there is no reason to doubt that the theological concept of *mokṣa* originated in India. However, there is some indication that a North Iranian goddess with this or a similar name did exist. The Roman geographer Strabo described the religious situation during the early first century in the sacred city of Comana in Cataonia (a subdivision of Cappadocia in Asia Minor):

In this Antitaurus are deep and narrow valleys, in which are situated Comana and the temple of Enyo, whom the people there call "Ma." It is a considerable city; its inhabitants, however, consist mostly of the divinely inspired people and the temple-servants who live in it. Its inhabitants are Cataonians, who, though in a general way classed as subject to the king, are in most respects subject to the priest. The priest is master of the temple, and also of the temple-servants, who on my sojourn there were more than six thousand in number, men and women together. Also, considerable territory belongs to the temple, and the revenue is enjoyed by the priest. He is second in rank in Cappadocia after the king; and in general the priests belonged to the same family as the kings. It is thought that Orestes, with his sister Iphigeneia, brought these sacred rites here from the Tauric Scythia, the rite in honour of Artemis Tauropolus, and that here they also deposited the hair [*kome*] of mourning; whence the city's name.

...

The third in rank is the priesthood of Zeus Daciëus, which, though inferior to that of Enyo, is noteworthy. At this place there is a reservoir of salt water which has the circumference of a considerable lake; it is shut in by brows of hills so high and steep that people go down to it by ladder-like steps. The water, they say, neither increases nor anywhere has a visible outflow.⁵²

Strabo is a reliable source in this case, since he himself was a native of Pontus, which was part of Cappadocia before the foundation of the Kingdom of Pontus in 281 BCE, and Pontus's original name was *Kappadokia Pontike* ("Cappadocia on Sea"). Zeus Daciëus, worshipped at Comana, was the great Hurrian storm god Teshub, whose permanent epithet was "the King of Kummi," and Kummi or Kummini, with the Hurrian definite article *-ni*, is the original Hurrian name of the Hellenistic and Roman Comana (Strabo's derivation of this name from the Greek

κόμη—“hair”—is invalid). However, the goddess Ma was not a local deity, but, according to Starabo, Orestes and Iphigeneia, on their flight from Tauris (Crimea) to Cappadocia, brought her cult with them from Tauric Scythia. This story is most probably a Greek interpretation of the historical invasion of Asia Minor by the North Iranian tribes of the Cimmerians in the late eighth century BCE and the Scythians in the mid-seventh century BCE, which Herodotus described.⁵³ Both events are well documented in contemporary Assyrian sources.⁵⁴ If these invaders from the northern Pontic area brought the cult of the goddess Ma to Cappadocia, could her original name have been Moksha? Given the transformation of the name of the Luwian god Runtiyas into the abridged form Ro in Hellenistic and Roman Cilicia,⁵⁵ this is a possibility. Strabo identifies the goddess Ma with Enyo, an obscure Greek goddess of war whom Homer mentioned.⁵⁶ However, in the Slavic translation of the Byzantine theologian Gregory Nazianzenus’ thirty-ninth Oration (“On the Holy Lights”), an interpolation equated Mokosh’ with the Greek Hecate,⁵⁷ goddess of crossroads and sorcery. The most distinctive feature of Hecate was her triple body, but even more interesting is the close association between Hecate and dogs, and even her representation as a bitch.⁵⁸ Especially important is that Hecate was known in Byzantine Constantinople precisely in this capacity,⁵⁹ and therefore the Slavic author could well have been aware of it. All Iranian peoples regarded the dog as a sacred animal, and the Scythian endonym Saka means “dog.”⁶⁰ An Iranian totemic myth about the origin of the ancestor hero from a dog is preserved in a weakened form in Herodotus’s story about the origin of Cyrus II the Great:

So saying, he [Harpagos] sent a messenger at once to one of Astyages’ cowherds, who he knew pastured his herds in the likeliest spots and where the mountains were most infested with wild beasts. The man’s name was Mitradates, and his wife was a slave like him; her name was in the Greek language Cyno [Κυνώ, from the Greek κύων—“dog”], in the Median Spako [Σπακώ]: for “spax” [σπάξ] is the Median word for dog.⁶¹

....

And he had been raised, he said, by the cowherd’s wife, and he was full of her praises, and in his tale he was constantly speaking of Cyno. Hearing this name, his parents circulated a story that Cyrus was suckled by a dog when exposed, thinking in this way to make the story of his salvation seem more marvelous to the Persians.⁶²

Therefore, it is possible that the North Iranian goddess Moksha and her East Slavic heiress Mokosh’ were personifications of a bitch, and that this was the reason for her identification with the Greek Hecate. If this assumption is correct, the Iranian triad among “Vladimir’s gods,” unlike the Slavic triad, constituted a family group of the bird-like sun god Khors, his wife Mokosh’, a bitch, and their son Simar’gl, half bird, half dog.

Notes

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- 2 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 93.
- 3 See U. Dukova, "Zur Frage des iranischen Eihflusses auf die slawische mythologische Lexik," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 24, 1979, pp. 11–16; K. H. Menges, "Early Slavo-Iranian Contacts and Iranian Influences in Slavic Mythology," *Symbolae in honorem Z. V. Togan*, Istanbul, 1950–1955, pp. 468–479; Андрей А. Зализняк, "Славяно-иранские схождения в мифологической и религиозно-этнической области," *Вопросы славянского языкознания*, 1962, № 6, pp. 41–44.
- 4 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 7.14.23–24.
- 5 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 94.
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 77.
- 7 See Marija Gimbutas, "Perkunas/Perun, the Thunder God of the Balts and the Slavs," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 1, 1973, pp. 466–478; Szymon Matusiak, "Piorun a Perkun," *Lud* 14, 1908, pp. 199–201; Gregory Nagy, "Perkunas and Perun," *Antiquitates Indogermanicae. Studien zu indogermanischen Altertumskunde und zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der indogermanischen Völker*, Innsbruck, 1974, pp. 113–131.
- 8 Antoni Mierzyński, *Żródła do mitologii litewskiej*, Warszawa, vol. 1, 1892, pp. 126–131.
- 9 *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, translated with an historical introduction, maps and appendices by Jerry C. Smith and William L. Urban, Bloomington, 1977, 1439 (p. 21).
- 10 *Corpus cultis equitis Thracii I: Monumenta orae Ponti Euxini Bulgariae*, eds. Zlatozara Gočeva and Manfred Oppermann, Leiden, 1979, No. 97, pp. 72–73.
- 11 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 9 (pp. 60–61).
- 12 Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, I.84 (pp. 218–219).
- 13 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 65.
- 14 М. В. Биби́ков, "Русь в византийской дипломатии: договоры Руси с греками X в.," *Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики*, 2005, № 1 (19), pp. 5–15.
- 15 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, pp. 65–68.
- 16 *Ibid.* pp. 74, 77.
- 17 *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the 12th Century*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York, 1960, 672.
- 18 For a different view, see C. L. Borissoff, "Non-Iranian origin of the Eastern-Slavonic god Xürsü/Xors," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 17, 2014, pp. 11–12.
- 19 Herodotus (English translation of A. D. Godley) 1.216.4.
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- 21 Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Roman History*, translated by C. D. Yonge, London, 1911, 23.5.16 (p. 328), 31.2.12 (p. 580).
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- 23 *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the 12th Century*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York, 1960, 665 (p. 62).
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- 26 Viljo J. Mansikka, *Die Religion der Ostslaven: Quellen*, Helsinki, 1922; В. Й. Мансикка, *Религия восточных славян*, Москва, 2005, p. 164.
- 27 See Vatroslav Jagić, "Mythologische Skizzen. I. Svarog-Svarozic. II. Dazbog-Dabog," *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 4, 1880, pp. 412–427; 5, 1881, pp. 1–14.
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- 30 *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the 12th Century*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York, 1960, 258, 305 (pp. 42, 44).
- 31 Е. В. Аничков, *Язычество и Древняя Русь*, Москва, 2009, pp. 417–418.
- 32 See L. Crepajac, "Zum slavischen Stribog," *Die Welt der Slaven* 12, 1967, pp. 19–21; Вячеслав И. Петр, "Об этимологическом значении слова 'Стрибог' в связи с индийским Сарамеем и греческим Гермесом," *Изборник Киевский*, Киев, 1904, pp. 106–118; Rüdiger Schmidt, "Zur angeblich iranischen Herkunft des altrussischen Gottsnamens Stribog," *Die Welt der Slaven* 16, 1971, pp. 193–200; Марк Бей, "К этимологии древнерусского Стрибог," *Вопросы языкознания* 7, 1958, pp. 96–99.
- 33 *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the 12th Century*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York, 1960, 197–199 (p. 39).
- 34 Е. В. Аничков, *Язычество и Древняя Русь*, Москва, 2009, pp. 419–420.
- 35 See Vittore Pisani, "Simargla, Chorsa-Dažboga," *For Roman Jakobson. Essays on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, 11 October 1956*, ed. M. Halle, Den Haag, 1956, pp. 392–394.
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- 45 For comparison between Anzu and Simurgh, see Jussi Aro, "Anzu and Sīmurgh," *Kramer Anniversary Volume: Cuneiform Studies in Honor of Samuel Noah Kramer*, ed. Barry L. Eichler, Kevelar, 1976, pp. 25–28.
- 46 Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals*, with an English translation by A. F. Scholfield, vol. 3, Cambridge, MA, 1959, 12.21 (pp. 38–41).
- 47 Camilla V. Trever, *The Dog-Bird. Sennmurw-Paskudj*, Leningrad, 1938.
- 48 Herodotus 3.116, 4.13, 27.
- 49 Е. В. Аничков, *Язычество и Древняя Русь*, Москва, 2009, pp. 453, 456.
- 50 Nikolai F. Mokshin, "The Mordva: Ethnonym or Ethnopholism," *Culture Incarnate: Native Anthropology from Russia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, Armonk, NY-London, 1995, pp. 31–43.
- 51 Тамаз В. Гамкредидзе, Вячеслав С. Иванов, *Индоевропейский язык и индоевропейцы. Реконструкция и историко-типологический анализ праязыка и протокультуры*, vol. 2, Тбилиси, 1984, p. 931.
- 52 Strabo, *The Geography*, translated by H. L. Jones, Cambridge MA, vol. 5, 1928, 12.2.3, 5 (pp. 352–354, 357–358).

- 53 Herodotus 1.6, 15, 103–106; 4.1, 11–13; 7.20.
- 54 J. Harmatta, “Scythians,” *UNESCO Collection of History of Humanity*, vol. 3: *From the Seventh Century BC to the Seventh Century AD*, Routledge/UNESCO, 1996, p. 182.
- 55 Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate, *The Luwian Population Groups of Lycia and Cilicia Aspera During the Hellenistic Period*, Leiden, 1961, pp. 128–131.
- 56 Homer, *Iliad* 5.333, 592.
- 57 Е. В. Аничков, *Язычество и Древняя Русь*, Москва, 2009, pp. 461, 464.
- 58 Alberta M. Franklin, *The Lupercalia*, New York, 1921, p. 67.
- 59 Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, London, 1994, pp. 126–127.
- 60 Ronald G. Kent, *Old Persian. Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (*American Oriental* vol. 33), New Haven, CT, 1953, p. 209.
- 61 Herodotus, an English translation by A. D. Godley, 1.110.1.
- 62 *Ibid.* 1.122.3.

15 Volos (Veles)

Volos (Волосъ) was not part of the Kievan pantheon that Vladimir I established in 980. This god is first mentioned together with Perun in the Rus'-Byzantine treaty of 907,¹ but since this treaty is not historical this reference can be dismissed. Volos does not appear in the treaty of 911 either,² or in the treaty of 944.³ He is mentioned for the first time in the Rus'-Byzantine treaty of 971.⁴ In both references in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, Volos is called “god of cattle” (скотій богъ, богъ скотъа), but the fourteenth-century Novgorodian *First Chronicle of St. Sophia*, based on one of the versions of the *Primary Chronicle*, calls this god Vlasii.⁵ The latter is the Slavic name of St. Blaise, derived from the Byzantine Greek form Vlasios. St. Blaise is the patron saint of cattle, and his cult became popular in the Balkans after the transfer of his relics from his native Sebastia in Cappadocia to Maratea in Southern Italy in 732. In 971, St. Blaise became the patron saint of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in Croatia after Stojko, canon of St. Stephan cathedral, experienced a vision in which this saint warned the city of the forthcoming Venetian attack of 948.⁶ The Rus'-Byzantine treaty of the same year was concluded after Emperor John Tsimiskēs defeated Sviatoslav of Kiev, and it is conceivable that Sviatoslav adopted the cult of St. Blaise during his occupation of Bulgaria in 969–971. Thus, a Christian saint became a pagan Slavic god, just as St. Vitus did 12 years later, after the Great Slavic Revolt of 983.

In *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, this god appears as Veles (Велесъ), and an ancient legendary poet, Boyan, is called the “grandson of Veles.”⁷ It is not clear whether this means that Veles was regarded as the god of poetry, or whether this is a reference to the tribal affiliation of Boyan, which was known to the audience of the *Tale's* author but is hidden from our modern eyes.

Finally, according to the fourteenth-century *Life of St. Avraamii*, there was a stone idol of Veles at Rostov in the late eleventh or the early twelfth century.⁸ Slavic settlers founded Rostov in the second half of the tenth century in the territory of the Eastern Finnish people, Meria. It is possible that these settlers brought the cult of Veles with them, but more likely this was the local Merian deity that the hagiographer confused with Veles.

Notes

- 1 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, p. 65.
- 2 Ibid. pp. 65–68.
- 3 Ibid. pp. 73–77.
- 4 Ibid. pp. 89–90.
- 5 Viljo J. Mansikka, *Die Religion der Ostslaven: Quellen*, Helsinki, 1922; В. Й. Мансикка, *Религия восточных славян*, Москва, 2005, p. 74; В. М. Ljapunov, “Blasios-Volos,” *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 9, 1886, pp. 315–316; А. И. Соболевский, “Волос и Власий,” *Русский филологический вестник* 3, 1886, pp. 185–187.
- 6 See Serafino Razzi, *Storia di Raugia*, Lucca, 1588, 1.10 (pp. 20–22).
- 7 *The Song of Igor’s Campaign: An Epic of the 12th Century*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York, 1960, 66 (p. 32).
- 8 *Памятники древнерусской церковно-учительской литературы*, под редакцией А. И. Пономарева, вып. 1, С-Петербург, 1894, pp. 221–222.

16 Conclusions

There was no pan-Slavic pantheon. All Slavic gods were purely local. Even within one tribe, different gods were worshipped in different towns. There were three different pantheons on the relatively small island of Rügen: in Arkona, Korenitsa, and Jasmund. Different gods were venerated in Starigrad and Plune in Wagria, and in Szczecin and Wolgast in Pomerania. Even these local pantheons were late and artificial creations introduced no earlier than the mid-tenth century. Only one such cultic reform is found in written sources: that of Vladimir I at Kiev in 980, but the very composition of other pantheons shows that they were constructed under heavy Christian influence. Eight out of 22 attested Slavic gods were of Christian origin (Chernobog, Sventovit, Rugevit, Porevit, Gerovit, Chernoglav, Triglav, and Volos), six had non-Slavic names: the Germanic Svarozhich, the Estonian Tutupid, the Baltic Pripegala, and the Iranian Khors, Simar'gl, and Mokosh'. All available information about the tribal affiliation, location of the cult, origin of the name, and the functions of Slavic gods is shown in Table 1 (Chernobog and Pripegala, whose tribal affiliation and cult's location are not known, are not included).

It is no coincidence that no Slavic god is mentioned before the end of the tenth century—such gods simply did not exist. It is also no coincidence that Slavic gods are found only on the edges of the Slavic world; no gods were invented between the Dnieper and the Oder. The Polish pantheon was invented only in the fifteenth century by the chronicler Jan Długosz as an imitation of “Vladimir's gods” in Kiev, and it consisted of phantom gods.¹ The Slavic tribes dwelling between the Oder and the Elbe constructed their pagan pantheons and built their pagan temples after the Great Slavic Revolt of 983 in an attempt to resist forced Christianization. They were imitating Christianity, which they perceived as a polytheistic religion, having made no distinction between saints and gods. Vladimir I's reform in Kiev in 980 was motivated by a variety of reasons. Vladimir created his pantheon by imitating the existing Iranian zoomorphic pantheon and extending it with the addition of several Slavic tribal gods. The Christian saint Vlasios (St. Blaise) was adopted as a pagan god not because of Christian expansion, as was the case among the Polabians and Pomeranians, but, on the contrary, because of the temporary conquest of Christian Bulgaria by the pagan Grand Prince of Kiev.

Table 1 Slavic gods

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>God</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Function</i>
Redarii	Radagost (Rethra)	Svarozhich	Svartaz— “black”	Fire god (Hephaestus)
Rani (Island of Rügen)	Arkona Korenets (Karensz, Gratz)	Sventovit Rugevit (Rinvit)	St. Vitus Vitus of Rügen	God of War (Mars)
		Porenut		
		Turupid	Tharapita	Storm god (Thor)
		Porevit (Puruvit)	Seasonal Vitus	Fertility god
	Jasmund	Pizamar		
		Chernoglav	Black Head	God of Victory
Polabi		Siva	Živa—“life”	Fertility goddess
Wagri	Starigrad (Oldenburg)	Prove		Storm god (?)
	Plune (Plön)	Podaga		
Pomerania	Szczecin	Triglav	Three heads	Trinity
	Wolgast (Hologost)	Gerovit	Fierce Vitus	God of War (Mars)
Poliane	Kiev	Perun	Thunderbolt	Storm god
Severiane	Chernigov and Kiev	Dazh’bog	Giving God	Sun god (Helios)
?	Kiev	Stribog		God of Winds (?)
?	Kiev	Khors	χoršid	Sun god
		Simar’gl	Simurgh	Bird with dog’s head
		Mokosh’	Moksha	Hecate
?	Kiev	Veles	St. Vlasios	God of Cattle

The transformation of Christian saints into pagan gods is the most surprising and unique feature of the Slavic pagan religion. With the spread of Christianity through Europe, Christian saints usually replaced pagan gods, not vice versa. The only close parallel to the Slavic pattern of development is the Afro-American syncretistic cult of voodoo in the Caribbean, Louisiana, and Brazil. In Haitian voodoo, for example, gods called *loa* (from French *lois*—“law”) are divided into two large groups: *Rada* (from Allada—the city-state in the modern Republic of Benin), gods brought from Africa, and *Petro*, new gods, mostly Christian saints. Thus, St. Isidore (patron saint of peasants), just as happened to St. Vitus on Rügen Island, was split into two in Haiti, becoming Azaka Tonnerre—the thunderstorm god—and Azaka Medeh—the god of agriculture. In the Dominican Republic (the former Spanish part of Santo Domingo Island), St. Anne (the Virgin Mary’s mother) became Anaisa Pye—goddess of love and wife of Belie Belcan—St. Michael Archangel.

Voodoo originated in conditions of slavery and forced acculturation, but the main reason for the adoption of Christian saints as pagan gods was the transatlantic forced migration of Africans, most of whom came from the West African coast, where they belonged to cultures with developed polytheistic pantheons. As in the case of ancient Near Eastern mass deportations,² the newcomers had to find new gods to protect them in their new homeland.

The Slavic situation was very different. In spite of their association with slavery in the eyes of other Europeans, Slavic peoples were never reduced to slavery,³ nor deported from their home countries. Slavic peoples on the edges of the Slavic world, coming into close contact with Christian nations, created their pantheons, borrowing freely from popular Christian cults, since they themselves previously had no traditional gods. What kind of religion was then the traditional Slavic paganism? We try to answer to this question in the next part of this book.

Notes

- 1 *Joannis Dlugossii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, eds. Ignatius Żegota Pauli and Aleksander Przezdziecki, vol. 1, Kraków, 1867, 1.3. (p. 70).
- 2 See about the problems of Babylonian deportees in Samaria in 2 Kings 17:24–32.
- 3 Although Thietmar of Merseburg claimed that Kiev in the early eleventh century was populated mainly by fugitive slaves. See *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, translated and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester-New York, 2001, 8.32.



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Part III

Heroes

Unlike the Slavic gods discussed in the previous part, the foundation legends' heroes of the various Slavic nations have a clear pan-Slavic background. This is surprising since these are etiological heroes whose names explain the origin of several Slavic cities and other natural landmarks; hence, they might have been expected to be local in character. Slavic foundation stories appear in medieval chronicles, which belong to the national historiography literary genre.¹ Before proceeding to the evidence itself, let us examine the sources.

Note

- 1 Norbert Kersken, "High and Late Medieval National Historiography," *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, Leiden, 2003, pp. 181–215.



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17 Sources

Slavic national historiography

Medieval national historiography originated in Eastern Europe beginning with Jordanes's sixth-century *History of the Goths* (*Getica*). A short time later, Gregory of Tours brought this genre to Western Europe with his *History of the Franks* (*Historia Francorum*). National historiography returned to Eastern Europe, which had meanwhile become Slavic, in the early twelfth century. In Part II, this genre was briefly discussed, since both the Danish Saxo Grammaticus and the East Slavic *Russian Primary Chronicle* are examples of medieval national historiography. Similar compositions were also written in Bohemia and Poland. Slavic chronicles differed from other medieval chronicles, which usually concentrated on recent and contemporary history, since they tended to incorporate legendary material from the remote past of their respective countries into the narrative. Most of these chronicles were written by Slavs (possibly, except for Gallus Anonymus) and for Slavs. Most of their authors wrote in Latin (except for *The Chronicle of Dalimil*, written in Czech).

As in the case of the Slavic gods, it is not easy to distinguish real historical tradition from artificial constructions that the chroniclers themselves invented. Earlier chronicles from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are naturally preferable to later ones from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but the latter can provide some useful details if these details can be corroborated using numismatic or epigraphic evidence.

Croatian material is exceptional, since it is found in the early but secondhand non-Slavic evidence of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, which has already been discussed in Part I.¹

Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*

Cosmas of Prague was a Czech cleric of noble birth who studied in Liège in 1075–1081. In 1086, he was appointed *canonicus* of Prague, and from no later than 1120 to his death in 1125 he served as Dean of the Prague Cathedral. Cosmas wrote his *The Chronicle of the Czechs* (*Chronica Boemorum*) between 1119 and 1125. The composition consists of three books: book one begins with the creation of the world, proceeds to the legendary prehistory of the Czechs, the

Christianization of Bohemia under the rule of Duke Bořivoj in the ninth century, and continues up to 1038. Book two begins with the Polish campaign of Duke Břetislav and continues until the death of the first King of Bohemia Vratislav II in 1092. The third book describes events between 1092 and the death of Duke Vladislav in April 1125 (Cosmas himself died in October of the same year). Like other contemporary chroniclers, Roman historiography and earlier medieval chronography influenced Cosmas, but more conspicuous in his writing is the influence of the early tenth-century *Chronicle*, written by the German chronicler Regino of Prüm. Cosmas himself distinguished between “fabulous tales of old men” (*senum fabulosa relatio*) and “true narration of reliable people” (*vera fidelium relatio*).² The former is more important for our purposes. These “fabulous tales” were also important to Cosmas himself, since he tried to present Přemyslid Bohemia not as a principality split off from Great Moravia, but as an independent polity with its own historical tradition, which had only temporarily come under the overlordship of Moravian princes. For this reason, Cosmas’s *The Chronicle of the Czechs* became one of the richest sources for Slavic legendary foundation stories, comparable only with Kałużebek’s *Chronicles of the Kings and Princes of Poland*.

Gallus Anonymus, *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*

The author of the earliest Polish chronicle, *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles* (*Gesta Principum Polonorum*), is unknown. On the margins of the fifteenth-century Heilsberg Codex (now in Warsaw), Prince-Bishop of Warmia Marcin Kromer wrote in the sixteenth century that a certain Gallus (i.e. a Frenchman) who lived in the time of Bolesław III (1107–1138) wrote the chronicle. Several attempts have been made to identify the author, but none gained universal acceptance. Maximilian Gumpłowicz proposed Baldwin Gallus, one of the legendary (probably unhistorical) Bishops of Kujawy, whom Jan Długosz mentioned.³ Pierre David suggested that the chronicle’s author was of Hungarian origin and had only studied in France.⁴ Karol Maleczyński and Marian Plezia accepted the French origin of the Anonymus, but the former thought that he was from the Flandres,⁵ and the latter argued that he was a native of Provence.⁶ Lately, a theory about the Littoral Dalmatian South Slavic origin of the chronicler had gained popularity in Poland.⁷ This hypothesis is based upon numerous similarities between Gallus Anonymus’s chronicle and the late eleventh-century Latin composition *Transfer of St. Nicolas* (*Translatio Sancti Nicolai*) attributed to an anonymous Littoral monk.⁸ A South Slavic origin for the Polish chronicler would nicely explain his familiarity with the Slavic language, but this theory has been rejected by the chronicle’s English translators.⁹

Gallus Anonymus wrote his chronicle in three books, probably between 1112 and 1118. The first book deals with the legendary origin of the Piast dynasty and continues up to the death of Władysław I Herman (1079–1102). Books two and three describe the reign of Bolesław III Wrymouth (1107–1138).

In the legendary part of his narrative, the author relied on the historical tradition of Great Poland, but did not include foundational legends from this region. Rather, he commenced his chronicle with the dynastic history of the Piasts. It is possible that the foreign writer was unfamiliar with legends of the Polanie tribe living in Great Poland, or maybe these legends did not exist at that time. The most likely explanation is that the author was mainly preoccupied with defending the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty, and therefore focused on topics that would support this objective. Since the wicked Prince Popiel, overthrown by Piast's son Ziemowit, was supposed to be a descendant of a legendary founder of Gniezno, Great Poland's capital, Anonymus was not interested in exposing legends connected with him. In any case, Gallus's chronicle is less valuable for our purposes than other chronicles.

Wincenty Kadłubek, *Chronicles of the Kings and Princes of Poland*

Wincenty (Vincent) Kadłubek was born in the village of Karwów near Opatów in Little Poland. According to Jan Długosz, he was the son of Bogusław, from the noble Różyce family, but his nickname Kadłubek, which means "small trunk" in Polish, suggests a peasant origin. In the introduction to her Polish translation of Kadłubek's chronicle, Brygida Kübris proposed that the author was the son of Stefan, Castellan of Cracow, from the Lis noble family.¹⁰ In 1167–1185, Wincenty studied in Paris and/or in Bologna, where he graduated as a *magister*, and was usually called Mistrz Wincenty (Master Vincent) in Poland thereafter. In 1208, he was consecrated as Bishop of Cracow, but in 1218 he resigned and retired to the Cistercian monastery at Jędrzejów.

Wincenty Kadłubek wrote his *Chronicles of the Kings and Princes of Poland* (*Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae*) at the request of Grand Duke Kazimierz II the Just (1177–1194), probably between 1190 and 1208. The composition consists of four books. The first three books are written in the form of a dialogue between Jan, Archbishop of Gniezno (1146–1167), and Mateusz, Bishop of Cracow (1143–1166). Book one deals with the legendary prehistory of Little Poland; book two is based on Gallus Anonymus; book three deals with the period between 1113 and 1167; and book four describes the struggle over the Cracovian throne between Mieszko III the Old (1173–1177, 1198–1202) and Kazimierz II the Just.

Kazimierz II, who led the rebellion against Grand Duke Mieszko III, commissioned the chronicle. Since Kazimierz is based in Little Poland, while Mieszko's power base was in Great Poland, it was important to the chronicler to establish that there was an independent historical tradition for Little Poland before the establishment of the Piast dynasty in Great Poland. Therefore, Wincenty Kadłubek paid great attention to the foundational legends of the Wiślanie and Łędzianie tribes living in Little Poland. This makes his chronicle one of the most valuable sources for our purposes (together with Cosmas's Bohemian chronicle).

The Chronicle of Great Poland

The original name of the composition conventionally called *The Chronicle of Great Poland* (*Kronika wielkopolska*) is unknown. Its text is incorporated into manuscripts of the fifteenth-century so-called *Great Chronicle* (*Kronika wielka*), which includes several Polish chronicles. In one of the manuscripts, our chronicle is entitled *Chronicon Polonie* ("Polish Chronicle"), and in another *Annalia vetuste gentis Polonorum* ("Ancient Annals of the Polish People"). Both the date of its composition and the identity of its author are controversial. Differences of opinions center on how the so-called "Dobner's fragments" are interpreted. In 1763, the Czech scholar Felix (Gelasius) Dobner published two fragments of *The Chronicle of Great Poland* (prologue and chapter 89), which he discovered in the library of the sixteenth-century Czech humanist Jan Hodičejovský. Since the original manuscript was never found, it has been claimed that Dobner forged these fragments. A remark in the second fragment states that the manuscript was written during the reign of Przemysł II (1295–1296). Therefore, those who believe in the authenticity of "Dobner's fragments" attribute the chronicle to the second half of the thirteenth century, and those who claim that the fragments are forged date the chronicle to the second half of the fourteenth century.

Among those who accepted the theory that the chronicle was written in the thirteenth century, two candidates were proposed for its authorship: Boguchwał II, Bishop of Poznań (1242–1253), and Godziszław Baszko, Capitular of the Poznań Cathedral (1268–1273).¹¹ If the chronicle is to be dated later, it was most likely written by Jan of Czarńków, Deputy Chancellor of the Crown in 1366–1371, Archdeacon of Poznań in 1375–1386, and the author of *The Chronicle of the Poles* (*Chronicon Polonorum*), also incorporated in the *Great Chronicle*.¹²

The Chronicle of Great Poland is not divided into books, but consists of 164 chapters. Chapters 1–57 are based on Wincenty Kadłubek's chronicle with the addition of some legends. Chapters 58–164 constitute the annalistic account of events between 1202 and 1273 based on the Annals of the Cathedrals of Poznań (for 965–1309) and Gniezno (for 1192–1247), which were also included in the *Great Chronicle*.

The Chronicle of Dalimil

The so-called *Chronicle of Dalimil* (*Dalimilova kronika*) was written by an anonymous author in 1308–1314 in the Old Czech language. In the seventeenth century, Tomáš Pešina attributed this chronicle to the Czech cleric Dalimil Meziříčský. Although this identification was proved erroneous, the title became conventional. The chronicle is written in verse and consists of 103 chapters. Chapters 1–25 are dedicated to the legendary period, chapters 25–77 deal with early Bohemian history, and chapters 78–103 cover more recent history from the reign of Ottokar I (1198–1230) to 1314. The account of Czech historical tradition is based on Cosmas of Prague with several author's additions.

The chronicle is one of the earliest examples of literature in the Czech language. It was composed in the aftermath of the assassination of Václav III in 1306, which marked the violent end of the Přemyslid dynasty, and was followed by a transition of power to a foreign prince, John of Luxembourg, in 1310. The very choice to use the national language reveals the author's deep dissatisfaction with both the fall of the national dynasty and the beginning of foreign rule in Bohemia. The chronicle was translated into Latin and Middle High German as early as the fourteenth century, and a lavishly illuminated Latin manuscript was found in Paris in 2005.

Jan Długosz, *Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland*

Polish chronicler, diplomat, and cleric Jan Długosz (1414–1480), scion of the noble Wieniawa family, was born in Brzeźnica in central Poland. He studied at the Cracow Academy but did not obtain an academic title. In 1433–1455, he served as secretary to the Bishop of Cracow, Zbigniew Oleśnicki (1423–1455), and from 1436 he was also the Canon of Cracow Cathedral. From 1455 to his death, Jan Długosz served King Kazimierz IV Jagellończyk in various diplomatic missions and also as tutor to his sons.

Jan Długosz wrote his *Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland* (*Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*) in 12 books in 1455–1480.¹³ The first five books, which start from legendary prehistory and end at 1370, summarize information derived from medieval Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and Russian (East Slavic) chronicles, embellished with many details, mostly fictitious. Books 6 to 12 survey East European history up to 1480. Długosz's chronicle served in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries as the standard textbook for Polish medieval history until the beginning of modern historical research in the nineteenth century. This is the latest source used in this study. We did not use Długosz in our discussion of Slavic pagan gods as it cannot be a reliable source for this information. However, with some hesitation, his presentation of Polish historical tradition will be considered, since it includes some valuable additional details, which numismatic and epigraphic evidence may possibly corroborate.

Notes

- 1 See Chapter 2, "Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*."
- 2 See Marie Bláhová, "The Function of the Saints in Early Bohemian Historical Writing," *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen, 2006, pp. 83–119.
- 3 Max Gumpłowicz, *Bischof Balduin Gallus von Kruszwica, Polens erster lateinischer Chronist*, Wien, 1895.
- 4 Pierre David, "La Pologne dans l'obituaire de Saint-Gilles en Languedoc au XII^e siècle," *Revue des Études Slaves* 19, 1939, pp. 217–226.
- 5 *Galli Anonymi Cronica et Gesta Ducum sive Principum Polonorum/ Anonima tzw. Galla Kronika Czyli Dzieje Książąt i Władców Polskich*, ed. Karol Małeczyński, Kraków, 1952.

- 6 Marian Plezia, "Nowe Studia nad Gallem Anonimem," *Mente et Litteris: O Kulturze i Społeczeństwie Wieków Średnich*, ed. Helena Chłopocka, Poznań, 1984, pp. 111–120.
- 7 Danuta Borawska, "Gallus Anonim czy Italus Anonim?" *Przegląd Historyczny* 56, 1965, pp. 111–119; Tomasz Jasiński, *O pochodzeniu Galla Anonima*, Avalon, 2008; Tomasz Jasiński, "Was Gallus Anonymus, Monachus Littorensis?" *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 112, 2005, pp. 69–89.
- 8 "Monachi Anonymi Littorensis, Historia de translatione Sanctorum Magni Nicolai, terra marique miraculis gloriosi, ejusdem avunculi, alterius Nicolai, Theodorique, martyris petiosi, de civitate Mirea in monasterium S. Nicolai de Littore Venetiarum, 6 Dec. 1100," *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Historiens occidentaux*, vol. 5, 1895, pp. 253–292.
- 9 *Gesta Principum Polonorum: The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, trans. Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer, Budapest, 2003. For a survey of different views on Gallus Anonymus, see Zbigniew Dalewski, *Ritual and Politics: Writing the History of a Dynastic Conflict in Medieval Poland (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450*, vol. 3), Leiden, 2008.
- 10 Misrrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, przełożyła i opracowała Brygida Kübris, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1996, pp. XIII–XV.
- 11 See Brygida Kübris in *Kronika wielkopolska*, Kazimierz Abgarowicz (translation), Brygida Kübris (ed.), Kraków, 2010, pp. 7–33.
- 12 Henryk Łowmiański, "Kiedy powstała Kronika Wielkopolska?" *Przegląd Historyczny* 51 (1), 1960, pp. 398–410.
- 13 *Jana Długosza kanonika krakowskiego Dziejów polskich ksiąg dwanaście*, przekład Karol Miecherzyński, Kraków, vol. 1, 1867, second edition: 1961.

18 Bohemia

Čech

Cosmas of Prague called an eponymous hero of Bohemia Bohemus:

Seeking places suitable for human habitation, whoever the man was (it is uncertain with how many souls) who later entered these solitudes, he surveyed with keen sight the mountains, valleys, and wastes and, so I think, located their first settlement around Mt. Říp between two rivers, namely, the Ohře and Vltava. He established their firm dwellings, and rejoiced in the guardian deities (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.68, 4.598) that he had carried with him on his shoulders, now erected on the ground. Then the elder, whom the others accompanied as if he was their lord, spoke thus to his followers (among other things): “O comrades (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.198), you who have endured with me heavy burdens through lonely forests, halt your step. Offer a thankful libation to your gods, through whose wondrous work you have come to your fatherland, as once foreordained for you by destiny. This is it. This is the land which you often reminded me I promised you, a land subject to no one, filled with wild animals and fowl, wet with nectar, honey, and milk (Deut. 6:3, Ovid. *Metamorphoses* 1.111), and, as yourselves see, air delightful for living. The waters are abundant on every side and full of fish beyond measure. Here nothing will be lacking to you, because no one will hinder you. But since a region such as this, both beautiful and great, lies in your hands, think what name might be fitting for land.” Immediately they said, as if moved by a divine oracle: “Since you, o father, are called Bohemus, where might we find a better or more fitting name that for the land to be called Bohemia?”¹

Was this Bohemus an invention of the author served up as an etiological explanation of the ancient Celtic name of Bohemia, or was this a Latin translation of an original Slavic name of an eponymous hero of the Czech people? The latter possibility seems preferable, since a forefather of the Czechs, Čech, appears in a role parallel to Bohemus of Cosmas in *The Chronicle of Dalimil*.

But again, was his name derived from a genuine Czech historical tradition, or was it borrowed from the Polish Czech, brother of Lech and Rus, from

The Chronicle of Great Poland? The second possibility can be ruled out since, even if *The Chronicle of Great Poland* was written earlier than *The Chronicle of Dalimil*, the legend about Czech, Lech, and Rus does not appear in the Dobner's fragment, and was either an early fourteenth-century interpolation or was written by Jan of Czarńków in the late fourteenth century. Further, Čech appears in *The Chronicle of Dalimil* in the following context:

*V tej zemi bieše lech,
jemužto jmě bieše Čech.*

In that country [Croatia] there was a ruler,
Whose name was Čech.²

In other words, *lech* in this text is not a name of Čech's brother, but rather a title. The Polish author misinterpreted this old Czech title as a name of an eponymous Polish hero, deriving it erroneously from the word used for Poles and Poland in all languages of this country's neighbors, except for the German: East Slavic *lęchi* (ЛАХИ), Lithuanian *Lenkija*, Hungarian *Lengyel*. The Hungarian form, pronounced as *Lend'el*, clearly shows that this name is derived from the name of the tribe of *Lędzianie*, who lived in the eastern part of Little Poland, somewhere near the current Polish–Ukrainian border. This name has nothing to do with the old Czech title *lech*, being derived from the old Slavic word *lědŭ* (ЛАДЪ, modern Polish *ląd*), meaning a field cleared in a forest, as part of the slash-and-burn agricultural system. Curiously, modern etymologists followed this medieval confusion deriving the Czech *lech* from this word.³ The Czech title, however, is more likely the sole Slavic representative of the ancient Indo-European word for king—Latin *rex*, Sanskrit *rājan*, Gothic *reiks*, Scottish Gaelic *righ*. Especially important is the proto-Tocharian form **lagant-*, which Ivanov and Gamkrelidze reconstructed on the basis of the Gutian onomastic component *-lag*.⁴

The most convincing argument in favor of the authenticity of the name Czech being an eponymous hero, however, is the East Slavic hero Shchek (Щекъ), brother of Kiy and Khoriv, and one of the founders of Kiev. Both words seem to be connected etymologically, and since both heroes appear nearly simultaneously in early twelfth-century compositions written independently in Kiev and Prague, they probably belong to the common pan-Slavic tradition. Nikolai Marr suggested that Shchek might mean “snake” in an attempt to connect the legend about the foundation of Kiev with the Armenian story about the brothers Kuar, Meltes, and Khorean recorded in the *History of Taron*, probably in the tenth or eleventh century.⁵ Marr suggested that Kuar corresponds to Kiy, Khorean to Khorev, and Meltes—“snake” in Armenian—is the translation of Shchek.⁶ Although the connection between the two legends is not likely,⁷ the etymology of Shchek seems to be right, since there is a Slavic verb *щекотать* (*shchekotat'*)—“to hiss like a snake.” Thus, Čech/Shchek appears to be the common Slavic zoomorphic totemic ancestral figure.

Snakes figured as totemic ancestors in several Indo-European mythologies. Athenians believed themselves to be descendants of the earth-born half-snakes, Cecrops and Erechthonius. The Indian epic hero Arjuna was married to Ulupi, daughter of Kouravya, king of the snakes.⁸

The cult of snakes is known to have existed in pagan Lithuania, where it served as a background for the Lithuanian folk tale *Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes* (*Eglė žalčių karalienė*).⁹ According to this story, three sisters bathed in a lake. The youngest, Eglė, found a snake curled up inside the sleeve of her dress. The snake agreed to release her clothes if the girl promised to be his wife. The frightened girl initially refused, but the snake insisted, and she finally agreed to be his bride. Three days later, thousands of snakes surrounded her parents' home, and some of them entered the house to speak with her parents. At first, the old man and woman refused, but they could not resist the multitude, and finally let their daughter be escorted by the snakes to the seashore. There was a handsome young man—the Serpent King—waiting for her there. Together, they crossed the sea to an island where they descended into the underground Serpent King's palace. Eglė soon fell in love with her husband and forgot her old home. In 12 years of marriage, Eglė bore three sons and a daughter. One day, her eldest son asked her why they never visit his grandparents. Eglė recalled her family and asked her husband to allow her to visit her parents, brothers, and sisters. The Serpent King promised to let her go if she would perform three impossible tasks: spinning a never-ending thread, wearing out iron shoes, and baking a cake without cooking vessels. With the help of an old witch, Eglė succeeded in performing all these tasks.

The Serpent King then took his wife and children to the seashore and told Eglė to return to that very spot nine days hence and to call out his name—Žilvinas. If he were still alive, the sea would foam milk, and if he were dead it would foam blood.

After Eglė's return home, her relatives did not want her to return to her husband. Eglė's brothers took her sons individually to a grove and tried to extract the name of the Serpent King from them, but the boys remained silent. Finally, Eglė's brothers brought her daughter to the grove and questioned her, and she was frightened into revealing her father's name.

The brothers took their scythes, went to the seashore, called for the Serpent King, and killed him. When nine days passed, Eglė went to the seashore and called out to her husband, but the sea foamed blood. Heartbroken, Eglė turned herself into an evergreen fir, her three sons into an oak, an ash, and a birch, and her daughter into a trembling poplar.

This story combines many typical elements found in European fairy tales,¹⁰ such as *Cupid and Psyche*,¹¹ for example. There are in this story elements of a totemic myth about a union of marriage between a human and an animal that serve to explain the origin of certain clans or tribes from a totemic animal.

The Lithuanian culture, as well as the Lithuanian language, preserved many archaic features that did not survive among other Indo-European nations. Although the *Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes* folk tale was recorded only in the nineteenth century, it probably preserved the basic plot of the most ancient common

Balto-Slavic totemic myth with the figure of a grass snake as an ancestor. Among the Slavs, however, only a figure of the forefather Čech/Shchek has survived as a part of the historical tradition, without supplementary mythological narrative.

According to *The Chronicle of Dalimil*, the forefather Čech and his six brothers were expelled from their homeland, Croatia, for committing a homicide. The author's identification of Croatia as the original homeland of the Czechs is, of course, his own speculation, but the motif of a homicide and subsequent exile likely belongs to the original myth since it is also present in other Slavic historical traditions. Čech's six brothers remain unnamed in *The Chronicle of Dalimil*. The author of *The Chronicle of Great Poland* introduces Lech and Rus as Čech's brothers. This is obviously a late and artificial construction, arising from the linguistic affinity of Slavic peoples: Czechs, Poles, and Ruthenians (modern-day Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians).

Krok

Cosmas of Prague calls the next generation's hero Krok, but does not indicate any kinship ties between him and Čech:

One particular man had arisen among them, called Krok, after whom a castle is known to have been named, located in the forest adjacent to Ztibečná [Stibecna, modern Zbečno] and now overrun by trees. He was a man absolutely perfect in his generations (Gen. 6:9), exceptional for his wealth in secular things, discreet in considering lawsuits. Like bees to their hive, so everyone, both from his own tribe and from the common folk of the whole province, flocked to him to sort out their lawsuits. Such a great man lacked riches of wisdom no fewer that she was accustomed to give men.¹²

Although Krok is presented in this passage as a local hero, whose name serves as an etiological explanation for a name of some Bohemian castle, Krok is obviously connected with the eponymous hero of Cracow, Krak,¹³ and less obviously with the Croatian Kloukas.¹⁴ The connection between historical traditions of Czechs and of the Wiślanie tribe in Little Poland is not surprising, since Bohemia and Little Poland are neighboring countries and both were under the rule of Great Moravia in the ninth century. The appearance of the related name in distant Croatia, however, shows the pan-Slavic background of this hero.

The Chronicle of Great Poland derives the name of Krak from Latin *corax* (the Greek loanword κόραξ in Latin)—“raven”—but the Croatian form points toward the Slavic *kliuka*—“scepter.” However, although the Croatian Kloukas appears in the tenth-century source, earlier than either the Czech Krok or the Polish Krak, this is secondhand information that a non-Slavic author presented, and an original Slavic name for the Croatian hero could have been distorted in this source. A connection between Krok/Krak and the Latin *quercus*—“oak”—has also been proposed,¹⁵ but, as we have seen, the original Slavic word for oak was probably **perkun*.¹⁶ In fact, Krok/Krak could well be derived from the Polish word

kruk—"raven"—which is a common Indo-European form related to the Greek κόραξ. Furthermore, the word for raven/crow is not only common in Indo-European languages, but in Nostratic, and possibly even in Boreal. The so-called Nostratic linguistic macro-family includes Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic (Semito-Hamitic), Ural-Altaic, Kartvelian, Dravidian, and possibly also Chukotko-Kamchatkan and Eskimo-Aleut.¹⁷ Boreal is an even greater super-macro-family, which some scholars have postulated.¹⁸ This linguistic grouping includes the Nostratic, Dené-Caucasian, Amerind, and Austric macro-families. The Dené-Caucasian macro-family consists of Basque, North-Caucasian, Burushaski, Yeniseian, Sino-Tibetan, and Na-Dené languages; the Amerind macro-family comprises all Native American languages, except for the Na-Dené and Eskimo-Aleut families; and the Austric macro-family includes the Austronesian, Mon-Khmer, Munda, Vietnamese, Daic, Miao-Yao, Nihali, and Ainu languages. This gigantic linguistic construction is called Boreal ("Northern"), since the languages that are excluded from it are mainly spoken in the southern hemisphere. These include the Congo-Saharan and Khoisan macro-families in Africa and the Australian and Indo-Pacific macro-families in Australia and New Guinea.

The reconstructed Nostratic form of the word for raven/crow is **ku/o/*√,¹⁹ the Dené-Caucasian form is **q√ηhə*,²⁰ in the Amerind Salish languages this word is *q'łáq'a* (Squamish) or *q'wuláqa?* (Columbian), the reconstructed proto-Salish form is **q'wlaq'a*,²¹ and in an Austric Santali language (one of the Munda languages) it is *kəhu*.²²

The raven plays the role of a trickster, a cultural hero, and an ancestral figure in the folklore of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan peoples (Chukchi, Koryak, and Itelmen) and of the inhabitants of the northwestern coast of North America (Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Athabaskan, Salish, and Kwakiutl). This mythological complex forms the so-called "Raven Cycle." In both regions, the raven is believed to create the light, sun and moon, dry land, and fresh water. It also bestows colors on birds and is associated with the invention of fishing. An Asian myth about the raven making a hole in the sky with its beak is unknown in North America, and an American myth about regulation of sea tides by a raven is unknown in Northeast Asia. In both regions the raven is also presented as an ancestral figure, but in Asia he is humankind's ultimate ancestor. In North America, by contrast, he is considered to be the ancestor of one of the moieties, the other having descended from either another type of bird (a swan or an eagle) or from a wolf. Another shade of the raven's image is its role as a trickster in comic situations. In a myth found both in Asia and North America, the raven pretends to be dead in order to steal food that its spouse prepared for the winter.

The discovery of this "Raven Cycle" in the nineteenth century was no surprise, since the Native American and Chukotko-Kamchatkan peoples were supposed to have lived in close proximity, on both sides of the Bering Straits, before the Eskimo-Aleut migration from Asia to North America separated them at a relatively late date. Archaeological exploration of the Bering Straits region, however, has shown that the migration of Native Americans from Asia took place in the late glacial age before the sea level rose. Thus, Asia and North America

separated before the Chukotko-Kamchatkans reached Northeast Asia. Therefore, these people never had any cultural contacts with Native Americans.

Following the ouster of this theory, several alternatives were suggested in an effort to explain the existence of the “Raven Cycle” on both sides of the Bering Straits. Claude Lévi-Strauss theorized that the raven became a cultural hero independently in Asia and North America because of its scavenging lifestyle. This trait, Lévi-Strauss proposed, rendered the raven a symbolic mediator between life and death.²³

While this is an interesting idea, the similarity between the raven myths in Northeast Asia and in the American Northwest tend to throw doubt on this explanation.

It seems unlikely that a myth of a raven stealing the sun and moon in the form of balls from an evil spirit in the sky and a myth about a raven stealing food could be invented independently in Asia and North America.

Eleazar Meletinsky observed that the “Raven Cycle” is most widespread in North America among the Na-Dené peoples (Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida, and Athabaskan), and since the Na-Dené peoples migrated from Asia to America with the second wave of migrants, later than the Amerind peoples, they could well have interacted with the Chukotko-Kamchatkans in Northeastern Siberia.²⁴

Note, however, that the most archaic form of the word for raven is found in the Amerind Squamish language (*q'łłáq'a*). This form is, in fact, similar to the Chukchi word *qʔurkəl*, while in the Tlingit language the raven is called *yel*. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the Amerind peoples of the northwestern coast of North America could have adopt the “Raven Cycle” from the Na-Dené newcomers. Could it alternatively be the case that the “Raven Cycle” is a remnant of the common Boreal mythology, which survived in an isolated region of the Bering Sea basin? This hypothesis may be too daring, since the Boreal unity dates to the Upper Paleolithic, and the survival of any mythological motif through tens of thousands of years is far-fetched. However, an independent Slavic tradition about the raven in the role of a totemic ancestral figure is the only known parallel to the “Raven Cycle” outside of the Bering Sea basin. It is thought-provoking, additionally, that the Czech and Polish names for raven (Krok/Krak) are similar to its Chukchi name (*qʔurkəl*), while its Croatian name (Kloukas) is similar to the Squamish form (*q'łłáq'a*).

Kazi

Krok is said to have had three daughters: Kazi, Tetka, and Libuše. The eldest daughter, Kazi, was a healing sorceress:

The eldest of them was named Kazi, who surpassed Medea of Colchis in herbs and song and Paeonian master (Asclepius: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.535, Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.769) in medical art, because she often made the Fates themselves cease their unending work and oracles follow the commands of her song. Hence the inhabitants of this land, when they lose something and despair

of its recovery, say the following proverb about her: “Even Kazi herself cannot get it back.” Like the place where the daughter of Ceres [Proserpina] was abducted by a tyrant [Pluto], her burial mound can still be seen today, heaped up very high by the inhabitants of the land in memory of their mistress, on the bank of the River Mže near the road which leads to the province of Bechyně, over the mountain called Osek.²⁵

The story itself is presented as an etiological explanation for the name of a certain burial mound.

Kazi was not the only witch mentioned in *The Chronicle of the Czechs*; Cosmas also described a female magician of the Lučané tribe in Northwestern Bohemia who performed magic spells in order to save her stepson from coming to harm in a battle with Czechs:

Meanwhile, a certain woman, one from the number of Eumenides, summoned her stepson, who was just about to go to battle. She said: “Although it is not natural for stepparents to favor their stepchildren, nevertheless, remembering my connection to your father, I will make you safe so that you will be able to survive if you wish. Know that the Czechs’ witches and ghosts have prevailed over our Eumenides in their prayers, whence victory will be granted to the Czechs, our men having been killed down to the last one. Here is how you might succeed in avoiding this calamity: kill whoever is opposite you in the first encounter and, cutting off both his ears, throw them into your purse. Then, with your unsheathed sword, mark the earth in the shape of cross between both feet of the horse. By doing this, you will loose the invisible bonds which make your horses (bound as they are by the anger of the gods) fail and fall, as if exhausted from a long journey. Immediately mounting the horse, flee.”²⁶

Slavic witches are called *ved'ma* (вѣдьма)—“one who knows”—from the common Indo-European root *ved*—“to know”—from which the Indian term *Veda* is also derived. In the early modern age, during the pan-European witch-hunt hysteria, witches in Muscovite Russia were protected by law. The 1589 Code of Law that Fiodor I promulgated for the northern provinces included a clause “on whores and witches” (блядем и видмамъ) that stipulated compensation for defamation of these two groups of women.²⁷ This does not mean that there were no witchcraft trials in Muscovy, but only a supposed victim of witchcraft could initiate such a trial.²⁸ This ambiguous attitude toward witches was typical in the Middle Ages. Witches were perceived as folk-healers who understood the medicinal uses of various herbs and incantations, but could also cause harm by means of poisoning and magic spells.²⁹ This attitude is reflected in images of witches in Cosmas’s chronicle.

However, the archetypal witch of Russian folklore—Baba-Yaga—is of East Finnish origin. In the Komi language, her name means “forest woman,” and it is contrasted with the Murt-Yaga—“forest man.”³⁰ The Baba-Yaga of Russian fairy

tales lived in a “hut on chicken legs” (*избушка на курьих ножках*), which is, in fact, a hunters’ storage hut that several northern peoples in Europe (the Saami, Komi, and Nentsy) utilize.

Tetka

The second daughter of Krok, Tetka, is said to have been a priestess:

Worthy of praise though second by birth, Tetka was a woman of keen discernment (Horace, *Satires* 1.4.8) lacking a husband. She built a castle on the River Mže, named Tetin after herself, well fortified by the nature of the place, with rocks reaching steeply to the summit. She taught the stupid and senseless people to adore and worship Oreads, Dryads, and Hamadryads, and established every superstitious sect and sacrilegious rite. Like many villagers up until now, just like pagans, this one worships waters or fires, that one adores groves and trees and stones, another sacrifices to mountains or hills, and still another beseeches and prays to the deaf and dumb idols he has made himself, so that they rule both his home and his own self (Sedulius, *Paschale Carmen* 1.259).³¹

Like all the other members of Krok’s family, the Tetka tale is presented as an etiological explanation, in this case for the name of Tetin Castle. The description of the Czech pagan religion in this passage is similar to Procopius’s description of Slavic religion written 600 years earlier; no gods are mentioned, Oreads (mountain nymphs), Dryads, and Hamadryads (tree nymphs) correspond to Procopius’s nymphs, and the cult of waters corresponds to his river cult.³² Several other authors noted Slavic cult worship of sacred groves.³³ However, there is no other known source that mentions Slavic priestesses. Slavic pagan priests are known as *volkhvy* (вѣлхвѣ), but they were exclusively male.³⁴ Ancient Germanic priestesses are well known, and are thus described by Tacitus:

They [Germans] even believe that the [female] sex has a certain sanctity and prescience, and they do not despise their counsels, or make light of their answers. In Vespasian’s days we saw Veleda, long regarded by many as a divinity. In former times, too, they venerated Aurinia, and many other women, but not with servile flatteries, or with sham deification.³⁵

In another place, Cosmas calls all three sisters Eumenides (Furies in their benevolent capacity), and compares Tetka with the “enchanter Aeaean Circe.”³⁶ Cosmas also describes another Czech female fortune teller fulfilling some of the priestess’s functions:

Devoted to empty rites, trusting more to lies, despairing now of their men and military arms, they [Czechs] approached a certain fortune teller, consulted her, and insisted she proclaim what act should be performed in such a crisis and what results a future war would achieve. As she was full

of divination [*phitone*],³⁷ she did not keep them long with this obscure riddle of words: “If you want to obtain the triumph of victory, it behooves you first to follow the commands of the gods. Sacrifice an ass to your gods, so that they might be your refuge. Jupiter, the greatest, Mars himself and his sister Bellona, and even the son-in-law of Ceres [Pluto] order this prayer to be made.” The pitiable donkey meanwhile was sought out, killed, and, as ordered, cut a thousand times into a thousand pieces. More quickly than could be said, it was consumed by the entire army.³⁸

The Czech pagan religion is presented here in a different light than the passage about Tetka. Several gods are mentioned using their Roman names. It would seem, however, that the indication of their kinship ties, which is in full accord with Greek mythology, suggests that this is simply the author’s classical reminiscences.

Libuše

The youngest daughter of Krok, Libuše is said to have been a prophetess, judge, and political leader of the Czechs after her father’s death:

Younger by birth but older in wisdom, the third was called Libuše. She built a castle, the most powerful then, next to the forest which reaches to the area of Ztibečná [Zbečno], and called it Libušin after her own name. She was truly a woman among women: cautious in counsel, quick to speak, chaste in body, upright in character, second to no one in resolving the lawsuits of the people. Affable, even lovable, in all things, she adorned and glorified the feminine sex while handling masculine affairs with foresight. But because no one is altogether blessed (Horace, *Odes* 2.16.27), this woman of such quality and of so great praise—alas the terrible human conditions!—was a prophetess [*phitonissa*].³⁹ Since she predicted many proven futures for people, that whole people took common counsel and set her up as judge over them after the death of her father.⁴⁰

In terms of the Czech historical tradition, Libuše was the most important of the three sisters, since she became the founding mother of the Přemyslid dynasty, through her marriage with Přemysl. She is also the only one of the three who was known outside of Bohemia and had a clear pan-Slavic background. It is evident from a Jewish gravestone found in Wrocław that the name Libuše came into use in Silesia as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century:

האבן הזאת אשר הוקם על ראש מרת ליבושה אשת ר[. . .] שהלכה לעולמה כ מרחשון בשנת סה
לפרט נת[צ]בה

This gravestone which was erected on head of Mrs. Libusha wife of rabbi [. . .], who has passed to her destiny on the 20th day of Marcheshvan in the year 65 on account [of the sixth millennium] (October 20, 1304). May her soul be [bound] in the bond of eternal life.⁴¹

Libuše was also probably an eponymous heroine of the Slavic land of Lubusz (German Lebus) in the mid-Oder on both sides of the current-day Polish–German border.

Libuše's connection with the East Slavic Lybed', sister of Kiy, Shchek and Khoriv, legendary founders of Kiev, as well as the Croatian Lobelos, brother of Kloukas,⁴² and the Hungarian legendary prince Lebedias is central to reconstructing this figure's pan-Slavic background.⁴³ Lebelos and Lebedias were male figures, but they are mentioned in an earlier, though secondary, non-Slavic source. Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentions Lebedias as an etiological explanation for the name of the Hungarian interim homeland Lebedia, located between the Don and Dniester rivers. The context is clearly Slavic. Lebedias carried the title voivode, written in Slavic in Greek characters, as well as a word *zakon*—"law":

The nation of the Turks [Hungarians] had of old their dwelling grounds next to Chazaria, in the place called Lebedia [Λεβεδία] after the name of their first voivode [βοέβοδος], which voivode was called by the personal name of Lebedias [Λεβεδιάς], but in virtue of his rank he was entitled voivode, as have been the rest after him.⁴⁴ [. . .]

The Turks [Hungarians] preferred that Arpad should be prince rather than Almoutzis his father, for he was of superior parts and greatly admired for wisdom and counsel and valor, and capable of this rule; and so they made him prince according to the custom, or "zakanon" (ζάκανον) of the Chazars, by lifting him upon a shield.⁴⁵

Lebedias is not connected to the Hungarian Árpád dynasty. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Lebedias renounced his title in favor of Almoutzis (Álmos), father of Árpád. The name Lebedias also has no Hungarian etymology, and Hungarians likely borrowed it from Slavs either from northern Pontic or already in Pannonia. The names of both the East Slavic Lybed' and the Hungarian Lebedias are derived from the Slavic word *lebed'* (лебедь)—"swan." The etymologies of the Czech Libuše and the Croatian Lobelos are less clear, but they are likely connected to the other two names.

The swan figures in European fairy tales as the so-called Swan Maiden. Stith Thompson classified this motif as a type D 361.1.⁴⁶ According to a typical plot, some young man (usually a hunter or a fisherman) observes a flock of swans landing on the shore of a lake or river. The swans shed their feather garments and transform into beautiful young girls. They leave their garments on the shore and enter the water to bathe. The young man steals one of the garments and forces the Swan Maiden whose gown he stole to marry him. After a while, one of their children (or some other relative of the husband) accidentally finds the feather garment and shows it to the Swan Maiden, who immediately dons it and flies away. In some variants, she disappears forever; in others, the husband succeeds in finding her, following many adventures.

This motif appears for the first time in the Icelandic *Völundarkviða* (*The Lay of Völund*), which forms a part of *The Poetic Edda*. This poem tells the story of three

brothers, sons of the King of the Finns (Saami), who married three Valkyries—Swan Maidens—who later leave these men.⁴⁷

The Swan Maiden motif is found later in numerous European fairy tale collections. Bolte and Polívka composed the most comprehensive list of this story's variants in their commentary on the Brothers Grimm tale No. 193 ("The Drummer").⁴⁸ Outside Europe, this motif is found in Bashkiria,⁴⁹ Buryatia,⁵⁰ and in Japan.⁵¹

Especially significant for our purpose are the Buryatian version and August Musäus's adaptation of the Swan Maiden, which he published in 1782–1786 as "The Stolen Veil" ("Der geraubte Schleier") in his collection *Folktales of the Germans* (*Volksmärchen der Deutschen*).⁵²

The Buryatian story about Khorōdoi-morgon and the Swan Maiden is clearly a totemic myth, which explains the origin of the 11 clans of the Khorī Buryatian tribe. Muzäus's tale (which inspired Piotr Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*) provides an exact location for the Swan Maidens' legend—Swan Lake (Schwanenteich) in the Ore Mountains (German Erzgebirge, Czech Krušné hory) near the Bohemian border. This location directly links the Swan Maiden story with the Czech legend of Libuše, which, incidentally, Musäus also included in his *Folktales of the Germans* collection.⁵³

It is evident that the Swan Maiden motif has parallels with the Lithuanian *Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes* tale. The gender roles of the animal and human counterparts have been reversed, however. The connection of this totemic myth with the Czech historical tradition about Libuše reveals a third totemic ancestral figure with a pan-Slavic background—the swan.

Let us recapitulate the contribution of the Czech historical tradition to the reconstruction of the pan-Slavic totemic mythology. The snake was the oldest ancestor and an eponymous hero of the Czechs. One of his descendants in the next generation was the raven, an eponymous hero of Cracow in Little Poland. His daughter was the swan, an eponymous heroine of the land of Lubusz (Lebus).

It should, however, be taken into account that this tradition was recorded for the first time about 300 years after the Christianization of Bohemia, and these kinship ties between the totemic heroes do not necessarily reflect the original ancient Slavic myth. Thus, a contrasting East Slavic tradition identifies the snake and the swan as brother and sister, and according to the Croatian tradition the raven and the swan were siblings. As we shall see, in some sources, the relationships between these heroes are presented in a less idyllic and harmonious light than the picture that Cosmas of Prague chose to present.

Notes

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- 2 *Nejstarší česká rýmovaná kronika tak řečeného Dalimila*, eds. Bohuslav Havránek, Jiří Daňhelka, Zdeněk Kristen, Praha, 1958, 2.3–4 (p. 20).
- 3 Václav Machek, *Etymologický slovník jazyka českého a slovenského*, Praha, 1957, p. 262.

- 4 Тамаз В.Гамкрелидзе, Вячеслав В. Иванов, "Первые индоевропейцы на арене истории: прототохары в Передней Азии," *Вестник древней истории*, 1989, pp. 18–20.
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- 6 Николай Я. Март, "Книжные легенды об основании Куара в Армении и Киева на Руси," *Известия Российской Академии материальной культуры*, 1924, № 3, pp. 257–287; *Избранные работы*, Москва-Ленинград, vol. 5, 1935, pp. 44–66.
- 7 See B. A. Арутюнова-Фиданян, А. С. Щавелев, "Очерк истории изучения легенд об основании городов в древнерусской 'Повести временных лет' и армянской 'Истории Тарона': Кий и Куар," *Древнейшие государства Восточной Европы: Устная традиция в письменном тексте*, отв. ред. Г. В. Глазырина, Москва, 2013, pp. 7–30.
- 8 Jean Philippe Vogel, *Indian Serpent-lore or the Nāgas in Hindu Legend and Art*, London, 1926, pp. 74–77, 208.
- 9 Gintaras Beresnevičius, "Eglė žalčių karalienė" ir lietuvių teogoninis mitas: religinė istorinė studija, Vilnius, 2003.
- 10 On the structure of European fairy tales, see Владимир Я. Пропп, *Морфология сказки*, Ленинград, 1928.
- 11 L. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 4.28–6.24.
- 12 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolvertson, Washington, DC, 2009, 1.3 (pp. 38–39).
- 13 Misrrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, przełożyła i opracowała Brygida Kübris, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1996, 1.5 (pp. 11–15).
- 14 *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 30 (pp. 142–143).
- 15 Marek Cetwiński, Marek Derwich, *Herby, legendy, dawne mity*, Wrocław, 1987.
- 16 See Chapter 11, "Perun."
- 17 See Aharon Dolgopolsky, *The Nostratic Macrofamily and Linguistic Paleontology*, Cambridge, 1998.
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- 25 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolvertson, Washington, DC, 2009, 1.4 (p. 39).
- 26 Ibid. 1.11 (pp. 55–56).
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- 31 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolverton, Washington, DC, 2009, 1.4 (pp. 39–40).
- 32 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 7.14.23–24. See Chapter 2, “Procopius, *The Gothic War*.”
- 33 *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 9 (pp. 60–61); Helmold, priest of Bosau, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Joseph Tschan, New York, 1966, 1.84 (pp. 218–219). See Chapter 2, “Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*” and Chapter 7.
- 34 See Russell Zguta, “The Pagan Priests of Early Russia: Some New Insights,” *Slavic Review* 33, 1974, pp. 259–266.
- 35 Tacitus, *Germania* 8, translation of A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb.
- 36 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolverton, Washington, DC, 2009, 1.4 (p. 42).
- 37 Misspelling of Latin *pythone*, from Greek πύθων—“oracle of Apollo.”
- 38 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolverton, Washington, DC, 2009, 1. 11 (p. 56).
- 39 Misspelling of Latin *pythonissa*, from Greek πυθία—Pythia.
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- 42 *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 30 (pp. 142–143).
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19 Little Poland

Two Slavic tribes populated Little Poland in the southern part of modern-day Poland. The Wiślanie tribe inhabited the Vistula River in the west, with its center in the town of Wiślica, and the Lędzianie tribe lived in the east, on both sides of the modern-day Polish–Ukrainian border. In his chronicle, Wincenty Kadłubek recorded the historical traditions of both tribes.

Wiślanie

Wincenty Kadłubek used the Latin form Gracchus as the name of the founder of Cracow. This figure's association with the name Cracow (Kraków), however, and citations in later chronicles show that his original Polish name was Krak. Jan Długosz directly identified him with the Bohemian Krok. Kadłubek cites three legends related to Krak: the slaying of the Dragon of Wawel (citadel of Cracow),¹ which is connected with the founding of Cracow, Krak's son's fratricide, and the legend of Wanda.²

The Dragon of Wawel (Smok Wawelski)

Kadłubek called the monster, which Krak had to encounter soon after he was elected as a king, *holophagus*—a Greek word that Kadłubek invented, which roughly translates as “one who swallows whole.” In Polish, this monster is usually called *smok wawelski*—“the Dragon of Wawel”—and this name is used as an etiological explanation for a cave under the Cracow citadel, in the Wawel hill, which has come to be known as *smocza jama*—“the dragon's pit”:

There was a cruel monster in the crevices of some rock, whom some used to call one who swallows whole [*holophagus*]. Because of his voraciousness, every week according to the calculation of days, a certain number of cattle had to be delivered to him. If the inhabitants did not deliver any victims, they would have been punished by the monster with the loss of many human lives. Gracchus [Krak], unable to endure this defeat, as he was the faithful son of his country even more than the father of his sons, secretly summoned his children, presented them with his intention, and shared his advice.

“The fear of activity”—he said—“is unacceptable, for the gray haired it is stupidity, and for the young it is laziness. There is no activity if it is timid, no wisdom of gray hair, if it is irrational; no youth, if it is lazy. Moreover, if there is no opportunity to exercise courage, it is necessary to conjure it. Who would ever dodge from fame, which imposes itself, unless it were someone infamous! Yet the good of the citizens, protected and preserved, enters into eternal triumph. You do not need to take care of your own salvation whenever there is a common danger. So, you, our favorites, both of whom we raised according to our skills, you are supposed to arm so as to kill the monster, you are fit to fight with him, but do not exaggerate as you are half of our life, those who have to inherit this kingdom.”

They responded: “Indeed, we could be considered poisoned with stepsons’ hate, if you wished us such a glorious task! You have authority of commandment, to us—the necessity of obeying.”

So after they had gained experience through many fights with strong forces, they were finally forced to resort to deception. Because instead of cattle they put in the ordinary cattle skin, stuffed with lighted sulfur. And since he [the dragon] swallowed them with great greed, the one who swallows whole was suffocated from the flames inside the fire.³

As Marian Plezia has shown, the method by which the monster was slain—through burning sulfur stuffed into an animal skin—is based on Oriental versions (Syriac, Coptic, and Persian) of Pseudo-Callisthenes’s *Alexander Romance*,⁴ based in turn on a lost Middle Persian (Pahlavi) version. The Syriac version describes this type of event:

And when the beast desired to come on towards the mountain, all my troops with one voice raised a shout against it; and when it heard the shout, it turned and crossed the river. Then I straightway gave orders to bring two oxen of huge bulk, and to kill them, and to strip off their hides, and to take away their flesh, and to fill their skins with gypsum and pitch and lead and sulfur, and to place them on that spot. When they had done this, the beast according to its wont crossed the river again, and when it came to them, it suddenly drew both of the skins into its mouth by its breath and swallowed them. As soon as the gypsum entered its belly, we saw that its head fell upon the ground, and it opened wide its mouth, and uprooted a number of trees with its tail. And when I saw that it had fallen down, I ordered a smith’s bellows to be brought and balls of brass to be heated in the fire and to be thrown into the beast’s mouth; and when they had thrown five balls into its mouth, the beast shut its mouth, and died.⁵

How this literary motif entered medieval Poland remains unknown, since it is absent in the Greek and Latin versions of this composition. Surprisingly, the Talmud may have served the role of Wincenty Kadłubek’s intermediate source. Tractates *Nedarim* and *Shvu’ot* of the Jerusalem Talmud contain the following

passage, which may have been derived from a lost Middle Persian (Pahlavi) version of the Alexander Romance:

והא חוייה דשבור מלכא בלע גמלין, בלע קרנין, בעי מיקטלוגיה מלון פחליין של גמלין תבן ויהבון בון
גומריין ובלעון ומית.

And that snake of King Shapur swallowed camels, swallowed wagons. When they wanted to kill it, they stuffed a camel with straw and burning coal, and it swallowed it and died. (Jer. Nedarim 3.2; Jer. Shvu'ot 3.8)

Jews are known to have lived in Cracow from at least the first half of the eleventh century (based on a halakhic responsa of Rabbi Yehudah ben Meir ha-Kohen of Mainz),⁶ and Kadłubek himself mentioned a Cracovian Jew in his chronicle.⁷ Therefore, it is possible that this literary motif was known to him or to his source from local Cracovian Jews.

A similar legend about two dragons was also found among the German-speaking population in modern Silesia. In the early twentieth century, the following legend was recorded in the Glatz (Polish Kłodzk) area near the Bohemian border:

On the Kahlen Berge [Polish Łysiec] in the wood near Gompersdorf [Polish Goszów] (in the Landeck [Polish Łądek] area) once there lived two dragons, which caused terrible devastation to the surrounding area. The inhabitants of the surrounding villages managed to get rid of one of them by using the carcass of a calf, which they had filled with slaked lime and sacrificed to him. But every cunning effort failed. At last they lit the forest in which he lived, from all sides, and he perished in the fire. But since that time the mountain has been bare; no forest grows any more in this place.⁸

Dragons here were associated not with Wawel Hill, but with a local hill called Kahlen Berge in German or Łysiec in Polish—meaning “bold mount” in both languages.

Little Poland's legend about the slaying of the Dragon of Wawel is closely associated with the story of Cracow founding:

And yes, on the rock of the one who swallows whole soon was established a famous city, called Gracchovia [Cracovia] in the name of Gracchus to keep Gracchus's memory alive. And funeral rites did not cease, until the completion of the city's construction. Some called it Cracow from the croaking of the ravens (*a crocitate corvorum*), which fell upon the monster's carcass.⁹

In this passage, Kadłubek provides two alternative versions for the origin of town's name: either based on the name Krak or from the croaking (*crocitus* in Latin) of the ravens. *The Chronicle of Great Poland* does not mention the Dragon of Wawel at all, and derives the name Krak from the word for raven (*corax*). Jan Długosz attributes the slaying of the dragon to Krak the Elder, and not to his sons.

Krak's younger son is also called Krak, according to all versions of the legend. The repetition of the name is probably due to the lack of the figure of the snake (Czech/Shchek) in the historical tradition of Little Poland, where Krak the Elder (raven) replaces the original snake. However, the snake is present in this tradition also. The Dragon of Wawel itself could be considered a type of snake! If we assume that, as in the Bohemian legend, only Krak the Younger was the raven in the original totemic myth, and the snake in that myth was his father, then in this hypothetical proto-Slavic version of the myth, the raven (Krok/Krak) killed the snake (Czech/Shchek), his father.

The patricide motif is of course universal, perhaps reflecting the so-called Oedipus complex. In the surviving portions of the Akkadian *Theogony of Dunnu*, gods kill their fathers in no less than seven generations.¹⁰ In Greek mythology, Cronus castrated and killed his father Uranus, and was in turn killed by his own son Zeus. According to the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, the hero Arjuna was killed by his son Babhravahana (whose mother was a female snake). In Scandinavian mythology, the dragon Fafnir killed his father, the dwarf Hreiðmarr. And so on.

The fratricide

After slaying the dragon, one of Krak's sons committed fratricide:

And then the younger man attacked and killed his brother, the partner in victories and kingship, viewing him not as a companion, but as a rival. From behind his corpse he emerged with crocodile tears, claiming that the monster had killed his brother, but the father gladly accepted him as the victor. Often, mourning is overcome by the joy of victory.

Thus, the younger Gracchus [Krak] takes over authority from his father—a criminal heir!

Alas, he was more defiled by the fratricide than decorated by authority. As soon as the fraud was uncovered, he was condemned to eternal exile as the penalty for the crime:¹¹

“... for there is no fairer law

Than that the murderer should perish by his own art.”¹²

Kadłubek calls the younger brother Krak but does not disclose the name of the elder. In *The Chronicle of Great Poland*, the elder brother also remains unnamed. Jan Długosz calls the elder brother Krak and the younger one Lech, claiming that Krak the Younger was killed by his brother, and not vice versa:

After the days of mourning for the death of Gracchus [Krak], during which all Polish nobles were busy paying him their final respect, they undertook the election of another prince to the throne of Gracchus. Gracchus also left two sons, born in the hope of succession - Gracchus and Lech, and a third child—the daughter Wanda—dying, he instructed the Polish nobles, begging in persistent requests that they, remembering his benefactions,

recognize his descendants as worthy of reign and set on the throne one of his sons. So, the younger Lech, fearing that they will prefer the older brother, Gracchus, for the inheritance of the principality both because of the birthright and his more mature age, and in view of the benevolence and advantage in the virtues and morals by which he surpassed his brother, and he himself be rejected, taking advantage of a convenient moment, secretly killed the elder brother and hid the torn body buried in sand. And in order not to be removed from the throne because of the accusation of killing a relative, he fabricated a story that the brother went hunting and, pursuing a beast with more courage than needed, he perished. He also added feigned tears to the story in order to give himself more credibility. Thus, having deceived and contrived the Polish grandees, he was crowned as the king and the supreme prince's power was transferred to him. After he held office for many years and the Poles revered him with no less faithfulness, obedience, and devotion than they had his father, first secret rumors spread about his crime and the murder of his brother, and then the grave was discovered and opened on the basis of obvious evidence, and he became hated by everyone, and incited against himself such hatred on the part of the nobles of Poland because of the abominable crime and undeserved murder of his brother that they overthrew him from the throne and punished him, condemning him to eternal exile due to disgust and horror from the offense committed by him, being worthy of considerable approval for the punishing the guilty for the murder of a kinsman due to ambition, not suffering that the perpetrator of such a serious crime commanded them.¹³

As we have seen, the name Lech is a misinterpretation of an Old Czech title, and Długosz himself most likely inserted this name into the story. However, his claim that Krak (raven) was the victim of fratricide and not its perpetrator deserves attention. Our hypothesis that Krak the Elder replaced the snake of the original totemic myth implies that the raven killed his father the snake. Therefore, it is most likely that the raven was killed in turn by his brother, whose identity remains unknown.

Fratricide is a universal motif. The Egyptian Osiris and Set, the biblical Cain and Abel, the Roman Remus and Romulus, the Indian Arjuna and Karna, and the Scandinavian Höðr and Baldur are some of the most famous examples. The Roman version is particularly instructive. The story is part of the foundation legend of Rome and has a clear totemic background. Remus and Romulus were nursed by a she-wolf. This legend is relatively late, however. Plutarch quotes the third-century BCE Greek historians Promathion and Diocles of Peparethus as the earliest sources for the she-wolf's story.¹⁴ During the same third century, a statue of a she-wolf was erected at the foot of the Palatine Hill,¹⁵ and the image of a she-wolf suckling twins began to appear on Roman coins. As for the famous bronze Capitoline She-Wolf, which was thought to be a sixth-century BCE Etruscan statue, in 2007 radiocarbon and thermoluminescence analyses proved that it was created in the early Middle Ages.¹⁶ All these strongly suggest

that the classical version of the story is a Hellenistic rationalization of the ancient totemic myth, created in an age when the founding father's descent from an animal was no longer regarded as trustworthy.

The fratricide motif should be regarded as a specific case of the twins myth, which is even more widespread, serving as an etiological explanation for the existence of the exogamous moieties' kinship system.¹⁷ Thus, Remus and Romulus's story probably reflects the division of early Romans into the moieties of wolf and woodpecker, since the twins' father Mars was originally worshiped as a woodpecker.

Wanda

After the murder of the elder brother and the exile of the younger, their sister Wanda became sole heiress:

So great was the love of the deceased ruler [Krak] over the senate, the mighty, and the whole people, that the only remaining child—a girl whose name was Wanda—was entrusted with the father's rule.

She was far superior to all by her beautiful figure as well as by the charm that nature bestowed on her; she was not merely generous, but extravagant. The bravest of the wise men were amazed at her advice, and the cruelest of the enemies gently smiled upon her. Hence, when a tyrant of the Leman people [Alemani, i.e. German] was going to destroy this people, trying to seize the throne as vacant, he succumbed to her unprecedented charm rather than to a force of arms. As soon as his army saw the queen in front of it, it was suddenly smashed as with a ray of sunshine. As if commanded, all abandoned the fight, deprived of hostile feelings; they claimed to be dodging sacrilege, not fighting; they were not afraid of humans but were moved to worship the superhuman majesty in Wanda. Their king, touched by the anguish of love or indignation, or both, said:

“Wanda of the sea,
Wanda of the land,
Let Wanda command the clouds,
To the immortal gods for her [people],
Let her be sacrificed,

And I for you, my dignitaries, make a sacrifice to solemn subterranean gods so that you and your successors will age in an unbroken line under the female rule!”

No more he said; and having fixed the point below his breast, he fell on the keen sword, still warm with his red blood.¹⁸

From her, they say, comes the name of the River Vandal, because it was the center of her kingdom; hence, all those who were under her power are called Vandals. Because she wanted to marry no one, but she valued virginity above marriage, she left the world without a successor. And yet long after her, the kingdom remained without a king.¹⁹

As we see, according to Kadłubek, the Aleman prince committed suicide, but Wanda lived happily ever after, remaining, however, unmarried and childless. According to *The Chronicle of Great Poland*, Wanda threw herself into the Vistula, performing a self-sacrifice to the gods. Jan Długosz repeats this latter version, but adds the name of the Aleman prince, whom he called Rytygier.

The confusing derivation of the name of the Vistula River from the name Wanda led Henryk Łowmiański to a hypothesis that Wanda's original name was Wisława,²⁰ but there is no evidence to substantiate this view. It is more likely that Kadłubek assumed that the old name for Vistula was Vandal. Wanda was probably an eponymous heroine of the Germanic Vandals tribe, which lived in the territory of modern-day Poland before the great migration age. In the historical tradition of Wiślanie, she replaced the originally Slavic Libuše/Lybed'—the swan. Curiously, in modern times, this Germanic Wanda became a symbol of Polish resistance to German expansionism.

Let us consider the contribution that the Wiślanie historical tradition makes to reconstructing the proto-Slavic totemic myth. This tribal tradition preserved the fullest form of the mythical narrative, which enfolds violent aspects of the story: patricide (reconstructed), fratricide (explicitly mentioned), and suicide (of the Aleman prince, later also attributed to Wanda). However, the repertoire of names is thinner than in the Bohemian version. Only raven (Krak) survived here, while the snake and swan were superimposed by other names. The reduplication of the name of Krak is found along with the introduction of the Germanic Wanda. Krak as the eponymous hero of Cracow, which replaced Wiślica as a capital of Little Poland, naturally became the central figure in the narrative. The snake associated with the hostile Czechs was transformed from an ancestral figure to a monstrous dragon.

Łędzianie

The Łędzianie tribe dominated other Polish tribes some time before the rise of the Piast dynasty, which was based in Gniezno in Great Poland. For this reason, the name for Poland in all neighboring languages (East Slavic, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and Turkish), except for German, is derived from the name Łędzianie, and not from the name Polanie of Great Poland. The eponymous hero of Łędzianie was called Leszek, and the Scandinavian name of Poland—Læsir—is derived from his name. Leszek is now regarded as a diminutive form of the name Lech, but Polish medieval chroniclers used its Latinized form, Lestco, as a name in its own right. Wincenty Kadłubek derived this name from the Old Polish word *leść*—"crafty." Kadłubek inserted the historical tradition of Łędzianie as a connecting link between the foundation legends of Wiślanie and the legendary history of Great Poland. In order to fill a chronological gap, Kadłubek split this legendary tribal hero into three separate persons (as he did with Krak).

Leszek I

Kadłubek placed Leszek I in the age of Alexander the Great and attributed to him an elaborate military deception²¹ as an etiological explanation for his name:

Since everyone doubted the possibility of salvation, someone who had been working as a goldsmith drew helmet and buckler shapes from wood or bark; some of them were coated with silver glitter, and others with gold. Shields that were stuck with litharge seemed to be made of silver, and bile [seemed] gold. He took them to the top of the mountain facing the sun to make them shine more brightly. *Argyraspides* ("silver shields" in Greek), invincible host of Alexander (Justin, *Epitome* 14.2), seeing them, suspected that they had ranks of the greatest order. Therefore, they fell headlong out of the camp, ran out in all directions here and there searching for the enemy, thinking that they had scattered. The master had previously set fire to these images so that no trace of the deception could be seen, and ordered a large number of people to hide in wait. The first part of the scattered, those who had fallen into the ambush, were kidnapped and recklessly cut; the winners wore the armor of the dead and pretended to be companions of the *argyraspides*, so that many of these warriors joined them, all fell pierced with the edge of the sword, so that none of them escaped.²²

Therefore, the inventor of so salutary a trick was established as the head of the homeland, which he had rescued, and soon afterwards, supported by virtue, he was decorated with high royal dignity. He was named Lestek [Leszek], that is "crafty" [Old Polish *leść*], since he had destroyed more enemies by duplicity than by force.²³

Jan Długosz called Leszek I Przemyśl and replaced the fantastic Alexander with the more realistic Moravians and Hungarians. Modern scholars readily adopted this version, since it seemed to be supported by the Royal Frankish Annals, where a certain Slavic chieftain, Lecho, is said to have fought Charlemagne:

In the same year [805] he [Charlemagne] sent his army with his son [Charles the Younger] into the land of Slavs, which are called Bohemians. He laid waste to the country and killed their leader named Lecho; and returning to the forest of Vosges [mountains] he came to the Emperor in a place called Camp [Champ-sur-Barse].²⁴

This Bohemian Lecho, of course, has nothing to do with the Polish Leszek, and his name is probably simply the Old Czech title *lech*, which the Frankish author misinterpreted as a personal name. Kadłubek's story has no historical basis apart from the reference to litharge, which may be related to lead mining at Olkusz in Little Poland.

Leszek II

The story of the rise to power of Leszek II provides an alternative explanation for the origin of his name:

Then there was the second prince of the same name who was called Lestek [crafty] for another reason. When Poland, without a king, fought for the successor to the throne and was almost plunged into turbulent riots because every leader wanted to kill the other for tyranny (Justin, *Epitome* 5.3). When these disputes continued for a long time and with great dangers, finally, the election of the prince was submitted to the ruling of the ordinary people; of course, those whose honesty was not disputed and those far from any competition. Both sides were committed by oath. The voters swore that they would not act for personal reasons, and they would not stray from the [right] way, seduced by a desire for profit, and they would not be frightened by the more powerful into [carrying out] what they considered useful for the good of the whole. The pretenders swore that no one would be allowed to deviate from the ruling of the electors. And because it is not easy to settle conflicting wishes, discussions continued for a long time, but the answer was brief: "Our extensive vineyard"—they said—"is destroyed under the dirty hooves of ruffled horses; this vineyard is our kingdom, groomed horses are our pride on which there is as much stain, as many contradictory claims. So let us choose a race field, put a pole [as a target], and the rider whose spotted horse will reach the goal first, he must be recognized as the king!" Everyone agreed, everyone applauded, everyone accepted the unanimous verdict, but execution of the judgment was postponed for the next day.

It seems to me that I have seen the enthusiasm of those, the cunning of those, the drills of riders, the contradictory desires. But where many trusted in agility, one relied on cunning, confident in the help of Vulcan's art. He cast iron spikes throughout the race field at intervals, carefully marking the exact width of the path so that when blade edges stopped the others, he, racing on this path faster, would win the prize.

"But the art of fraud and deception mastered the art of deceit."

Two youngsters of low descent decided to compete. They promised [each other] a certain amount of money, and pledged that the one defeated would not dare to call the winner by any other title than king. And when paying courtesy of each other, they said:

"We want to win our victory in the field where we are fighting for the kingdom."

Right in their first attempt they stopped and sat down, spikes piercing their feet to the bone. After staring at the nails for a long moment, they finally discovered the deception. When they saw a cunningly marked path, they set the same trap, and pretended not to know a thing.

And since, as often happens, the opportunity often arouses desire for something of which one had never dreamed, both wanted to be faster, each

of them individually considered the idea. The foretold day came; the dignitaries of the venerable senate were sitting next to the excellent men and smiling flower of youth. Among the others, or rather before the others, was the master of the trick, confident in the help of the [marked] path. Also one of the other riders was no less hopeful, [since] he had secured the hooves of his horse with iron horseshoes. Meanwhile, the remaining one [stood] apart from the other and turning away from the crowd he pondered, quietly sighing. After the first, the second, and the third signal everyone jumped ahead, [and] this one trotted across, raising laughter in the crowd. And while all of them stepped on the treacherous spikes, he has gone in a circuitous path, hurrying to the designated pole, but his companion reached the goal before him, and ominously was [already] greeted as a king. The assembly, astonished at the sight of the hobnailed horse, decided that he was the perpetrator. And because tricks are not good for anyone, they condemned him to mortal torment, and he was torn to pieces. And the other, the laughing stock, by the judgment of the jury, reached royal authority.²⁵

This story was probably invented by Kadłubek himself, and Stanisław Witkowski demonstrated its classical sources.²⁶ Many Greek and Roman authors attributed a “stratagem” with spikes planted on the battlefield to various ancient military leaders. The earliest perpetrator to whom this device was attributed was the Athenian general Nicias fighting the Syracusans during the Peloponnesian War:

While the Athenians were encamped by the Olympieium, Nicias ordered his men to fix wooden spikes by night in the level ground, which extended in front of the camp. On the next day Ecphantus, the Syracusan commander, attacked with his cavalry, but he was entirely routed, as the spikes stuck into the horses’ hooves with every step that they advanced. Many of them, who were unable to make good their retreat, were cut down by the peltasts, who had been provided with hard stiff shoes for that purpose.²⁷

However, all Greek authors call this device *τρίβολοι*, while Kadłubek used another Greek word—*oxygona* (ὀξυγώνα). Therefore, his exact intermediate source remains unknown.

Leszek III

Kadłubek placed Leszek III (son of Leszek II) in the age of Julius Caesar. Defeating the famous Roman, Leszek III received Julius’s sister, Julia, in marriage:

Finally Julius, glad to ally him [Leszek III] with matrimonial ties, gave him his sister Julia in marriage. Bavaria passed from her brother as a dowry, and the Serbian province—as a wedding gift from her husband. She founded two towns, one of which she called in the name her brother Julius (now Lubusz), and the second she called Julia after her own name (now called Lublin).²⁸

The Chronicle of Great Poland replaced Lublin with Wolin following the local Pomeranian tradition that associated this town with Julius Caesar:²⁹ Wolin was called, using the Latinized form, Julin, and a spear attributed to Julius Caesar was shown in a pagan temple at this site in the early twelfth century:

Julin, which had been founded by Julius Caesar and called after him, and in which his spear was kept, fixed on a column of great size in order to preserve his memory, was accustomed to hold a festival in honor of a certain idol at the beginning of the year, which was accompanied by dancing.³⁰

However, Kadłubek's attribution of the name of Lubusz, otherwise associated with the Czech Libuše, and the name Lublin, previously associated with the Croatian Lobelos, to Julia clearly shows that in his narrative, Julia replaced the original figure of the female swan. Thus, the eponymous hero of *Lędzianie* appeared as the human spouse of the Swan Maiden in their tribal version of the pan-Slavic totemic myth. Note that the Scandinavian *Völund* was a smith, just like Leszek I, and according to Jan Długosz, his original name was *Przemysł*, which is the Polish equivalent of the Czech *Přemysl*, consort of *Libuše*.

Kadłubek claimed that Popiel I, whom he called Pompilius, following the Latinized form, was Leszek III's son, thus connecting the historical tradition of *Lędzianie* with the historical tradition of Great Poland, since according to the latter, Popiel II, son of Popiel I, was overthrown by Ziemowit, son of Piast and the founder of the Piast dynasty. This association is artificial, since Popiel ruled in Gniezno, the capital of Great Poland, and later the first capital of Poland, which Mieszko I, the great-grandson of Ziemowit, united in about 960.

Thus, the historical tradition of *Lędzianie* introduces the figure of the Swan Maiden, which is missing from the tradition of *Wiślanie*, where it was replaced by the Germanic Wanda, completing the totemic myth of Little Poland.

Notes

- 1 Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay-Jędrzejewiczowa, "Legenda o Krakusie mistrza Wincentego i pogromcy smoka, św. Jerzy w 'Legenda Aurea' Pawła de Voragine," *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego na Obczyźnie* 5, London, 1954–1955, pp. 56–63.
- 2 K. Römer, "Podanie o Kraku i Wandzie," *Biblioteka Warszawska* 3, 1876, pp. 1–26; K. Kumaniecki, "Podanie o Wandzie w świetle źródeł starożytnych," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 22–23, 1925–1926, pp. 46–55.
- 3 Misrż Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, przełożyła i opracowała Brygida Kübris, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1996, 1.5 (pp. 13–14).
- 4 Marian Plezia, "Legenda o smoku wawelskim," *Rocznik Krakowski* 42, 1971, pp. 21–32.
- 5 *The History of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, edited from five manuscripts, with an English translation and notes, by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Cambridge, 1889, p. 108.
- 6 Irving A. Agus, *Urban Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe. A Study of Organized Town-Life in North-western Europe during the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries based on the Responsa Literature*, New York, 1965 (reprint: Leiden, 1968), vol. 1. pp. 93–94.

- 7 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 4.2 (p. 177).
- 8 R. Küna, *Sagen aus Schlesien*, Leipzig, 1914, p. 49.
- 9 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.7 (pp. 15–16).
- 10 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harab Myth (Sources from the Ancient Near East 2/3)*, Malibu, 1984.
- 11 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.5 (pp. 14–15).
- 12 Ovid, *The Art of Love (Ars amatoria)*, translated by A. S. Kline, 2001, 1.655–656.
- 13 *Joannis Dlugossii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, eds. Ignatius Żegota Pauli and Aleksander Przedziecki, vol. 1, Kraków, 1867, 1.3. (p. 69).
- 14 Plutarch, *Romulus*, 2–3 (Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3C, Leiden, 1958, No. 817, Fr. 1, p. 894; No. 820, Fr. 2, p. 895).
- 15 T. Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 10.23.
- 16 John Hooper, “Radio-carbon tests reveal true age of Rome’s she-wolf—and she’s a relative youngster,” *The Guardian*, July 10, 2008.
- 17 Александр М. Золотарев, *Родовой строй и первобытная мифология*, Москва, 1964.
- 18 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Brookes More, Boston, 1922, 4.162–163. In the original, these words are said by Thisbe in feminine language.
- 19 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.7 (pp. 16–17).
- 20 Henryk Łowmiański, *Początki Polski*, vol. 4, Warszawa, 1970, p. 324.
- 21 See J. Banaszkiewicz, “Podanie o Lestku i Złotniku. Mistrza Wincentego ‘Kronika polska’ I 9, 11,” *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 30, 1987, pp. 39–50.
- 22 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.9 (p. 21).
- 23 Ibid. 1.11 (pp. 23–24).
- 24 “Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi,” *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historicis separatim editi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, Hannover, 1895, p. 120.
- 25 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.13 (pp. 24–27).
- 26 Stanisław Witkowski, “Podstęp Leszka z kolcami u Kadłubka i jego źródło,” *Księga pamiątkowa ku czi O. Balzera*, vol. 2, Lwów, 1925, pp. 677–690.
- 27 Polyaeus, *Stratagemata*, 1.39.2 (trans. R. Shepherd).
- 28 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.17. (p. 30).
- 29 Tadeusz Lehr-Splawiński, “O nazwie pomorskiego grodu Wolin-Julin u ujścia Odry,” *Rocznik Gdański* 7–8, 1935, p. 41.
- 30 Ebo and Herbordus, *The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, 1060–1139*, translated by Charles H. Robison, London, 1920, Ebo 3.1. (p. 108).

20 Great Poland

The historical tradition of Great Poland is the most problematic. The Piast dynasty (possibly of Scandinavian origin) suppressed legends about the founding of Gniezno, the tribal capital of Polanie. The earliest Polish chronicler, Gallus Anonymus, was, first and foremost, the chronicler of the Piast dynasty. Therefore, the only piece of information that he provides apart from demonizing the previous ruler, Popiel, is the derivation of the name of Gniezno from the Polish word for nest—*gniazdo*:

In the city of Gniezno (the name of which means ‘nest’ in Slavic [*gniazdo*]) lived a duke named Popiel, who had two sons.¹

The Chronicle of Great Poland calls the founder of Gniezno Lech and provides some explanation for the origin of city’s name:

Among the Pannonians, therefore, three brothers were born to Pan, prince of the Pannonians. The first was named Lech, the second Rus, and the third Czech. These three held the three kingdoms of the Lechites [Poles], Ruthenians, and Czechs (or Bohemians). . . . Afterward, Lech and his offspring, walking along the broadest groves, where the Polish kingdom was, came to a place with very fertile soil, abounding with fish and wild animals, put his tent there, intending to build for himself and for his followers first a dwelling, and said: “Let’s build a nest.” That’s why this place (up to the present time) is called “Gniezno,” that is, “the nest.”²

The story of Lech, Rus, and Czech, sons of Pan, does not belong to the genuine historical tradition of Great Poland. Rather, it reflects the historiosophic views of the chronicler about the origin of the Slavs from Pannonia, and the affinity of three Slavic nations: Poles, Ruthenians (as East Slavs were known in the fourteenth century in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), and Czechs. However, the derivation of the name of the city from the word for nest can be substantiated by the numismatic evidence. In a Latin legend on a coin struck by Bolesław I the Brave (992–1025), Gniezno is called Gnezdum, and in a Hebrew legend on a bracteates of Mieszko III the Old (1138–1202) it is called KNZDN (גנזדן)³ or GNZDN (גנזדן).⁴ Both forms are clearly derived from the word *gniazdo*.

Jan Długosz repeats the story of Lech as a founder of Gniezno, but adds eagles nesting on trees at the site of the future town:

He [Lech] set up his camp there, and this place, by the decision of both Prince Lech himself and all the elders under his authority, was approved and elected as the first residence of the kingdom and the capital city, and he appropriated it and granted the Lechite the Polish name of Gniezno, which means “the nest” in the popular language. For the prince and father of the Poles, Lech, having set up camp here, for the first time stopped wandering and decided to create there for himself and for all his elders a nest, to establish a princely residence. He also learned that the eagles nested there on tall and slender trees.⁵

It is possible, of course, that Długosz added eagles himself in order to embellish the story, but an image of a white eagle served as the heraldic symbol of Great Poland, and later of all Poland. An image of some bird, possibly an eagle, appears for the first time on a coin minted by Bolesław I the Brave. The combination of an image of a dragon with two birds on the Hebrew bracteates of Mieszko III can also be interpreted as a symbol of his rule over Great Poland and Little Poland, symbolized by eagles and a dragon, respectively.

The bird images are schematic and their identification is disputed: a peacock⁶ and doves are also possible. However, Wincenty Kadłubek mentioned an eagle as the heraldic symbol of Poland.⁷

When the long fight was over, the people of Kazimierz, one by one, hurried [and] mourned the star of their glory that seems to have gone out. However, seeing the sign of the victorious eagle happily breaking through dead bodies, they grew proud of a victory, and viewed the pride of their prince [Vsevolod of Belsk] more gloriously.⁸

Iconographically, an eagle as a symbol of Poland appeared for the first time on a seal impression of Przemysł II in 1295.⁹ However, this eagle is different from the earlier images; it is clearly an imitation of the German black eagle, which was used as a coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire starting with the reign of Henry VI (1190–1197). The German eagle, in turn, is based on the Roman *Aquila*—military insignia in a form of a bronze eagle on a pole with the number of a legion attached. The Serbian double-headed white eagle, as well as all other double-headed heraldic eagles (Russian, Austrian, Albanian, and Montenegrin) are derived from the Byzantine model.

Even without Jan Długosz’s addition about nesting eagles, the words of Lech in *The Chronicle of Great Poland* (“Let’s build a nest”) suggest that the founder of Gniezno was himself originally an eagle. The problem is that apart from the heraldic use, there is no any other supportive evidence for the totemic role of the eagle in European folklore. The only encouraging sign is the appearance of the eagle in the role of the totemic ancestor paired with the raven or the swan among several non-European peoples. The eagle and the raven of a Chukchi folk tale shared a wife following the Chukchi polyandric customs.¹⁰ Tlingits were subdivided into the

moieties of Yeil (raven) and Ch'aak', which was identified as an eagle among the northern Tlingit and as a wolf among the southern Tlingit.¹¹ Irkut-Buryats living on the Olkhon Island on Lake Baikal regarded the eagle as their totemic ancestor,¹² just as the Khor-Buryats regarded the swan.

Thus, we can tentatively assume that the totemic ancestor of Polanie in Great Poland was the white eagle. Its original name, however, remains unknown, since Lech is a secondary appellation, being derived from the Old Czech title. It is possible that this title was also in use in Great Poland in prehistoric times, since there is Lech's Hill (Wzgórze Lecha or Góra Lecha) at Gniezno, also called King's Hill (Góra Królewska). If this interpretation is correct, the original pan-Slavic totemic myth can be reconstructed as follows: the raven killed his father, the snake, and was killed in turn by his younger brother, the white eagle, who was exiled and founded Gniezno in Great Poland.

Notes

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- 2 *Chronica Poloniae maioris. Kronika wielkopolska*, ed. and commentary by Brygida Kürbis, Warszawa, 1970, prologue.
- 3 Marian Gumowski, *Hebräische Münzen im mittelalterischen Polen*, Graz, 1975, no. 27, p. 39 (plate I).
- 4 Dobrochna Gorlińska, *Żydz w administracji skarbowej polskich władców czasu rozbięcia dzielnicowego*, Kraków, 2015, pp. 47, 261.
- 5 *Joannis Długossii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, eds. Ignatius Żegota Pauli and Aleksander Przezdziecki, vol. 1, Kraków, 1867, 1.3 (p. 59).
- 6 Stanisław Suchodolski, "Orzeł czy paw? Jeszcze o denarze Bolesława Chrobrego z napisem PRINCES POLONIE," *Inter Orientem et Occidentem. Studia z dziejów Europy Środkowowschodniej ofiarowane Prof. Janowi Tyszkiewiczowi*, Warszawa, 2002, pp. 1–18.
- 7 Tomasz Panfil, "Orzeł na denarze Bolesława Chrobrego—pochodzenie i znaczenie symbol," *Biuletyn Numizmatyczny*, 1999, pp. 18–23; Borys Paszkiewicz, "Od symbolu do herbu. Orły polskie na monetach średniowiecznych," *Orzeł Biały. Herb państwa polskiego*, ed. S. K. Kuczyński, Warszawa, 1996, pp. 15–32.
- 8 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 4.14. (p. 215).
- 9 Aleksandra Jaworska, *Orzeł Biały – herb państwa polskiego*, Warszawa, 2002.
- 10 E. M. Мелетинский, *Палеоазиатский мифологический эпос. Цикл ворона*, Москва, 1979, p. 28.
- 11 *Ibid.* pp. 114–115.
- 12 *Сказания бурят, записанные разными собирателями*, издано на средства хамбо-ламы Д. Г. Гомбоева, Иркутск, 1890, pp. 80–81.

21 Kiev

The Russian Primary Chronicle reports the following legend about the founding of Kiev:

While the Polyanians lived apart and governed their families (for before the time of these brothers, there were already Polyanians, and each lived with his gens on his own lands, ruling his kinsfolk), there were three brothers, Kiy, Shchek, and Khoriv, and their sister—Lybed'. Kiy lived upon the hill where the Borichev trail now is, Shchek dwelt upon the hill named Shchekovitsa, while on the third resided Khoriv, after whom this hill is named Khorevitsa. They built a town and named it Kiev after their oldest brother. Around the town lay a wood and a great pine-forest in which they used to catch wild beasts. These men were wise and prudent; they were called Polyanians, and there are Polyanians descended from them living in Kiev to this day.

Some ignorant persons have claimed that Kiy was a ferryman, for near Kiev there was at that time a ferry from the other side of the river, in consequence of which people used to say, "To Kiy's ferry." Now if Kiy had been a mere ferryman, he would never have gone to Tsar'grad [Constantinople]. He was then the chief of his kin, and it is related what great honor he received from the Emperor in whose reign he visited the imperial court. On his homeward journey, he arrived at the Danube. The place pleased him and he built a small town, wishing to dwell there with his kinsfolk. But those who lived nearby would not grant him this privilege. Yet even now the dwellers by the Danube call this town Kievets. When Kiy returned to Kiev, his native city, he ended his life there; and his brothers Shchek and Khoriv, as well as their sister Lybed', died there also.¹

Kiy, of course, is the eponymous hero of Kiev. This name may be a patronymic of one of the signatures of the so-called Kievan Letter—a Hebrew letter written in early tenth-century Kiev and discovered in the Cairo *genizah*.² The editors read this name as כהן בר קיבר גוסטיאטא—"Gostiata son of KYBR priest (KHN)"—and interpreted the patronymic KYBR as reference to the Khazarian tribe of Kavar (Κάβαροι), which Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentioned.³ However, since the name KYBR is not found anywhere else and an ethnic Kavar is not congruent with the designation "priest" (the priesthood transmitted in the Jewish tradition through

a strictly agnatic line of descendants of Aharon), Abram Torpusman proposed that this name be read as *גוסטיא בר כי בר כהן*—"Gostiata son of Kiy son of Cohen."⁴ This reading is problematic too, since this would be the only name among the other signatures with a patronymic and a papponymic, while the two other names are accompanied with the designations "priest" (Cohen) and Levite (Levy). However, the Talmudic ruling prescribes that the "triple" name (personal name, patronymic, and papponymic) should be used in signatures on documents in a case where two persons with identical names and patronymics are present in the same community.⁵ In this case, we may assume that the Slavic names Gostiata and Kiy were quite common names in the Jewish community of Kiev in the early tenth century.

The names of Kiy's two brothers, Shchek and Khoriv, served as etiological explanations for the names of two Kievan hills: Shchekovitsa and Khorevitsa. Shchek means "snake" and has already been discussed in connection with Čech. The names Khoriv and Khorevitsa are clearly derived from the biblical Mount Horeb (Hebrew *Horev*), and since the legend refers to pre-Christian times, this name could only have been borrowed from the Hebrew Bible during the Khazar rule in Kiev in the ninth century.⁶

Their sister Lybed' is the swan whose name was discussed in connection with Libuše. At Kiev, her name served as an etiological explanation for the River Lybed', which is a tributary of the Dnieper. Slavic settlers from Kiev brought with them this hydronym to Vladimir, where the River Lybed' is a tributary of the Rpen' River (itself a tributary of the Kliaz'ma River) and to Peryaslav Riazanski (modern-day Riazan'), where this name was applied to a tributary of the Trubezh River (a tributary of the Oka). The Name Trubezh, as well as the name of the town, were also brought from the south—from the Trubezh River, a tributary of the Dnieper and Peryaslav Russki (modern-day Peryaslav Khmel'nitski). The third Trubezh along with the third Peryaslav (modern-day Pereslavl' Zaleski) is situated in the Yaroslavl' region.⁷

Thus, the names of two of the four siblings, legendary founders of Kiev, have a clear pan-Slavic totemic background. This background makes any attempts to find the "historical Kiy" futile.

Notes

- 1 *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA, 1953, pp. 54–55.
- 2 Nornam Golb and Omeljan Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, Ithaca, NY-London, 1982.
- 3 *De Administrando Imperio by Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 39 (pp. 174–175).
- 4 Abram Torpusman, "Slavic names in a Kiev Manuscript from the First Half of the 10th Century," *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, vol. 2, ed. Aaron Demsky, Ramat-Gan, 1999, pp. 171–175.
- 5 *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra*, 172a.
- 6 Владимир Я. Петрухин, "Город и сакральное пространство: библейский миф в начальном русском летописании," *Сакральная топография средневекового города*, Москва, 1998, pp. 23–30.
- 7 Александр А. Никольский, "Топонимическая загадка: три Переяславля на Трубеже," *Материалы к исследованию по рязанскому краеведению*, vol. 17, Рязань, 2008, pp. 217–220.

22 Croatia

Constantine Porphyrogenitus tells the story of the Croats' migration into the Roman province of Dalmatia twice: in sections 30 and 31 of his treatise *De Administrando Imperio*.¹ The two stories partially contradict each other. According to the first story, the Croats migrated on their own initiative, while according to the second story the Emperor Heraclius invited them. In section 30, Porinos is named as their prince, who is said to have adopted Christianity. According to section 31, however, this prince was named Porgas. Both sections belong to the so-called "Balkan file," probably written by Leo VI, Constantine VII's father.² The source of neither section is known. It seems that section 30 is based on the Croatian historical tradition, but section 31 is derived from some Byzantine source. The first story also contains the names of the seven siblings who led the Croats into Dalmatia:

But the Croats at that time were dwelling beyond Bavaria, where the Belocroats [White Croats] are now. From them split off a family of five brothers, Kloukas and Lobelos and Kosentzis and Mouchlo and Chrobatos, and two sisters, Touga and Bouga, who came with their folk to Dalmatia and found the Avars in possession of that land.³

Chrobatos is obviously the eponymous hero of the Croats. As for the other names, Henri Grégoire proposed that these are place names in Little Poland and Slovakia, thus delineating the original homeland of the White Croats: Kloukas stands for Cracow, Lobelos for Lublin, Kosentzis for Košice, and Bouga for the Bug River⁴ (no explanation was offered for Mouchlo and Touga). In our opinion, this identification is true only in an indirect way—through the names of the pan-Slavic totemic ancestral figures: Kloukas corresponds to the Czech Krok and to the Polish Krak—the raven—and Lobelos is a male counterpart of the Czech Libuše and the Kievan Lybed'—the swan. The distorted form of these names probably appeared in Constantine's treatise because of the thirdhand or even fourthhand nature of the information, which was ultimately derived from the Croatian historical tradition, but reached Constantine through several intermediary sources. Nevertheless, the Croatian material is the earliest evidence available for the names of pan-Slavic totemic heroes.

Notes

- 1 *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 30 (pp. 138–147), 31 (pp. 146–153).
- 2 See Chapter 2, “Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*.”
- 3 *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington, DC, 1993, 30 (pp. 142–143).
- 4 Henri Grégoire, “L’Origine et le nom des Croates et des Serbes,” *Byzantion* 17, 1944–1945, pp. 88–118.

23 Reconstruction

The reader may note that the source selection principles utilized in Part II differed from those in Part III. In our discussion of Slavic gods, we consistently avoided the use of sources written later than the thirteenth century and also forwent the use of Slavic folklore recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, both groups of sources were used in the discussion of Slavic foundation legends. It is important to stress that the reconstruction of proto-Slavic totemic myths is based solely on sources from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. Later sources, as well as folklore legends from across the globe, were brought into the discussion only as supportive evidence.

Our assumption is that the Slavic foundation legends reported in the Slavic national historiography go back to the proto-Slavic totemic myth. This assumption is based on the common repertoire of names found throughout the Slavic world: in West Slavic Bohemia and Poland, East Slavic Kiev, and South Slavic Croatia. All the available information on the distribution of these names can be presented in a series of genealogical charts (see Charts 3–7) drawn on the basis of reliable and relatively early sources: Cosmas of Prague for Bohemia, Wincenty Kadłubek for Little Poland, *The Russian Primary Chronicle* for Kiev, and Constantine Porphyrogenitus for Croatia. Only in the case of Great Poland, we had to rely upon relatively late sources (*The Chronicle of Great Poland* and Jan Długosz), but with solid reinforcement from earlier numismatic and epigraphic sources.

We should take into account that even these relatively early sources are late in respect to the mythological materials that they contain. All were written in the Christian age, and all report the ancient myths in a distorted form.

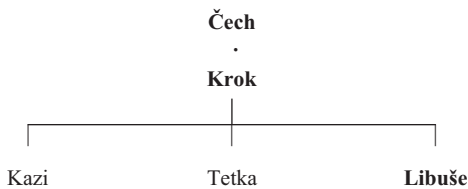


Chart 3 Bohemia

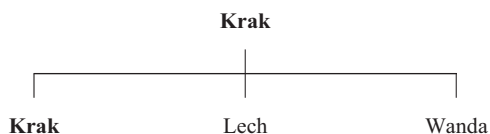


Chart 4 Little Poland (Wiślanie)

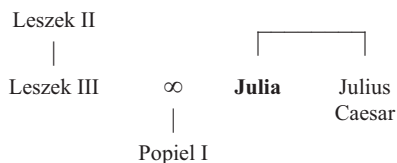


Chart 5 Little Poland (Łędzianie)



Chart 6 Kiev

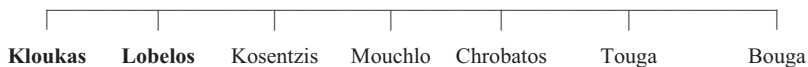


Chart 7 Croatia

Our conclusion about the totemic nature of the original myth, whose fragmentary variants survived in the sources, is based on the rather transparent etymologies of all the repeatedly appearing names of the founding heroes of various Slavic nations and towns: Čech/Shchek is the snake, Krok/Krak/Kloukas is the raven, and Libuše/Lybed'/Lobelos is the swan. The white eagle appearing as a heraldic symbol of Great Poland can be added to this group.

The totemism is not the animals' worship. As Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated in his classical study, totemism is the translation of the social code into zoological symbols.¹ In other words, members of various exogamous clans and moieties, and even of different endogamous tribes, did not differ from each other in their physical appearance. Therefore, in order to distinguish themselves from each other visibly, they claimed an ancestry from different species of animals

called totems in the Ojibwe language of the Algonquin family in North America. However, since all of them spoke the same language or closely related tribal dialects, their totemic animals formed a “totemic family” and were regarded as kin.

The proto-Slavic totemic myth can be reconstructed on the basis of the comparison of various local variants (mainly the Bohemian and Little Poland versions) as follows: the common Slavic Forefather, the snake, was killed by his son, the raven, who was killed in turn by his brother, the white eagle. The latter was exiled for the fratricide and sovereignty passed to their sister, the swan. With the separation of different Slavic tribes into distinct ethnic groups, every one of the members of this totemic family (see Chart 8) came to be regarded as an ancestor of one or more of these ethnic groups. The snake was regarded the forefather of the Czechs, the raven the ancestor of the tribe of Wiślanie in Little Poland, the white eagle became an emblem of Great Poland, and the swan became associated with the land of Lubusz on the mid-Oder and with the town of Lublin in the tribal territory of Łędzianie in Little Poland.

The zoomorphic Northern Iranian pantheon, consisting of the bird-like sun, the composite animal (winged dog) Simar’gl, and Mokosh’ the bitch, was easily incorporated into the Eastern Slavic “totemic family.” The bitch fitted in the Slavic totemic mythology especially well, since the dog was originally regarded the ancestral animal of North Iranian Saka tribes.

The oak should be also added to this totemic group, since this tree was considered among ancient Slavs, Balts, and Thracians as the earthly personification of celestial lightning. However, this mythological motif was forgotten among ancient Slavs at a very early stage, surviving only in pagan Lithuania until the late fourteenth century. Procopius erroneously interpreted this figure in the sixth century in the monotheistic terms as “one god, the maker of the lightning (ἁστραπῆς δημιουργὸν), [who] is alone lord of all things.”²

The ancient Slavic religion was different from the polytheistic religions of the neighboring Celtic, Germanic, and Finnish tribes. The closest parallels to the Slavic totemic cults are found among the Hungarians, ancient Turks, and the Wusun people. The Hungarians believed that the ancestor of their ruling Árpád dynasty, Álmos, was son of the *turul*-bird, identified as either a falcon or a hawk.³ According to the Turkic legend recorded in Chinese sources, the gray she-wolf nursed a wounded boy who later married her and fathered Ashina, half-man, half-wolf—the ancestor of the ruling clan of ancient Turks.⁴ Especially instructive is

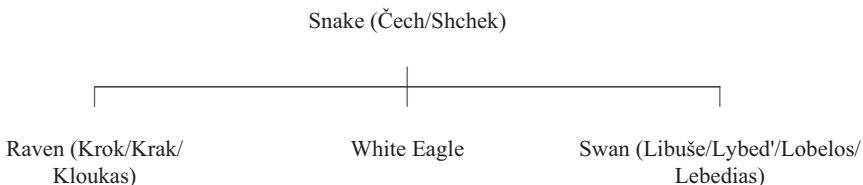


Chart 8 Slavic totemic family

the Wusun version. The Wusun people, of Indo-Iranian origin, lived in the Tarim basin in Central Asia in the second century BCE and later migrated in the Ili Valley. In Chinese, Wusun means “grandsons of a raven,” but according to the Chinese sources, their prince Liejiaomi was nursed by the she-wolf after the murder of his father Nandoumi.⁵ All this probably reflects the division of Wusun into the totemic moieties of the raven and the wolf.

The similarity between the Wusun and the Turkic totemic myths and the Roman legend of Remus and Romulus is striking. In fact, the original Roman religion provides yet another parallel to the process of gradual adjustment of an ancient totemic cult to the polytheistic religions of neighboring peoples—a process that in the second half of the tenth century impacted the Slavic religion between the Oder and the Elbe and in Kiev. All Roman gods, except for Jupiter (the common Indo-European *Dyēus-pətēr) and Mars (originally a woodpecker) were of foreign origin: the Etruscan Juno (Uni), Saturn (Satre), Minerva (Menrva), Vulcan (Velchans) and Neptune (Nethuns), the Sicilian Venus (of Eryx) and Ceres (of Enna), Sabine Janus and Quirinus, the Latin Diana of Aricia, Liber and Vesta of Lavinium. The Roman totemic myth can be reconstructed on the basis of foundation legends, just as is the case with the Slavic religion.

Christian observers tended to interpret totemic cults without a polytheistic pantheon as monotheistic religions. John Plano Carpini, the papal legate of Innocent IV to the Mongolian Great Khan Güyük, described the religion of the Mongols in the following text:

They believe in one God, and they believe that He is the maker of all things visible, and invisible; and that it is He who is the giver of the good things of this world as well as the hardships; they do not, however, worship Him with prayers or praises or any kind of ceremony. Their belief in God does not prevent them from having idols of felt made in the image of man, and these they place on each side of the door of the dwelling; below them they put a felt model of an udder, and they believe that these are the guardians of the cattle and grant them the benefit of milk and foals; yet others they make out of silken materials and to these they pay great honor. Some put them, in a beautiful covered cart before the door of their dwelling and if anyone steals anything from that cart he is put to death without any mercy.⁶

Similar seventeenth- and eighteenth-century descriptions of the religion of native North American tribes by missionaries⁷ led to the formulation of the deistic concept of monotheistic “natural religion,” which preceded the polytheistic cults invented by priests for self-serving reasons. Of course, neither the ancient Slavic “maker of the lightning,” nor the Turkic and Mongolian Blue Sky, nor the Sioux and Algonquin Great Spirit had anything to do with monotheism, but all these peoples’ (and many others’) totemic cults lacked polytheistic pantheons.

Southern Slavs and most of the Eastern and Western Slavs between the Dnieper and the Oder preserved these kinds of totemic cults until their Christianization. The appearance of Slavic totemic animals (raven, swan, and eagle) and even of

some mythological motifs (the Swan Maiden) among non-Indo-European peoples, such as the Turkic Bashkirs, the Mongolian Buryats, the Chukotko-Kamchatkan peoples of Northeast Asia, and even among the Native American Na-Dené and Amerind peoples of the northwestern coast, shows that Slavic totemic mythology goes back to a pre-Indo-European Nostratic or even Boreal past.

Only Western Slavs between the Oder and the Elbe and Eastern Slavs at Kiev invented polytheistic pantheons in the late tenth century in the course of their confrontation with Christianity. Kievan Prince Vladimir I initiated his religious reform in 980, and the Western Slavs of modern East Germany followed after the Great Slavic Revolt of 983. As practically all religious reformers do, the perpetrators of these reforms also presented these reforms not as innovations, but as the revival of ancient forgotten cults. They succeeded beyond their imagination: 1,000 years later, modern scholars of Slavic pagan religion took this claim at face value.

Notes

- 1 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham, Boston, 1963.
- 2 Procopius, *The Gothic War*, English translation by H. B. Dewing, London, vol. 4, 1954, 7.14.23.
- 3 Simon of Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, edited and translated by László Veszprémy and Frank Schaer with a study by Jenő Szűcs, Budapest, 1999, pp. 43, 81; *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle: Chronica de Gestis Hungarorum*, edited by Dezső Dercsényi, Corvina, 1970, 25 (p. 98).
- 4 Carter Vaughin Findley, *The Turks in World History*, Oxford, 2005, p. 38.
- 5 Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China. Han Dynasty II. Chapter 123. The Account of Ta-yüan*, New York, 1993, pp. 237–238.
- 6 “History of the Mongols by John of Plano Carpini,” *Mission to Asia*, ed. Christopher Dawson, Toronto-Buffalo-London, 1980, p. 9.
- 7 For example: Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps*, vol. 1, Paris, 1724, pp. 108–455.

Appendix 1

Indo-European hippomancy

Despite our conclusion that the Slavic pantheons were late and artificial creations heavily influenced by Christianity, and that the Slavic totemic myths go back to the pre-Indo-European age, traces of common Indo-European rituals can be found in the Slavic pagan religion. Hippomancy is an example of an Indo-European ritual that can be reconstructed with the help of Indian, Iranian, Greek, Roman, Germanic, Slavic, and Celtic evidence. Hippomancy is oracular prophecy based on a horse's behavior.

Horses played a central role in the Indo-European religion. Indo-Europeans probably domesticated the horse already in the age of their unity. The Finnish languages borrowed the common Indo-European word for horse—*Hek^wa*—in the form *hepo-* from a language where the original *k^w* became *p*, as in the Greek ἵππος or in the Celtic *epo-*. Semitic languages also borrowed this word in the form *sws* from the Luwian *aswas*, where the Indo-European *k^w* became *sw*. Composite half-human, half-horse mythological creatures—the Greek κένταυρος (a horse with a human torso) and the Indian *kinnara* (a human with a horse's head)—are of common Indo-European origin. Divine twin horsemen—the Indian Ashvins (*aśvinau*) and the Lithuanian *Ašvieniai*—are also common Indo-European figures. Other mythological Indo-European horse images include the Greek winged horse Pegasus, the Indian seven-headed horse Uccaiṣravā, and the Scandinavian eight-legged horse Sleipnir.

The earliest evidence regarding the Indo-European hippomantic ritual is found in ancient India, where it was called *aśvamedhā*—"horse sacrifice." The latest and richest evidence is Slavic. Let us examine the available information.

India

Aśvamedhā is first mentioned in the Black (*Kṛiṣṇa*) *Yajurveda*, one of the four *Vedas* ("knowledge" in Sanskrit)—the most sacred books of Hinduism: *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. The *Vedas* were recorded in writing in the second century BCE, but they were composed earlier—between the Aryan migration into India at about the twelfth or eleventh centuries BCE and the appearance of the first "heretical" teachings of Buddha and Mahavira in the sixth or fifth

centuries BCE. Because of the long period during which the *Vedas* were transmitted in oral form, several recensions of these texts developed. The two major recensions of the *Yajurveda* are called the “Black” (*Kṛiṣṇa*) and the “White” (*Śukla*). The ritual of *aśvamedhā* is thus described in the Black *Yadurveda*:

The eye of Prajapati swelled, that fell away, that became a horse; because it swelled (*āśvayat*), that is the reason why the horse (*āśva*) has its name. By the horse sacrifice the gods replaced it. He who sacrifices with the horse sacrifice makes Prajapati whole; verily he becomes whole; this is the atonement for everything, and the cure for everything. All evil by it the gods overcome; by it also the gods overcome (the sins of) Brahman-slaying; all evil he overcomes, he overcomes Brahman-slaying who sacrifices with the horse sacrifice, and he who knows it thus. It was the left eye of Prajapati that swelled; therefore they cut off from the horse on the left side, on the right from other animals. The mat is of reeds; the horse has its birthplace in the waters, the reed is born in the waters; verily he establishes it in its own birthplace. The *Stoma* is the fourfold one; the bee tore the thigh of the horse, the gods made it whole with the fourfold *Stoma*; in that there is the fourfold *Stoma*, (it is) to make whole the horse.¹

Be “pure for the winning of strength,” this is the *Anustubh* strophe; three *Anustubhs* make four *Gayatris*; in that there are three *Anustubhs*, therefore the horse when standing stands on three feet; in that there are four *Gayatri* is, therefore he goes putting down all four feet. The *Anustubh* is the highest of meters, the fourfold *Stoma* is the highest of *Stomas*, the three-night sacrifice the highest of sacrifices, the horse is the highest of animals; verily by the highest he makes him go to the highest state. It is the twenty-one-fold day, on which the horse is slain, there are twelve months, five seasons; these worlds are three; the twenty-one-fold (*Stoma*) is yonder sun; this is Prajapati, the horse is connected with Prajapati; verily he wins it straightway. The *Prstha* (*Stotra*) is of *Śakvari* verses to make the horse complete, there are various meters, different sets of animals are offered, both domesticated and wild; in that the *Prstha* is of *Śakvari* verses, (it is) to complete the horse. The *Saman* of the Brahman is that of *Prthuraśami*; by the rein the horse is restrained, a horse unrestrained and unsupported is liable to go to the furthest distance; (verily it serves) to restrain and support the horse. The *Achavaka*’s *Saman* is the *Samkrti*; the horse sacrifice is an extensive sacrifice; “who knows,” they say, “if all of it is done or not?” In that the *Achavaka*’s *Saman* is the *Samkrti*, (it serves) to make the horse whole, to win it entirely, to prevent interference. The last day is an *Atiratra* with all the *Stomas*, to obtain all, to conquer all; verily he obtains all, he conquers all with it.²

Prajapati is the “lord of creatures”—the creator of the world; his eye is the sun. Words left untranslated in the text are names of the Old Indian poetic meters.

The horse sacrifice is presented as redemption for the slaying of the Brahmins (*Brāhmaṇahatya*—“killing of a member of the priestly estate”), the ultimate crime in Indian tradition. The ritual of hippomancy as such is mentioned in the last lines of the second fragment. The king with his army follows the unrestrained horse, and when the horse crosses the border of the state, the king attacks the neighboring kingdom. After returning from the military campaign, the horse is sacrificed. The next stage of the *aśvamedhā* is described in the *Yajurveda* using such obscene language that the relevant passage was omitted in Victorian-era academic translations. It was distorted beyond recognition in translations into modern Indian and European languages that were printed in order to promote Hinduism. An English translation of this passage is found on the internet:

[The wives of the king surround the slain horse]

The Queen grieves thus: “O mother, no-one has taken me. The little horsie is asleep.”

The rest of the King’s wives say to the Queen: “O Queen, cover yourself and the horse with this cloth” and pray thus: “O horse, you are capable of impregnating me. I am ready. Take me.”

The priest covers the queen and the horse with a cloth.

The queen hugs the slain-horse saying thus: “Let us hold each other with our (hind) limbs.”

The priest says the following: “May the horse expel its sperm and may the Queen receive (the sperm).”

The priest recites: “O horse, place your male organ in between the legs of the queen. Excite the queen’s vagina so that it will receive your huge penis.” The Queen then places the horse’s limp penis in between her legs.

The Queen once again calls out aloud: “O mother, no-one has slept with me (*na mā yabhati*). This good-for nothing horse is fast asleep.”

The other women surrounding the slain horse and the queen respond thus: “O Queen, just like the one who, after collecting the bamboo poles from the forest ties them together first places them upright on the ground, lift your vagina and hold it up. Later, just like the one who sifts grain from the chaff exults when the cool wind blows, you must relax and exult.”

The Queen once again complains aloud about the somnolent horse to her mother.

All the other women say thus: “O Queen, grieve not. You may not be aware that you have been taken by the horse. Just like a slave-girl (*śudra*) who gets to sleep with her master (*arya*) and rejoices without expecting anything in return.”

“O Queen, rejoice, that the horse has accepted you.”

They say: “Here we see a female bird warbling around a male bird (even after mating). It is unsatisfied and restless. O Queen, you are behaving like that bird. This is not good.”

“You can rejoice and be happy that the horse has accepted you. Now please stop complaining about it.”

“O Queen. Have no doubt. Just like your father has done to your mother when they climbed on to a wooden cot, and your father entered her saying ‘I am placing my penis inside your vagina’, the horse has entered you. Have no doubt. Now, please get up.”³

Thus, the ritual of *aśvamedhā* comprises of three stages:

- 1 the ritual of hippomancy—the oracular prediction of the direction of the military expedition according to the route of the horse’s unrestrained running;
- 2 the horse sacrifice; and
- 3 the imitation of sexual intercourse with the dead horse that the queen performs.

The *aśvamedhā* ritual is described in both Indian national epics, *Mahabharata* (book 14) and *Ramayana* (twice, in book 1.10–15 and in book 7).

The earliest appearance of an *aśvamedhā* in historical sources is one performed by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga⁴ (185–149 BCE), and the latest was performed in 1715 by Sawai Jai Singh II,⁵ *Raja* of Jaipur.

Persia

Herodotus described an Old Persian hippomantic ritual in his account of Darius I gaining royal power in 522 BCE. According to the story, seven conspirators (Darius, Otanes, Intaphrenes, Gobryas, Hydarnes, Megabyzos, and Aspathines) killed King Smerdis (Bardiya), whom they declared to be an imposter, and after a discussion on their desired form of government, they decided how to select the next king:

And about the kingdom they [the seven conspirators] determined this, namely that the man whose horse should first neigh at sunrise in the suburb of the city when they were mounted upon their horses, he should have the kingdom.

Now Dareios had a clever horse-keeper, whose name was Oibares. To this man, when they had left their assembly, Dareios spoke these words: “Oibares, we have resolved to do about the kingdom thus, namely that the man whose horse first neighs at sunrise, when we are mounted upon our horses, he shall be king. Now therefore, if thou hast any cleverness, contrive that we may obtain this prize, and not any other man.” Oibares replied thus: “If, my master, it depends in truth upon this whether thou be king or no, have confidence so far as concerns this and keep a good heart, for none other shall be king before thee; such charms have I at my command.” Then Dareios said: “If then thou hast any such trick, it is time to devise it and not to put things off, for our trial is to-morrow.” Oibares therefore hearing this did as follows: when night was coming on he took one of the mares, namely that one which the horse of Dareios preferred, and this he led into the suburb of the city and tied her up; then he brought to her the horse of Dareios, and having for some

time led him round her, making him go so close by so as to touch the mare, at last he let the horse mount.

Now at dawn of day the six came to the place as they had agreed, riding upon their horses; and as they rode through by the suburb of the city, when they came near the place where the mare had been tied up on the former night, the horse of Dareios ran up to the place and neighed; and just when the horse had done this, there came lightning and thunder from a clear sky; and the happening of these things to Dareios consummated his claim, for they seemed to have come to pass by some design, and the others leapt down from their horses and did obeisance to Dareios.

Some say that the contrivance of Oibares was this, but others say as follows (for the story is told by the Persians in both ways), namely that he touched with his hands the parts of this mare and kept his hand hidden in his trousers; and when at sunrise they were about to let the horses go, this Oibares pulled out his hand and applied it to the nostrils of the horse of Dareios; and the horse, perceiving the smell, snorted and neighed.

So Dareios the son of Hystaspes had been declared king . . . And first he caused to be a carving in stone, and set it up; and in it there was the figure of a man on horseback, and he wrote upon it writing to this effect: "Dareios son of Hystaspes by the excellence of his horse," mentioning the name of it, "and of his horse-keeper Oibares obtained the kingdom of the Persians."⁶

Herodotus's main informer for this story was Zopyros, the great-grandson of one of the conspirators—Megabyzos (Bagabuxša)—who fled in the 440s BCE to Athens, where he met Herodotus.⁷ Zopyros probably relied on a family tradition, and, whatever the real circumstances of Darius's accession to power were, he most likely described a real Persian hippomantic ritual.

As we can see, Old Persian hippomancy differed considerably from the ancient Indian custom. The ritual is performed in stationary conditions, the oracle is based on the horse's neighing, not on the route of its run; sexual connotation is considerably weakened—the groom replaces the king, a hand replaces a penis, and, above all, there is no horse sacrifice. According to Herodotus, ancient Persians sacrificed white horses to the river Strymon on their way to Greece during Xerxes's expedition of 480 BCE,⁸ but there was no connection between this sacrifice and hippomancy.

Parthia

Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus provides yet another example of ancient Iranian hippomancy. In his account of the Parthian campaign that Gaius Cassius, the Roman governor of Syria in 49 CE, undertook, Tacitus describes a certain ritual reformed by the Parthian king, Gotarzes II (40–51):

Gotarzes meantime was offering vows to the local divinities on a mountain called Sambulos, with special worship of Hercules, who at a stated time bids the priests in a dream equip horses for the chase and place them near

the temple. When the horses have been laden with quivers full of arrows, they scour the forest and at length return at night with empty quivers, panting violently. Again the god in a vision of the night reveals to them the track along which he roamed through the woods, and everywhere slaughtered beasts are found.⁹

Sambulos Mountain is identified as the Rock of Behistun, where a bas-relief of Gotarzes II and a shrine to Vereθraϑna (Middle Iranian Bahram, the god of victory identified with Hercules) are found.¹⁰ Tacitus does not identify a ritual performed at this sacred place as hippomancy, but the similarity with the Indian *aśvamedhā* is striking. The free run of an unrestrained horse here is combined with oracular dreams.

Let us recapitulate the information about Indo-Iranian hippomancy. The common theme of all three cases is the close association of the ritual with royal power. Only a king and a queen could perform the Indian *aśvamedhā*; in Achaemenid Persia, the hippomantic ritual served as a method for selecting the ruler; the Parthian king performed hippomantic rites in order to secure his victory over the Romans. All the other components of the ritual differ in the three countries. The Indian and Parthian rituals involved a free run of an unrestrained horse, but in Persia the ritual was performed in stationary conditions.

In addition to the above-mentioned Persian ritual, several ancient Iranian peoples practiced horse sacrifice: the Massagetae of Central Asia sacrificed horses to the sun,¹¹ and the northern Pontic Scythians sacrificed horses to their sword god.¹² There is no evidence, however, that these rites were connected to hippomancy. The zoophilic sexual components were present in India (where a dead stallion and a queen were involved) and in Persia (where a mare and a groom were mentioned), but these were absent in Parthia.

Greece

The ancient Greek legend describes how Pelops, son Tantalus of Lydia, became the king of Pisa in Elis on Peloponnesus, which was named after him:

Now Oenomaus, the king of Pisa, had a daughter, Hippodamia, and whether it was because he loved her, as some say, or that he had been warned by an oracle that he must die by the hand of the man who married her, no man received her as a wife; for her father could not persuade her to cohabit with him, and her suitors were put to death by him.

For he had arms and horses given him by Ares, and he offered as a prize to the suitors the hand of his daughter, and each suitor was bound to take up Hippodamia on his own chariot and flee as far as the Isthmus of Corinth, and Oenomaus straightway pursued him, in full armor, and if he overtook him he slew him; but if the suitor were not overtaken, he was to have Hippodamia as a wife. And in this way he slew many suitors, some say twelve; and he cut off the heads of the suitors and nailed them to his house.

So Pelops also came a-wooing; and when Hippodamia saw his beauty, she conceived a passion for him, and persuaded Myrtilus, son of Hermes, to help him; for Myrtilus was a charioteer serving Oenomaus.

Accordingly Myrtilus, being in love with her and wishing to gratify her, did not insert the linchpins in the boxes of the wheels, and thus caused Oenomaus to lose the race and to become entangled in the reins and dragged to his death; but according to some, he was killed by Pelops. And in dying he cursed Myrtilus, whose treachery he had discovered, praying that he might perish by the hand of Pelops.¹³

As we can see, the choice of the husband for the king's daughter, and subsequently the choice of the next king, took a form of a hippomantic chariot race.

Some hint to sexual relations with a mare is also present in this legend in a form of an etiological explanation for the prohibition to mate mares with asses in Elis:

What is the reason why the Eleans lead their mares outside the boundaries of their country to mate them with asses?

Is it because of all the kings Oenomaus was most fond of horses, and, since he particularly loved this animal, he laid many terrible curses upon any that should thus mate horses in Elis; and it is in fear of that curse that they endeavor to keep clear of it?¹⁴

The legend about Pelops and Hippodamia is mentioned for the first time in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*¹⁵ in the seventh century BCE, and the Elean prohibition to mate mares with asses by Herodotus¹⁶ in the fifth century BCE. The Olympic Games were believed to be established in commemoration of the chariot race between Pelops and Oenomaus.

Rome

Annually, on the Ides of October (October 15), a chariot race was held in ancient Rome for the purpose of selecting the sacrificial horse called the October Horse (*October equus*).¹⁷ Timaeus first mentioned the ritual in the third century BCE. He connected it with the commemoration of the Trojan Horse, which Romans, as the supposed descendants of the Trojans, celebrated.¹⁸ In the second century CE, Sextus Pompeius Festus described the hippomantic race, the horse sacrifice, and the rituals that followed:

The October Horse (*October equus*) is named from the annual sacrifice to Mars in the Campus Martius during the month of October. It is the right-hand horse of the winning team in the two-horse chariot races. The customary competition for its head between the residents of the Suburra and those of the Sacra Via was no trivial affair; the latter would get to attach it to the wall of the Regia, or the former to the Mamilian Tower. Its tail was transported to the Regia with sufficient speed that the blood from it could be dripped onto the hearth for the sake of becoming part of the sacred rite (*res divina*).¹⁹

The October Horse ritual is mentioned for the last time in the Calendar of Philocalus in 354 CE.²⁰

The Roman evidence is the only reference found outside India to an association between hippomancy and horse sacrifice. Hippomancy is performed in the form of a chariot race as in ancient Greece, not as the run of an unrestrained horse, and the selection of a horse for sacrifice is its purpose.

Germanic tribes

In another composition—*Germania*—Tacitus described the hippomantic rites of the Germanic tribes in the first century CE:

It is peculiar to this people [Germans] to seek omens and monitions from horses. Kept at the public expense, in these same woods and groves, are white horses, pure from the taint of earthly labor; these are yoked to a sacred car, and accompanied by the priest and the king, or chief of the tribe, who note their neighings and snortings. No species of augury is more trusted, not only by the people and by the nobility, but also by the priests, who regard themselves as the ministers of the gods, and the horses as acquainted with their will.²¹

The Germanic ritual is similar to the Old Persian version; it is performed in stationary conditions, and an oracular response is obtained through the horse's neighing and snorting. The ruler is also involved in the ritual—driving the sacred chariot—while the priest interprets the ominous behavior of the horse.

Slavs

Slavic hippomancy is mentioned in medieval chronicles in three places: Radagost in modern Mecklenburg, Szczecin (Stettin) in Pomerania, and Arkona on the Island of Rügen. Two additional cases of hippomancy are mentioned in a legendary historical context in Bohemia and Little Poland. Slavic evidence is restricted to the Western Slavs.

Redarii

Thietmar of Merseburg thus describes the hippomantic rituals in the Temple of Svarozhich at Radagost (Rethra), the capital of the Redarii tribe, located in what is now Mecklenburg:

To carefully protect this shrine [of Svarozhich], the inhabitants have instituted special priests. When they convene there to offer sacrifices to the idols or assuage their anger, these priests sit while everyone else stands. Murmuring together in secret, they tremble and dig in the earth so that, after casting lots, they may acquire certainty in regard to any questionable matters. When this is finished, they cover the lots with green grass and, after placing two spears crosswise on the ground, humbly lead over them a horse, which they

believe to be the largest of all and venerate as sacred. That which the casting of lots had already revealed to them, should also be foretold by this almost divine beast. If the same omen appears in both cases, it is carried out in fact. Otherwise, the unhappy folk immediately reject it.²²

In 1068, Burchard, Bishop of Halberstadt, who, according to the Annals of Augsburg, sacked Radagost, desecrated the sacred horse:

Burchard, Bishop of Halberstadt invaded, burned, and devastated the province of Liutici, and abducting a horse, whom they worshipped at Rethra as a god, he rode on its back to Saxony.²³

Pomerania

Herbord and Wolfger of Prüfening described a similar hippomantic ritual taking place in the Temple of Triglav at Szczecin (Stettin) in Pomerania. Herbord's account is as follows:

Now the people possessed a stallion of great size which was plump, dark-colored and very spirited. It did no work throughout the year and was regarded as being so holy that no one was worthy to ride it. It had also as its attentive guardian one of four priests who were attached to the temples. Whenever the people contemplated setting out on any expedition by land to attack their enemies, or in order to secure booty, they were accustomed to forecast the results in this way. Nine spears were placed on the ground separated from one another by the space of a cubit. When then the horse had been made ready and was bridled, the priest, who was in charge of it, led the horse three times backwards and forwards across the spears that were lying on the ground. If the horse crossed without knocking its feet or disturbing the spears, they regarded this as an omen of success and proceeded on their expedition without anxiety, but if the result were otherwise they remained inactive.²⁴

The way of obtaining an oracle is similar to the modern game of "pick-up-sticks," which is still popular in Slavic countries. It is called *biriul'ki* in Russian.

Rani

Saxo Grammaticus described hippomancy, practiced at the Temple of Svantovit at Arkona on the Island of Rügen:

Moreover, it [Temple of Svantovit] had a claim to a particular white horse, the hairs of whose mane and tail it was considered impious to pluck out. Only the high priest had the right to feed and mount this animal, in case a repeated use of the sacred creature should cause it to be held in less esteem. The people of Rügen believed that on its back Svantovit (that was the name

they gave to the idol) waged war against the opponents of his religion. Their major proof of this supposition was that, although it occupied its stall during the night, it frequently appeared bathed in sweat and splashed with mud in the morning, as if it had come back from hard exercise and had galloped over vast distances in its travels.

Auguries of the following nature were also taken from this horse: when they had decided to prosecute war against some region, three sets of spears would be erected in front of the temple by servants; each set consisted of a pair of spears joined crosswise with the points thrust into the earth, and the same amount of space lay between each arrangement. At the time when they were thinking of conducting an enterprise against an enemy, a solemn prayer would first be offered, and then the priest would lead the horse in its trappings out from the forecourt; if it stepped over each formation of spears with the right hoof before the left, this was accepted as a favorable prediction for undertaking the war. Yet if the left even once preceded the right, the plan to attack that territory was altered, and their date of sailing was only fixed properly after they saw the horse take three paces in turn which made the creature's advance auspicious.²⁵

The hippomantic rite itself is similar to the practices of neighboring Slavic tribes, but this account also contains two additional components, connecting the Rani ritual with the ancient Indian and Parthian rituals. These are a hint to the sacred horse's miraculous nocturnal run, and exclusive use of the hippomantic oracle for military purposes, in order to obtain predictions about the outcome of a military expedition.

Bohemia

So far, we have observed Slavic hippomancy performed in several pagan temples, as described in eyewitnesses' accounts. Following are two legendary narratives, which also contain some elements from hippomantic rituals. Cosmas of Prague states that when Libuše became ruler of Bohemia after the death of her father Krok, the Bohemian people, dissatisfied with female rule, demanded that she choose a husband. Libuše chose Přemysl of Stadice, but no one knew the way to his village:

Meanwhile, messengers were chosen, who would bring the lady's and the common folks' orders to the man [Přemysl]. When Libuše saw them delaying, as if they did not know the way, she said: "What delays you? Go confidently, follow my horse. It will lead you on the right road and bring you back, because that road has been trod by him more than once." Empty rumor and false conjecture both fly (Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.121) that, Libuše, always at night, on an imaginary ride, was accustomed to go there in the evening and return before daybreak. Let Apella the Jew believe it (Horace, *Satires* 1.5.100)! What then? Wise, though uneducated, well aware of their ignorance (Gregory

the Great, *Dialogues* 2), messengers proceeded, following the horse's footsteps. Soon they crossed the mountains and eventually approached the village to which they had been sent. A boy ran out to meet them. They said to him, inquiring: "Hark, excellent boy! Is not that village named Stadice? If it is, is a man named Přemysl in it?" The boy said: "It is the village you seek. And behold, the man Přemysl goads his oxen in the field nearby so that he might finish the work he is doing more quickly." Approaching him, the messengers said: "Happy man! The Duke whom the gods produced for us!" As is the custom with peasants, it was not sufficient to have said it once, so with puffed cheeks, they repeated: "Hail, Duke! Hail, most worthy of great praise! Release the oxen, change your clothes, and mount the horse (T. Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 3.26)!" And they showed him the clothes and the neighing horse. "Our lady Libuše and all the common folk demand that you come quickly and take up the realm fated for you and your descendants. Everything ours and we ourselves are in your hand (Gen. 47:25). We elect you Duke, you ruler, you protector, you as our only lord."²⁶

In spite of the author's humoristic hint that Přemysl had already been Libuše's lover for some time, and therefore the horse knew the way, the procedure itself is clearly hippomantic. The free run of the unrestrained horse follows the pattern of the Indian and the Parthian hippomantic rituals, but the purpose of the hippomancy is similar to the Old Persian one—the choice of a ruler. Sexual connotation is also present, since not only a ruler is chosen, but also a husband.

Little Poland

We already examined the legend of Leszek II—the hero of the tribe of Lędzianie in Little Poland—and his ascent to the throne.²⁷ The elders decided that the choice of the ruler will take the form of a horse race:

So let us choose a race field, put a pole [as a target], and the rider whose spotted horse will reach the goal first, he must be recognize as king!²⁸

Though the contest failed because of several contestants' efforts at deceit, the very choice of a horse race as a way to select the ruler is probably of a hippomantic nature. Kadłubek himself compares this episode with the election of Darius I as the king of Persia,²⁹ but the way to obtain an oracle most resembles the chariot races of Greek legend and the Roman October Horse ritual.

Let us summarize the Slavic evidence on hippomantic rituals. All three examples of real hippomancy, as it was performed in Slavic pagan temples, are similar to the Old Persian and Germanic practices. The oracle was obtained in stationary conditions, though it was taken not in the form of a horse's neighing, but based on the horse's leaps over obstacles. The Bohemian legend resembles the Indian and Parthian rituals in the form of a free run of an unrestrained horse, and there is some hint at a nocturnal run of the horse in the Rani ritual of the Island of Rügen. The legend of the Lędzianie in Little Poland is similar to the Greek and

Roman hippomantic chariot races. The use of the hippomancy to select a ruler is found only in legendary accounts, and its use for military purposes is also found at Arkona on Rügen Island. The sexual component of the ritual is found in a weakened form in Bohemia. The sacrifice of the horse is not mentioned anywhere among the Slavs.

Ireland

Hippomancy was unknown to the Celts. However, the ritual associated with the inauguration of the head of a clan in Northern Ireland, as the twelfth-century Welsh author Girald described it, contributes to the reconstruction of a common Indo-European hippomantic rite. It contains two components of the ancient Indian *aśvamedhā*, sexual intercourse with a horse and horse sacrifice:

There is, then, in the northern and most remote part of Ulster, namely, at Kenel Cunil [county of Donegal], a nation which practices a most barbarous and abominable rite in creating their king. The whole people of that country being gathered in one place, a white mare is led into the midst of them, and he who is to be inaugurated, not as a prince but as a brute, not as a king but as an outlaw, comes before the people on all fours, confessing himself a beast with no less impudence than imprudence. The mare being immediately killed, and cut in pieces and boiled, a bath is prepared for him from the broth. Sitting in this, he eats of the flesh which is brought to him, the people standing round and partaking of it also. He is also required to drink of the broth in which he is bathed, not drawing it in any vessel, nor even with his hand, but lapping it with his mouth. These unrighteous rites being duly accomplished, his royal authority and dominion are ratified.³⁰

Ireland was a Christian country from the fifth century, and the appearance of the pagan rite in the twelfth century in Northern Ireland is strange. Girald participated in the first Irish campaign of Prince John in 1185, and he also wrote, in his *Conquest of Ireland (Expugnatio Hibernica)*, an account of Henry II's 1171–1175 Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland. Girald presented this campaign as a crusade against "Irish schismatics," meaning the Irish Celtic Church loyal to Rome, but practicing distinct Celtic rite. His *Topography of Ireland (Topographia Hibernica)*, where the quoted passage is found, also presents the Irish as a savage and barbaric people. Therefore, it is not clear whether the ritual of inauguration really took place in twelfth-century Northern Ireland or whether Girald merely heard about some legendary Irish rituals performed in a more remote past.

The rulers' sexual intercourse with a mare, which is present in the Irish rite, explains what was later replaced in the Indian *aśvamedhā* by an imitation of a sexual act between the queen and the dead horse, and by the hand of the royal groom inserted into the mare's genitals in the Old Persian story. The combination of this ritualized zoophilic sex with horse sacrifice connects this Irish ritual with Indian hippomancy, while its use for the inauguration of a ruler connects it with the Old Persian, Bohemian, and Little Poland's legendary historical hippomantic stories.

Reconstruction

The proto-Indo-European hippomantic ritual constituted a part of a ritual complex consisting of three parts: hippomancy proper used for selecting a tribal chief, sexual intercourse of the selected ruler with a mare, and horse sacrifice. We will reconstruct these rites individually based on comparative evidence.

1. Hippomancy is found among the historical Indo-European peoples in three basic forms: the free run of an unrestrained horse, the chariot or horse race, and oracular interpretation of a horse's behavior in stationary conditions. The first form was practiced in ancient India and Parthia, and it was described in Bohemia's legendary tradition. The second form (a chariot race) was performed in ancient Rome, and is described in a Greek legend. Another variant (the horse race) is described in a legend belonging to the Lędzianie tribe of Little Poland. The third form was observed among Germanic and Western Slavic tribes, and is described in a historical context in Achaemenid Persia. Though the first form is found in the oldest Vedic source, the chariot race was probably the original proto-Indo-European form of hippomancy, since it is the most plausible way to select a ruler. The association between hippomancy and the selection of a ruler is found only in the legendary historical traditions of Achaemenid Persia, Greece, Bohemia, and Little Poland, but the following rites performed in ancient India and medieval Ireland strongly suggest that this was the original purpose of the proto-Indo-European ritual.

2. The ruler's sexual intercourse with a mare is described in the Elean story about King Oenomaus and his mares, and in the source describing medieval Northern Ireland. However, the weakened forms of this ritual hint at the necrophilic part of the Indian *aśvamedhā*. The Herodotean account of Darius's I selection as the king of Persia, and the Greek and Bohemian stories about the selection of the husband for the queen all suggest that the Irish form of the ritual was the original one.

Sexual relations with a horse are first mentioned in the Hittite Law Code, where they are permitted with certain restrictions, in contrast with all other forms of zoophilia:

If a man has sexual relations with either a horse or a mule, it is not an offense, but he shall not approach the king, nor shall he become a priest.³¹

The ritual itself probably reflects the proto-Indo-European totemic myth about "son/daughter of a mare,"³² which is found in an uncensored form in Pseudo-Plutarch (citing Agesilaus) and in a Gypsy (Roma) folk tale recorded in nineteenth-century Bukovina. It is also found in a weakened form in Welsh, Irish, and Serbian heroic epics. Agesilaus wrote about the origin of the Celtic goddess of horses, Epona:

Fulvius Stellus hated women and used to consort with a mare and in due time the mare gave birth to a beautiful girl and they named her Epona. She is the goddess that is concerned with the protection of horses. So Agesilaüs in the third book of his *Italian History*.³³

The Gypsy story, called the *Mare's Son*, tells of a boy borne by a mare impregnated by a priest and abandoned in a forest.³⁴ The hero of the Welsh epic *Mabinogion*, Pryderi, disappeared after his birth and mysteriously replaced a foal born in the stables in another place.³⁵ The hero of the Irish epic *Compert Con Culainn* ("The Conception of Cú Chulainn"), Cúchulainn (Cú Chulainn), was born simultaneously with twin colts.³⁶ The hero of the Serbian epic songs of the Battle of Kosovo Cycle, Miloš Obilić (Милош Обилић), was also named Kobilić (Кобилић)—"mare's son" (from Slavic *kobyła*—"mare")—since a mare nursed him in his infancy.³⁷

3. Horse sacrifice was connected to hippomancy only in ancient India and Rome, but it was widespread in antiquity in the Middle Ages. Polybius, criticizing Timaeus's claim that the October Horse ritual in Rome commemorated the Trojan Horse, remarks:

For at that rate we should have to say that all barbarian tribes were descendants of the Trojans, since nearly all of them, or at least the majority, when they are entering on a war or on the eve of a decisive battle sacrifice a horse, divining the issue from the manner in which it falls. Timaeus in dealing with the foolish practice seems to me to exhibit not only ignorance but pedantry in supposing that in sacrificing a horse they do so because Troy was said to have been taken by means of a horse.³⁸

The association of hippomantic divination with the outcome of a battle is also present in this passage, but Polybius does not specify to which barbarian tribes he is alluding. It could have been the Massagetae, the Scythians, or the Persians, whose horse sacrifices Herodotus mentioned.³⁹ The Celtic evidence is especially important, since it connects horse sacrifice with sexual intercourse with a mare. The Scandinavian example can be also introduced in this context:

Svein, the King's [Ingi] brother-in-law, remained behind in the assembly, and offered the Swedes to do sacrifices on their behalf if they would give him the Kingdom. They all agreed to accept Svein's offer, and he was then recognized as King over all Sweden. A horse was then brought to the assembly and hewn in pieces and cut up for eating, and the sacred tree was smeared with blood. Then all the Swedes abandoned Christianity, and sacrifices were started again. They drove King Ingi away; and he went into Vestergötland. Svein the Sacrificer was King of Sweden for three years.⁴⁰

The thirteenth-century Icelandic *Hervarar saga* places this episode at about 1080, connecting horse sacrifice to the inauguration ceremony of the last Swedish pagan king, Svein the Sacrificer (Blót-Svein).

Let us summarize in Table 2 the available information about the hippomantic ritual complex among historical Indo-European peoples.

Most probably, the original proto-Indo-European ritual was conducted for the purpose of a tribal chief's selection, which took the form of a chariot race.

Table 2 Indo-European hippomantic ritual complex

<i>Place</i>	<i>Hippomancy</i>	<i>Sexual intercourse</i>	<i>Horse sacrifice</i>	<i>Purpose of the ritual</i>
India	Free run of an unrestrained horse	Imitation of a sexual intercourse of a queen with a dead horse	Horse sacrifice after a military campaign	Direction of a military campaign
Persia	Horse's neighing	Royal groom puts his hand into mare's genitals	-	Selection of a king
Parthia	Free run of an unrestrained horse	-	-	Success in war
Greece	Chariot race	Choosing husband for a princess; sexual intercourse of the king with a mare	-	Choice of the next king
Rome	Chariot race	-	Sacrifice of a right-hand horse of a winning chariot	For success of the next agricultural and military season
Germanic tribes	Horse's neighing and snorting	-	-	Conducted by a tribal chief and a priest for unspecified purposes
Redarii (Radagost)	Horse's stepping over hidden lots	-	-	Unspecified omens
Pomerania (Szczecin)	Horse's crossing over laying spears	-	-	Success of a military campaign
Rani (Arkona)	Horse's stepping over erected spears with its right hoof	-	-	Setting a date for naval expedition
Bohemia	Free run of an unrestrained horse	Choosing a husband for the queen	-	Choice of a king
Little Poland (Łędzianie)	Horse race	-	-	Choice of a king
Northern Ireland	-	Public sexual intercourse of clan's chief with a mare	Mare's sacrifice after sexual intercourse	Inauguration ceremony
Sweden	-	-	Horse's sacrifice	Inauguration ceremony
Unspecified barbarian tribes	Manner of sacrificial horse's falling	-	Horse's sacrifice	Outcome of war

The selected ruler then publicly performed sexual intercourse with a mare as a demonstration of his male potency. Afterward, the mare was sacrificed to ensure the success of future military campaigns. All three stages of the ritual survived only in ancient India, but with the order of the second and third stages reversed. The horse sacrifice preceded the imitation of sexual intercourse with the dead horse. The gender roles of the ruler and the mare were also reversed in the Indian *aśvamedhā*—a queen replaced a king, and a stallion replaced a mare. Only one or two stages of the original ritual survived among the other Indo-European peoples, and their forms were also changed.

Notes

- 1 *The Veda of the Black Yajus School: Entitled Taittiriya Sanhita*, translated from the original Sanskrit prose and verse by Arthur Berriedale Keith, Cambridge, MA, 1914, 5.3.12.
- 2 Ibid. 5.4.12.
- 3 Black Yajurveda 7.4.19. English translation is from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Ashvamedha/archive1>.
- 4 Chandra Mauli Mani, *A Journey Through India's Past (From Earliest Times to the Last Hindu Emperor)*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 37.
- 5 Yamini Narayanan, *Religion, Heritage and the Sustainable City: Hinduism and Urbanization in Jaipur*, London-New York, 2014, p. 106.
- 6 Herodotus, *Histories*, 3.84–88, translation of G. C. Macaulay.
- 7 Ibid. 3.160.
- 8 Ibid. 7.113.
- 9 Tacitus, *The Annals*, 12.13, translation of Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb.
- 10 Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet (with a contribution of Roger Beck), *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 3, Leiden-New York-Copenhagen-Köln, 1991, pp. 93–94.
- 11 Herodotus, 1.216.
- 12 Ibid. 4.62.
- 13 Apollodorus, *The Library*, with an English translation by James George Frazer, in 2 volumes, Cambridge, MA, 1921, Epitome, 2.4–7.
- 14 Plutarch, *Moralia*, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt, Cambridge, MA-London, vol. 4, 1936, Greek Questions 52 (pp. 240–241). See also Georges Devereux, “The abduction of Hippodameia as ‘aiton’ of a Greek animal husbandry rite,” *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 36, 1965, pp. 3–25.
- 15 Martin L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins*, Oxford, 1985, p. 99.
- 16 Herodotus, 4.30.
- 17 Jens Henrik Vanggaard, “The October Horse,” *Temenos* 15, 1979, pp. 81–95.
- 18 Polybius, 12.4b (Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3B, Leiden, 1950, No. 566, Fr. 36, p. 612).
- 19 *Sexti Pompei Festi De Verborum Significatu quae Supersunt cum Pauli Epitome*, ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay, Leipzig, 1913, reprint: Olms, 1965, p. 190.
- 20 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Berlin, 1853, p. 274.
- 21 Tacitus, *Germania* 10, translation of A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb.
- 22 *Ottoman Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, translated and annotated by David A. Warner, Manchester-New York, 2001, 6.24 (p. 253).
- 23 *Annales Augustani*, ed. G. H. Pertz (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, scriptores, vol. 3), Hannover, 1839, year 1068 (p. 128).

- 24 Ebo and Herbordus, *The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, 1060–1139*, translated by Charles H. Robison, London, 1920, Herbordus 2.33 (pp. 79–80).
- 25 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Fisher, Oxford, 2015, 14.39.9–10 (pp. 1280–1283).
- 26 Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, translated by Lisa Wolvertson, Washington, DC, 2009, 1.6 (pp. 45–46).
- 27 See Chapter 19, “Leszek II.”
- 28 Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, Brygida Kürbis (translation), Wrocław, 1992, 1.13 (p. 25).
- 29 Ibid. 1.14 (p. 27).
- 30 Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography of Ireland*, translated by Thomas Forester, revised and edited with additional notes by Thomas Wright, Cambridge, Ontario, 2000, 3.25 (pp. 77–78).
- 31 “Hittite Laws,” translated by Harry A. Hoffner, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, ed. Martha T. Roth with a contribution of Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., volume editor Piotr Michalowski, Atlanta, GA, 1995, pp. 213–248, 200a (p. 237).
- 32 W. O’Flaherty, “The Indo-European Mare and the King,” *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 5–6, 1981, pp. 23–33.
- 33 Pseudo-Plutarch, *Parallela Minora* 29 (translated by F. C. Babbitt); Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3C, Leiden, 1958, No. 828, Fr. 1 (p. 900).
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- 35 *The Mabinogion*, translated with an introduction by Jeffrey Gantz, London, 1976.
- 36 *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, translated with an introduction and notes by Jeffrey Gantz, London, 1981 (reprint 1983), pp. 130–132.
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- 38 Polybius, *The Histories*, translated by William Roger Paton, vol. 4, Cambridge, MA, 1925, 12.4b–c (p. 317).
- 39 Herodotus, 1.216, 4.61, 62, 72, 7.113.
- 40 “The Saga of Hervör and Heithrek c.1250 AD,” *Stories and Ballads of the Far Past*, translated from the Norse (Icelandic and Faroese) with introductions and notes by Nora Kershaw, Cambridge, 1921, p. 142.

Appendix 2

Zmey Gorynych

The composite animal conventionally called a dragon (from the Greek δράκων)—a winged or feathered snake or lizard—is a worldwide mythological entity. It appears throughout the globe from the Chinese *lóng* to the Mexican Quetzalcoatl. The Indo-European dragon was a gigantic snake, sometimes a multi-headed one. It appeared for the first time in Hittite mythology under the name Illuyanka, which means “snake” in Hittite. Later ancient Indo-European dragons included the Indian Vedic Vritra, the Iranian Avestan three-headed Aži-Dahāka, and numerous Greek dragons (the Cadmean *Drakōn*, the seven-headed Lernaean *Hydra*, the *Python*, the *Ladon*, etc.).

Medieval European (Celtic, Germanic, Romance, West and South Slavic) winged dragons are of relatively late origin. They are usually supposed to have originated from the Roman military insignia in the form of a bronze dragon’s head with a fabric flying body attached to a spike, which was used as a standard by Roman cavalry units called *draconarii*.¹ This design was in turn derived from the Dacian military dragon standard, which the Romans adopted after Trajan’s Dacian campaigns in 101–106 CE. However, the Dacian and Roman military dragons were wingless.

In fact, the earliest image of a winged dragon appears, surprisingly, on the base of the Jewish Menorah (on the left- and right-hand sides of its lower register) displayed in the triumphal procession of Titus, as depicted on Titus’s Arch in Rome. This base was most likely not an integral part of the original Menorah in the Jewish Second Temple of Jerusalem, since in all genuine Jewish representations of the Menorah it stands on a tripod. The box on Titus’s Arch was probably the Roman military installation constructed for the purpose of carrying the heavy golden object in the triumphal procession. However, neither the origin of this winged dragon’s design nor the ways it was transmitted throughout Europe are known.

Eastern European dragons were three-headed winged creatures. They include the Romanian *balaur*, the Hungarian *sárkány*, the Lithuanian *Slibinas*, the Mordovian (Erzian and Mokshan) *Seniasha*, and the East Slavic *Zmey Gorynych*. Since all these peoples were unrelated to each other, this image was probably borrowed from some common source. Most likely, this common prototype of the East European dragon was the Iranian Aži Dahāka, who is thus described in *Avesta*:

He [Θraētaona, Middle Persian Ferīdūn] begged of her [goddess Anāhita] a boon, saying: “Grant me this, O good, beneficent Ardvī Sūra Anāhita! That I may overcome Aži Dahāka, the three-mouthed, the three-headed, the six-eyed, who had a thousand senses, that most powerful, fiendish *Druγ* [‘Lie’], that demon baleful to the world, the strongest *Druγ* that Angra Mainyu created against the material world, to destroy the world of the good principle; and that I may deliver his two wives, Savanghavāk and Erenavāk [daughters of king Yima], who are fairest of body among women, and the most wonderful creatures in the world.”²

This Iranian three-headed dragon likely reached Eastern Europe not directly from Iran, but from the Northern Iranian tribes of the northern Pontic area. Let us concentrate on the figure of the Eastern Slavic dragon *Zmey Gorynych*, who appears in the Russian heroic epic songs (*byliny*). *Zmey* means “snake,” and *Gorynych* is a patronymic meaning “son of Gorynia.” There is a character in the Russian folk tale with this name, where he is one of three giants: Usynia (derived from *us*—“moustache”), Gorynia (derived from *gora*—“mountain”), and Dubynia (derived from *dub*—“oak”):

He [Ivashko-Medvedko] went along the road and path, and he came to a river three *versts* wide. On the banks stood a man, slurping up the current with his mouth, catching fish with his moustache, cooking them on his tongue, and eating them. . . .

So the two of them set off, and then they saw this *bogatyř*. The *bogatyř* grabbed hold of a whole mountain, carried it into a gully, and made a road. . . .

So the three of them set off, and then they saw this miracle. A *bogatyř* was arranging an oak grove. Whichever oak grew tall, he’d bring down to earth, and one that was low he’d stretch up from the ground.³

The three probably personify the forces of nature: Usynia, the river cataracts, Gorynia, the river streams, and Dubynia, the winds. There is indeed a river called Goryn’ (Polish Horyń, Ukrainian Horyn’)—a tributary of Pripiat’—flowing northward through Ukrainian Volhynia and Belarusian Polesye. According to the *bylina* about the epic hero Dobrynia Nikitich, *Zmey Gorynych* was the master of the magic Puchai River, and he lived in the Sorochin Mountains.⁴ Such mountains do not exist, but there is a village called Sorochin (now Sorochen’) at the sources of the River Uzh—another tributary of the Pripiat’—flowing eastward and beginning in close proximity to the Goryn’ valley. This village is first mentioned in 1906 as a German agricultural colony.⁵ Its German name was Ludowikowka,⁶ but its Slavic name was probably adopted by the settlers from some local microtoponym, maybe of the name of the spring from which the River Uzh flows. *Uzh* means “grass snake,” but this is a relatively new name for this river, which possibly originated from its association with *Zmey Gorynych*. The old name of the River Uzh was Usha (Polish Usza), which has no convincing Slavic etymology,

but in the Avestan *ušā* means “dawn,” and this Iranian word corresponds to the Sanskrit name of the Indian goddess of dawn—Uṣas.

Thus, the place of the origin of *Zmey Gogynych* can safely be located at the spring near the village of Sorochen’ in the Goryn’ River valley, from which the River Uzh flows. The dragon itself was probably regarded as a son of the river Goryn’ or its personification, giant Gorynia and Usha—the female personification of dawn.

Notes

- 1 Jon C. N. Coulston, “The ‘Draco’ Standard,” *Journal of Military Equipment Studies* 2, 1991, pp. 101–114.
- 2 *Zend-Avesta*, translated by James Darmesteter, vol. 2 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 23), ed. Max Müller, Oxford, 1883, Yasht 5.34 (pp. 61–62).
- 3 “The Bear, Moustaches, Mountain Man, and Oakman Bogatyrs,” *The Complete Folktales of A. N. Afanas’ev*, edited by Jack V. Haney, vol. 1, Jackson, MS, 2014, pp. 322–323.
- 4 *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics*, translated with an introduction and commentary by James Baibey and Tatyana Ivanova, Armonk, NY-London, 1988, pp. 81–97.
- 5 *Список населенных мест Волынской губернии*, Житомир, 1906, с. 207.
- 6 *Немецкие населенные пункты в Российской империи: География и население*, составил В. Ф. Дизендорф, Москва, 2006, с. 37.

Afterword

Modern forgers of Slavic mythology were paradoxically closer to understanding the true nature of the Slavic pagan religion than academic scholars. They perceived instinctively that Slavic paganism on the eve of Christianization was itself a kind of forgery. Composers of the *Veda Slovena* or the *Book of Veles* were not much different from the late tenth-century composers of the Slavic “pantheons” of Kiev or Rügen Island.

The failure of academic scholarship to understand the nature of Slavic religion has more complicated roots. The first reason for this failure is use of the wrong comparative paradigm. According to an unspoken general consensus, if Celtic, Germanic, and Finnish peoples possessed highly developed pantheons and complicated mythological systems, then Slavic pagan religion could not differ much. The absence of any Slavic gods before the end of the tenth century and their presence in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries only at the edges of the Slavic world were dismissed. The grounds offered were that the Celtic and Germanic mythologies also survived only in remote corners of the Celtic and Germanic worlds—in Ireland and Iceland—and even there they were recorded after the inception of the Christian age.

This parallel, however, is only partially true. Roman authors Lucan¹ and Lucian² mentioned some continental Celtic deities, and there are the ninth- or tenth-century *Merseburg Incantations* (*Merseburger Zaubersprüche*),³ which preserved some elements of continental German pagan mythology.

The second reason for this failure is connected to the ideological split between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers in many Slavic countries, and especially in Russia. Slavophile scholars dismissed any doubts regarding the authenticity of Slavic deities as Slavophobic slander and did not hesitate to use the most dubious sources in their efforts to reconstruct a Slavic mythology. They also interpreted the Slavic totemic myths as parts of a genuine Slavic historical tradition.

Their Westernizer colleagues were zealous to deconstruct the Slavophilic fantasies, but did not make any serious attempt to reconstruct an “alternative” Slavic mythology. Fortunately, we take no part in this inner Slavic discourse. We relied on the sources, where two main facts were evident, which are worth recounting here:

- 1 No Slavic gods are mentioned in the sources written before the end of the tenth century. The gods described in eleventh- to thirteenth-century sources appear only on the western and eastern edges of the Slavic world, and most of them are either borrowed from non-Slavic peoples or constructed on the basis of Christian saints and other Christian mythological characters.
- 2 The names of the entities of the local Slavic historical traditions are repeated in different Slavic countries. Etymologically, most of these names reveal the zoomorphic nature of the foundational heroes of Slavic pseudo-historical legends.

These observations led us to two conclusions:

- 1 The true parallels to the ancient Slavic pagan religion are the totemic cults of the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe, and not the pagan religions of Western and Northern Europe.
- 2 The pagan Slavic pantheons were created artificially at the edges of the Slavic world by the late tenth century under heavy Christian influence.

Notes

- 1 Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.499–500.
- 2 Lucian, *Heracles, An Introductory Lecture*.
- 3 Merseburger Domstiftsbibliothek, Codex 135, f. 85r, 10th Cy; Jacob Grimm, *Über zwei entdeckte gedichte aus der zeit des deutschen Heidentums*, Berlin, 1842.

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