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SLAVIC MYTHOLOGY AS A PART OF OUR LIFE

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Slavic mythology as a part of our life

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Abstract

Slavic mythology and Slavic religion evolved over more than 3,000 years ago. It is conjectured that some parts of it are from Neolithic or possibly even Mesolithic times. Most Slavic mythologies hold that God ordered the devil to bring up a handful of sand from the bottom of the sea and created the land from it. Slavic religion was often characterized by dualism, with a Black God named in curses and a White God invoked to obtain protection or mercy. Lightning and fire gods were also common.

As their descendants we must know where our tradition, customs, legends and beliefs come from.

We should therefore study it to avoid making the same mistakes. Human nature does not change, but we can make the world a better place by being aware of what we did wrong before.

Key words: mythology, god, belief, legend, myth, ritual

Rezime

Slovenska mitologija i Slovenska religija razvile su se pre 3,000 godina. Pretpostavlja se da neki njeni delovi datiraju još iz Neolita ili moguće čak iz vremena Mezolita. Većina slovenskih mitologija veruje da je Bog naredio djavolu da podigne ruku punu peska sa dna mora i da je odatle stvorio zamlju. Slovenska religija je često bila okarakterisana dualizmom, sa Crnim Bogom imenovanim u kletvama i Belim Bogom prizvanim da obezbedi zaštitu i milost. Bogovi Munja i Vatre su također bili česti.

Kao njihovi potomci moramo znati odakle dolaze naša tradicija, običaji, legende i verovanja. Trebali bi smo dakle izučavati Slovensku mitologiju kako bismo izbegli iste greske. Ljudska priroda se ne menja, ali možemo svet učiniti boljim mestom, tako što bismo bili svesni onoga što smo pre loše uradili.

Ključne reci: mitologija, Bog. Verovanje, legenda, mit, ritual

SLAVIC MYTHOLOGY

When “mythology” is mentioned one can hardly help thinking about the amazingly rich and often highly artistic and moving tales of ancient Egyptians, ancient Greeks, ancient Indians, mediaeval Islanders, mediaeval Irish and native Americans, or Australian Aborigines. It seems that not all the peoples were so endowed with such a vast capacity of creating myths and tales, but probably most of the peoples on earth did have a body of all sorts of myths that told the stories of the creation of earth, of man, of heroes and of their heroic or cultural deeds, of love and death, and, of course, of gods and of all kinds of “supernatural” or “otherworldly” creatures.

Slavic mythology and Slavic religion evolved over more than 3,000 years ago. It is conjectured that some parts of it are from Neolithic or possibly even Mesolithic times. The religion possesses numerous common traits with other religions descended from the Proto-Indo-European religion.

Slavic mythology is the mythological aspect of the polytheistic religion that was practised by the Slavs.

Slavic religion is related to pre-Christian religious practices among the Slavs of Eastern Europe. There is only fragmentary and scattered information about the myths and legends of the pagan Slavs, and it is not possible to trace the history of their religion or to reconstruct the whole Slavic pantheon. Nevertheless, there were certain common beliefs among most pre-Christian Slavs. It is generally thought that the earliest Slavic religious beliefs were based on the principle that the whole natural world is inhabited and directed by spirits or mysterious forces. Later, particularly in areas where the Slavs had a more organized cultural life and were integrated with foreign peoples, the spiritual beliefs became less rustic, and the vague spirits of nature were anthropomorphized into divinities with special powers and functions.

Beliefs and religious practices of the ancient Slavic peoples of East Europe, including the Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Most Slavic mythologies hold that God ordered the devil to bring up a handful of sand from the bottom of the sea and created the land from it. Slavic religion was often characterized by dualism, with a Black God named in curses and a White God invoked to obtain protection or mercy. Lightning and fire gods were also common. The ancient Russians appear to have erected their idols outdoors, but the Baltic Slavs built temples and enclosed sacred places, where festivals were held and animal and human sacrifices occurred. Such festivals also often included communal banquets at which the flesh of sacrificial animals was consumed.

Unlike Greek or Egyptian mythology, there are no first-hand records for the study of Slavic mythology. Despite some arguable theories (for instance, the Book of Veles), it cannot be proven that the Slavs had any sort of writing system before Christianity; therefore, all their original religious beliefs and traditions were likely passed down orally over the generations, and basically forgotten over the centuries following the arrival of Christianity. Before that, sparse records of Slavic religion were mostly written by non-Slavic Christian missionaries who were uninterested in accurately portraying pagan beliefs. Archaeological remains of old Slavic cult images and shrines have been found, though little can be yielded from them without legitimate knowledge of their contexts, other than confirming existing historical records. Fragments of old mythological beliefs and pagan festivals survive up to this day in folk customs, songs, and stories of all the Slavic nations.

There are currently no known written accounts of Slavic mythology predating the fragmentation of the Proto-Slavic people into West, East, and South Slavs, with the possible exception of a short note in Herodotus' *Histories*, mentioning a tribe of Neuri in the far north, whose men, Herodotus claims, transform themselves into wolves for several days each year. Some researchers have interpreted this through the Slavic folk belief in werewolves, whilst others believe that Herodotus actually referred to ancient Slavic carnival festivals, when groups of young men roamed the villages in masks, sometimes referred to as vucari (wolf-humans). The identification of "Neuri" with Proto-Slavs remains controversial, however.

The first authoritative reference to the Slavs and their mythology in written history was made by the 6th century Byzantine historian Procopius, whose *Bellum Gothicum* described the beliefs of a South Slavic tribe that crossed the Danube heading south in just two days. According to Procopius, these Slavs worshipped a single deity, who crafted lightning and thunder. Though not named

explicitly, it can be deduced this is a reference to the deity known as Perun in later historic sources, as in many Slavic languages today (Polish 'piorun' for example). Perun simply means "thunder" or "lightning bolt". He also mentions the belief in various demons and nymphs (i.e. vilas), but does not mention any other names.

The most numerous and richest written records are of West Slavic paganism, particularly of Wendish and Polabian tribes, who were forcibly made Christian only at the end of the 12th century. The German missionaries and priests who criticized pagan religion left extensive records of old mythological systems they sought to overcome. However, they hardly restrained themselves from "pious lies", claiming pagan Slavs were idolatrous, blood-thirsty barbarians. As none of those missionaries learned any Slavic language, their records are confused and exaggerated.

Major works include a chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg from the beginning of the 11th century, who described a temple in the city of Riedegost (Radegast) where the great deity Zuarasic (Svarožic) was worshipped. According to Thietmar, this was the most sacred place in the land of pagan Slavs, and Svarožic was their most important deity.

Another very valuable document is the *Chronica Slavorum* written in the late 12th century by Helmold, a German priest. He mentions 'the devil' Zerneboh (Chernobog), goddess Živa, god Porenut, some unnamed gods whose statues had multiple heads and, finally, the great god Svantevit, worshiped on the island of Rügen who, according to Helmod, was the most important of all (Western) Slavic deities.

The third, and arguably the most important record, comes from the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, who in his *Gesta Danorum* described the war fought in 1168 by the Danish king Valdemar I against the Wends of Rügen, the conquest of their city at cape Arkona and the destruction of the grand temple of Svantevit that stood there. Saxo meticulously described the worship of Svantevit, the customs associated with it and the tall four-headed statue of the god.

The fourth major source are three biographies of the German warrior-bishop St Otto, who in the early 12th century led several military-pastoral expeditions into the regions of Slavic tribes living near the Baltic Sea. According to the manuscript, the most important Slavic deity was Triglav, whose temples in the city of Szczecin were respected oracles. In the cities of Wolgast and Havelberg, the war god Gerovit was worshiped, a likely corruption of Jarovit, a Slavic deity possibly identical to Jarilo of the East Slavic folklore.



SLAVIC RELIGION

As various Slavic populations were Christianised between the 7th and 12th centuries, Christianity was introduced as a religion of the elite, flourishing mostly in cities and amongst the nobility. Amongst the rural majority of the medieval Slavic population, old myths remained strong. Christian priests and monks in Slavic countries, particularly in Russia, for centuries fought against the phenomenon called dvoeverie (double faith). On the one hand, peasants and farmers eagerly accepted baptism, masses and the new Christian holidays. On the other hand, they still persisted performing ancient rites and worshipping old pagan cults, even when the ancient deities and myths on which those were based were forgotten.

From a perspective of the Slavic peasant, Christianity was not a replacement of old Slavic mythology, but rather an addition to it. Christianity may have offered a hope of salvation, and of blissful afterlife in the next world, but for survival in this world, for yearly harvest and protection of cattle, the old religious system with its fertility rites, its protective deities, and its household spirits was taken to be necessary. This was a problem the Christian church never really solved; at best, it could offer a Christian saint or martyr to replace the pagan deity of a certain cult, but the cult itself thrived, as did the mythological view of the world through which natural phenomena were explained.

While folk beliefs and traditions of all Slavic peoples indeed are the richest resource for reconstructing the ancient pagan beliefs, these may very likely have lost their original mythology and sanctity. People entertained a vague idea that some festivals must be celebrated in a certain way, some stories must be told or some songs must be sung, merely in accordance with tradition. Cults of old deities were mixed with worship of new Christian saints, and old rituals blended among new Christian holidays.

We can roughly divide the folklore accounts into two groups:

Fairy tales about various fantastical characters and creatures such as Alkonost, Baba Yaga, Koschei the Deathless, Firebird, Zmey, songs and tales of legendary heroes such as Russian bogatyrs, and superstitions about various demons and spirits such as domovoi, likho, vilas, vampires, vodyanoy, rusalkas etc. Many of these tales and beliefs may be quite ancient, and probably contain at least some elements of old mythical structure, but they are not myths themselves. They lack a deeper, sacral meaning and religious significance, and furthermore they tend to vary greatly among various Slavic populations.

Folk celebrations of various Christian festivals and popular beliefs in various saints. It is, for instance, quite clear that a popular saint in many Slavic countries, St Elijah the Thunderer, is a replacement of old thunder-god Perun. Likewise, traces of ancient deities can also be found in cults of many other saints, such as St Mary, St Vitus, St George, St Blaise and St Nicholas, and it is also obvious that various folk celebrations, such as the spring feast of Jare or Jurjevo and the summer feast of Ivanje or Ivan Kupala, both very loosely associated with Christian holidays, are abundant with pre-Christian elements. These beliefs have considerable religious and sacral significance to the people still performing them. The problem is, of course, that the elements of pre-Christian religion are hopelessly mixed into popular Christianity.

SLAVIC MYTHS

Slavic myths were cyclical, repeating every year over a series of festivities that followed changes of nature and seasons. Thus, to understand their mythology, it is important to understand their concept of calendar. On the basis of archeological and folklore remains, it is possible to reconstruct some elements of the pre-Christian calendar, particularly major festivals.

The year was apparently lunar and began in early March, similar to other Indo-European cultures whose old calendar systems are better known to us. The names for the last night of the old year and the first day of the new year are reconstructed as Velja Noc (*Velja Notj)/Velik Dan (Veliku dini) (Great Night/Great Day). After Christianization, these names were probably passed onto Easter. In Slavic countries belonging to Orthodox Churches, Easter is known as Velik Dan/Great Day, whilst amongst Catholic Slavs, it is known as Velika Noc/Great Night.

In pagan times, however, this was a holiday probably quite like Halloween. Certain people donned grotesque masks and coats of sheep wool, roaming around the villages, as during the Great Night, it was believed, spirits of dead ancestors travelled across the land, entering villages and houses

to celebrate the new year with their living relatives. Consequently, the deity of the last day of the year was probably Veles, god of the Underworld.

The number three: Slavs really like the number three, and tend to group things in threes whenever possible. Nine is the second most popular, being three threes. Many folk tales are about three brothers, with the youngest always winning. Heaven-Earth-Underworld, Rod-Lada-Svarog, Svarog's sons, Zemlya-Kupala-Veles, the Zori, the Bogatyri, all triads.

Rod's Egg: The Slavs continue to honor the Egg by incorporating it into the celebration of Easter. The ultimate expression of the Egg are those created by the House of Fabrege for the Tsars, used as Easter presents beginning with Aleksandr III.

Burial rituals: The early Slavs cremated the dead to help the soul rise up to Heaven, also a reasonable practice when bears and wolves live in the area. The Christian practice of burial can't have been an easy sell, a grave was closer to the Underworld, further from Heaven, and not easy to dig six months of the year because of frozen ground. I would not be surprised to find that for an extended period after the Baptism of the Rus, locals told the priest that a bonfire was needed to thaw the ground for burial, whereupon they cremated the body in secret and buried an empty coffin with the priest in attendance.

Hell must have been another problem, as fire was sacred to the Slavs, and cold was death. I am not sure how much of a threat burning in Hell was to most Slavs. It was probably similar to imprisoning an Orthodox monk. Prison would be a general improvement in living conditions for most Orthodox monks, who tended to live in hand-dug caves with barely enough room to crouch in.

Death: Homicide and suicide were the only types of death that were not considered natural. All other causes were considered the will of one god or another.

Sacrifices: The usual ritual sacrifice amounted to a barbeque, with the animals burned, and then eaten by the congregation. Most gods were satisfied with a 'cockerel past crowing', but sometimes, goats, sheep, and cattle were needed. (Veles wasn't into poultry.) Human sacrifice was not a feature of the old Slavic religion.

Temples: Early 'temples' for most ritual sects consisted of an oak grove surrounded by a circle of stones, or a moat. Some featured statues, but there did not seem to be an absolute requirement for images. It was much later, near cities, that buildings were constructed for worship, and images became a regular feature. The early circles tended to be for a single god, while the buildings were polytheistic.

Oak trees: The hardwood oak tended to be struck more often by lightning, provided long burning fuel for the winter fires, was the source of charcoal for forges, and provided animal feed in the form of acorns. It was sacred to all the major gods.

Bears: The primary use of bears in elder times was to locate bee hives. The Slavs traded honey to the Vikings, who used it to make mead (an alcoholic drink made from honey, drunk esp. in the past), and the wax was traded to the Byzantine Empire, to be made into candles. The Russian word for bear is Medved, a compound word derived from the roots of Honey and Seer/Witch, reflecting the bears use in the search for honeycombs.

Major Holidays: The Equinoxes were the major Slavic holidays. The people witnessed the battle between the White God (Belobog) and the Black God (Chërnobog). Of course, the White God always won in the Spring, and the Black God in the Fall. Rations would have been short for the Spring Equinox, but people would celebrate the coming warmth and begin their preparations for planting. There was more food in the Fall, but the Black God's victory was a warning of the hard times to come. This was the cycle of Slavic life:

Times are hard, but will get better;

Times are good, but will soon get worse.



SLAVIC GODS AND GODDESSES

PERUN

Perun is one of the mightiest Slavic gods, creator of thunder and lightning, bringer of storms and rains, protector of warriors and leader of military detachments. Almost everywhere Perun is considered the supreme god. His name is derived from Indo - European root "perk", "parg" (hit, strike) which developed into pan-Slavic "pierun", "perun" - a thunder, a lightning. In ancient times universal master and supreme god was Svarog - god of sky and archetypal fire. He was a peaceful god - father and creator - and had 3 sons: 1) Dazhbog, the good golden-faced god of sun, warmth, light and life, protector and donator to people; 2) Svarozhich - the furious god of terrestrial fire, whose name should never be pronounced; 3) Perun - fearful and cruel god of thunderbolts, storms, hurricanes, hails and wars, requitor and punisher of people, guardian of world order. When Slavs started their migrations in IV-V cent., they confronted with many foreign tribes and their life turned into a struggle for survival, because of which they started paying greater honour to warlike Perun, than to peaceful Svarog. Thus Perun became a supreme overlord, displacing his father Svarog. Besides being thunderer and punisher, Perun is also a benefactor - rain, caused by him, bring life and fertility to earth; to encourage pious people, Perun assists them and rewards them for their good deeds, but His cruelty and stringency enforce and strengthen order among people. If there was nobody to control them, they would have exterminated each other and obliterated the whole mankind.

BELOBOG, BYALBOG, BELUN

Byelobog means "white god," and so he appears as an old man with a long white beard, dressed in white and carrying a staff. He is a giver of light, traveling only in the daytime. He leads the lost out of dark forests, bestows wealth and fertility on all, and helps reapers in the fields. He fights with Chernobog every winter and summer solstice.

DAZHDBOG, DAZHBOG, DAYBOG

Dazhbog is the sun god, and a kind of chief god, somewhat similar to Zeus or the Dagda. He has horns and a canine head. Dazhbog travels in a chariot across the sky every day like Helios, bringing justice, prosperity and sunshine to the world. He is known as the grandfather of the Russian people. His attendants include two maidens (the morning and evening stars), seven judges (the planets), and seven messengers (the comets). In one myth, he is married to Lada, and the two secure abundance for the world.

PEPERUNA, PERUNITSA

Peperuna is the wife of Perun the Thunderer. She is often mentioned in Slavic pagan conjuring songs and prayers for rain, mainly at the Bulgarian rain-begging ritual "peperuna". Peperuna is goddess of rain, rainclouds and storms. Probably another name for Dodola.



DOLYA, SRETYA, SRECHA

Dolya is the goddess of good fortune and luck, bringer of joy and happiness, assistant of the household and welfare goddess Makosh. Sretya is represented as a gold-curl maiden, who, just like Makosh, often spins golden yarn. Inside it she weaves people's fate or better - the good parts of their fate. Often Sretya travels around the world and can appear before everybody - once as a girl, once as a boy. She would request a small favour, ask this or that and, if the man is good, helpful and respectful, she gives him good luck. If the man is peppy, unobliging or say bad words for gods, Sretya turns her face off him and happiness never comes to such person.

ZHAROVIT, YAROVIT

Jarovit (or Gerovit) is the god of war; his name may mean "severe lord." He rules the springtime, looking toward the West. His sacred symbol is his shield, which was kept in his temple and brought out when a victory was needed.

ZHIVA, DIVA, SIVA

Zhiva, from Slavic "zhiv" = alive; "zhivot" = life. Goddess of life, birth, spring, fertility and love. She embodies the universal vital powers, brings life-giving forces. Thus Zhiva appears to be the absolute antagonist of death - goddess Mora. Zhiva is wife of the universal demiurg, the creation - god Rod.

LADA

Lada is the goddess of spring, love and beauty. She lives in the Otherworld, called Vyri, until the spring equinox, when she emerges, bringing Spring with her. One story has her married to Swarog who without her could not have created the world. Other sources give her a brother/lover named Lado which would make them divine twins such as Freya and Frey. There is also some mention of her two sons, Lel & Polel, and that of a daughter, Liuli or Lielia. She and her daughter are the Rozhanitsy - Goddesses of a child's fate. Lada is often portrayed as a goddess who is born and dies yearly. Her sacred tree is the lime/linden, supposedly because its leaves are shaped like hearts. As a Slavonian love song goes:

"As the bee is drawn by the linden-bloom (or lime-perfume),
My heart is drawn by thee."

DODOLA

Dodola is the goddess of clouds and rain. At times of drought, villagers would perform rituals to propitiate her, which included pouring water over a flower-bedecked girl.

MATI ZEMLYA

Mother Earth; everywhere she is mentioned together with deities, but she is more likely to be one of the essential elements - earth. Different deities are personifications of its states and functions - like goddess Makosh is mistress of moist soil and respectively of agricultural abundance. People paid great honour to Mati Zemlya, because of her vital significance for the ancient agriculturing Slavic communities. Harvest was up to her, so food and survival depended on her, too. Earth also provides eternal asylum for the mortal remains of people. I.e. man was directly dependent on Mati Zemlya through all his life and beyond the death, as the material state of the dead body affects the state of the deceased soul. There are obvious parallels between Slavic Mother-Earth and the Hellenic Gaea or

Nordic Jord (read Yiord), both whose names mean "Earth". Mati Zemlya is wife of the progenitor god, Svarog.

SVAROG

Svarog is the sky god, as well as a smith and the giver of fire. He is similar to Hephaestus. Svarog hammered the sun into shape and placed it in the sky. He is the founder of monogamous marriage. He has two sons. A short invocation to Svarog reads: "Sky, you see me! Sky, you hear me!"

SVAROZHICH, SVAROZHITS

Svarozhich is the personification of fire, and a son of Svarog. He gives life to the newborn winter sun. He is often seen as warrior, clad in armor on a horse, with a bird-shaped helmet, a bison on his breastplate, and holding a shield and a double-axe. At harvest time, he kindles a fire to dry the corn and wheat before threshing

SVANTOVIT, SVETOVIT, SVYATOVID

Svantovit is a horned god connected with the ancestor cult. He is also a god of war, and protector of fields. His idol had four heads, and held a horn filled with wine, from which the priest predicted the harvest. Svantovit also had a sacred white horse which predicted the outcome of war - if it stepped across the plowings with its right foot, it was a good omen, but with its left, a bad omen. Svantovit became St. Vitus.



STRIBOG

Stribog is the god of wind, storms and dissension. He brings the frost and cold. He is called the grandfather of the winds, and sometimes the distributor of wealth.



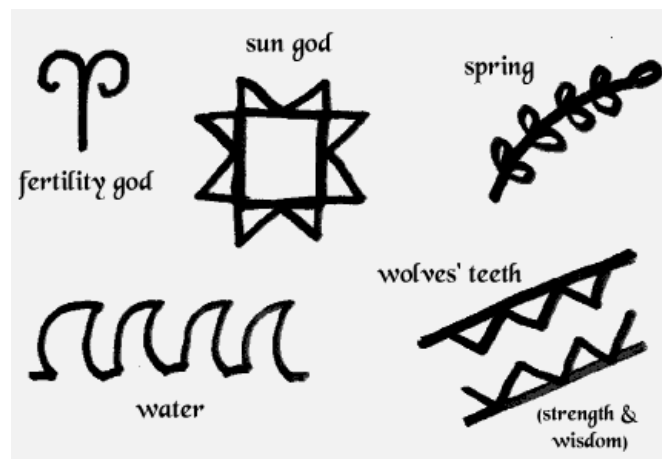
TROYAN, TRIGLAV, TRZIGLOV

(lit. 'three headed')also sometimes called troglav is a god or complex of gods in Slavic mythology, similar in nature to the Trinity in Christianity or Trimurti in Hinduism. Often, he is considered to be the same deity as Troyan.Triglav is a unity of three gods. The exact members of the triad vary by place and time. An early variation included Svarog, Perun, and Dajbog. Later, Dajbog was replaced by Svetovid or Veles. Triglav is usually described as a fusion of these gods. More rarely he is said to be their son. It may also be a unity of lesser gods (Lesser Triglav). In one legend, Triglav is veiled completely, so holy that he cannot see the evil deeds of men. He rarely appears around mortals.Triglav is depicted as a three-headed man sometimes with bands of (gold) blindfolds over his eyes, or a man with three goat heads. Several temples dedicated to Triglav existed near Szczecin, Poland.

CHERNOBOG, CHRNB OG

Chernobog means "black god." He is the opposite force of Byelobog, the lord of darkness, the bringer of calamities and destruction

SLAVIC CREATURES



With the term "Slavic spirits" we conditionally name all supernatural creatures, for which Slavs believed to haunt the surrounding world. Slavs themselves usually called these creatures "bes, pl. besove" (fury), which in pre-Christian period designated absolutely all spirits, demons etc., disregarding their functions and characters (whether good or evil). In the western literature and Internet the furies are wrongly called "gods", probably because of their non-human character and peculiar abilities. But not all of the miraculous mythological images can be identified with the gods.

The difference between them is simple end explicit - in short, the gods are almighty; they embody the essential characteristics of nature, humans and the social life so they can guide everything and modify it in accordance with the vertical and the horizontal of the World tree - life, death, love, marriage, birth, illness, fertility, misery, strength, weakness, rains, drought, earthquakes, light, darkness, cold etc. Also their deeds emanate concern about mankind and nature, regardless of the real concrete display of these deeds - as benefit or harm. Their concern is not necessarily favourable for the human, it is not pointed at his welfare but one way or another it has the purpose to sustain the basic

universal principles. Much more elementary, lower and feeble are all the demons, spirits, souls and other supernatural creatures. It is true that they possess some magical abilities, but these abilities are limited to a small area and are used to achieve insignificant effect, which is more like a whim of the respective creature than a manifestation of purposeful striving. It must not be disregarded that these creatures themselves are subservient to the gods' will, even if slighter than the humans. They are not so vitally dependent upon the gods' benevolence but are forced to obey it, in order to escape from being "punished by the sky", and it is this punishability that draws the line between them and the gods' powers, which we regard as non-punishable. And if the gods are mostly objects of religious worship and belief, the rest of the supernatural creatures are burdened with mythological and superstitious belief. That's why the people are just afraid of them, as they are afraid of beasts and illnesses, while the gods are treated with awe, respect, even love.

VILLA, SAMOVILLA - Vila, a young, beautiful woman with long hair, who is usually the spirit of a girl who died unbaptized. Vilas are warriors, and they can shapeshift into animals. They leave fairy rings where they walk. Round cakes, ribbons, fruits, vegetables, and flowers are left for them at sacred trees, wells and fairy caves.

VODNIK, VODYANOI - from "voda" (water) - male spirit, master of rivers, springs and lakes. The Vodnik is lord of the Russalkas and often harms people.

DOMNITSA, DOMOVITSA - from "dom" (a house) - female domestic spirit; partner of the Domovik. Other name - Kikimora.

SLAVA - the messenger bird of Perun, often a flame-colored owl. Slava points its wing toward the direction where an army should go.



RUSALKA, the spirit of a child who died unbaptized or of a virgin who drowned. Rusalki live in lakes and have long, wavy green hair. Some have fish tails like mermaids, and some can turn into fish. They manifest either as beautiful girls, dressed in robes of mist, who sing sweet songs to bewitch passersby, or as ugly and wicked women who attack humans, especially men. During Rusalki week, around Midsummer, they emerge from the water and climb into weeping willow and birch trees until night, when they dance in rings in the moonlight. Any person who dances with them must do so until he dies. After that week, the grass grows thicker wherever they walk. In the 19th century, the Rusalki were connected with the cult of the dead.

Pozemne Vile, earth spirits, like gnomes, who guard treasure and help miners.

Research and findings

I surveyed 111 people. The age range was:

- 14 year-olds -20 people (chart 1)
- 15 year-olds -21 people (chart 2)
- 17 year-olds - 42 people (chart 3)
- 18 year-olds -28 people (chart 4)

They were asked to say what they know about the following questions:

- 1 Are you interested in mythology?
- 2 Do you find it useful?
- 3 Are myths still relevant?
- 4 Have you heard of Slavic mythology? If your answer is yes, what do you know about Slavic mythology? Can you name any Slavic gods?
- 5 Do you think that Greek and Roman mythology are more important than Slavic mythology for the development of Christianity or philosophy?
- 6 Should we study Slavic mythology at school?
- 7 Why is it important to know about Slavic mythology?
- 8 Is there a connection between mythology and tradition?
- 9 Are national customs and traditions important for you?
A) a lot B) slightly C) not at all
- 10 Do you think that we have to preserve our national customs and traditions?
A) yes, they are a part of our national identity
B) I haven't thought about it
C) I don't care about customs and traditions
- 11 Do you agree with the statement "Myth is a pattern of beliefs that give meaning to life"?

Summary:

In conclusion, I believe that my survey showed:

- * the fact that young people do not know almost anything about Slavic mythology.
- * that young people recognise the need to know about Slavic mythology and Slavic Gods as that is important for understanding our culture, tradition and habits.

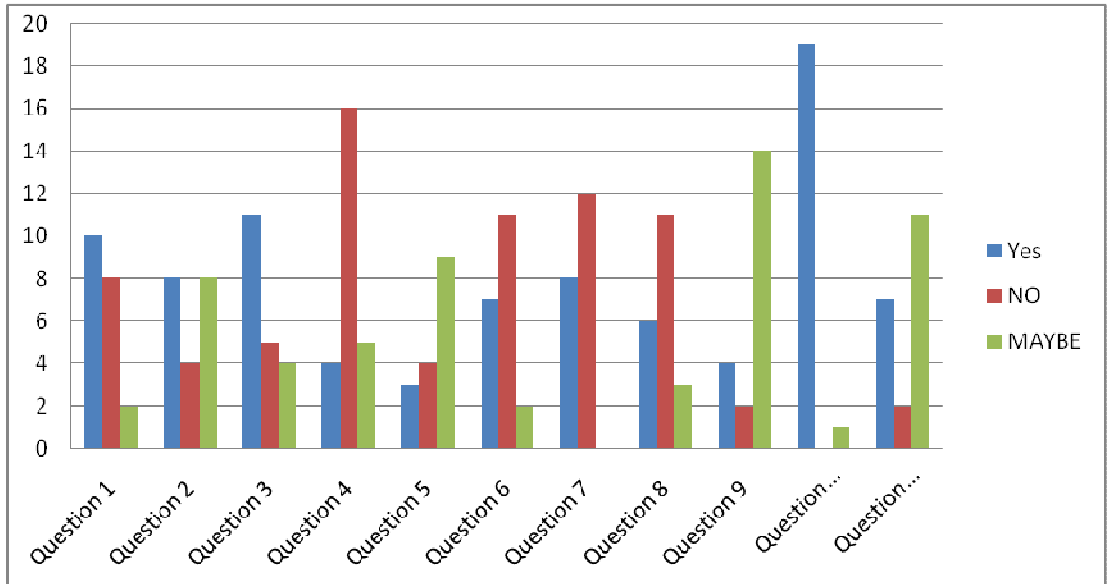


Chart 1

It is interesting that only four students mentioned the names of Slavic God and Goddess - Vesna and Triglav. They said that they had not built temples, which I found as a very useful piece of information. They agreed that we should study more about Slavic mythology, especially in our History classes.

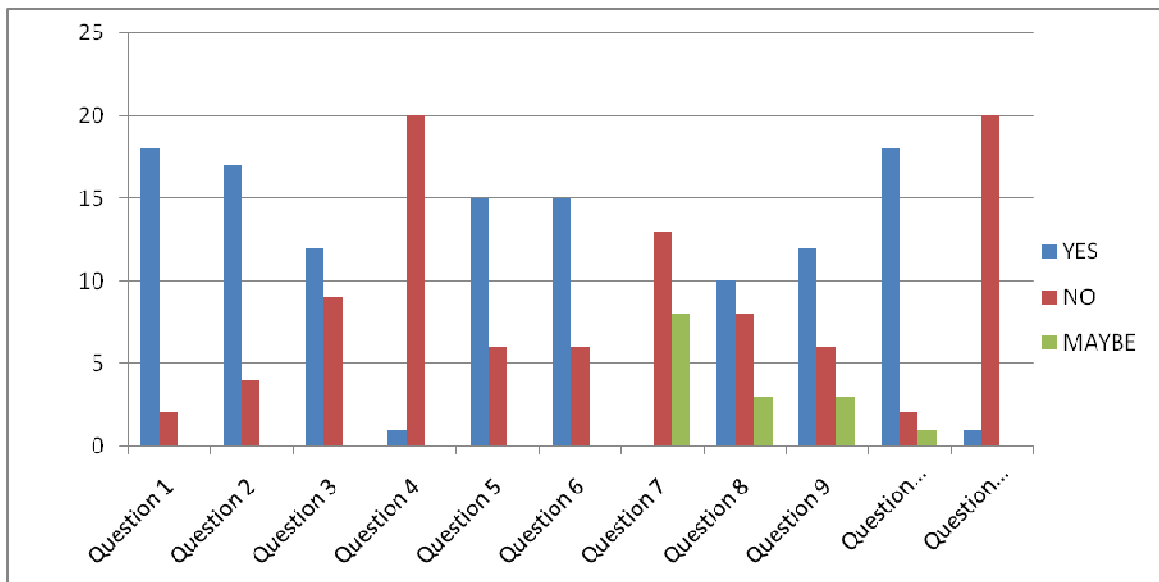


Chart 2

The saddest thing is that 20 students answered that they had not heard about the existence of Slavic mythology and 8 of them do not even care. They certainly do not want to learn about it at schools and most of them do not have any opinion. What is wrong with this generation?

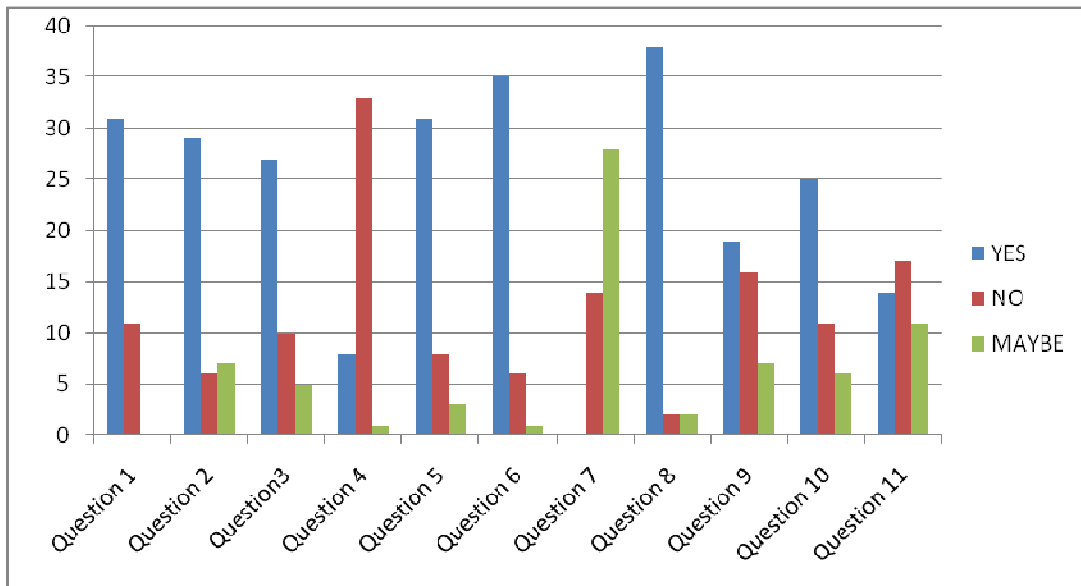


Chart 3

Eight students named Perun as Slavic God and one of the other 34 interviewed, who do not care at all, named the wrong mythology! Fourteen students do not find Slavic mythology useful and interesting to learn, but others think that we should know more because we are their descendants.

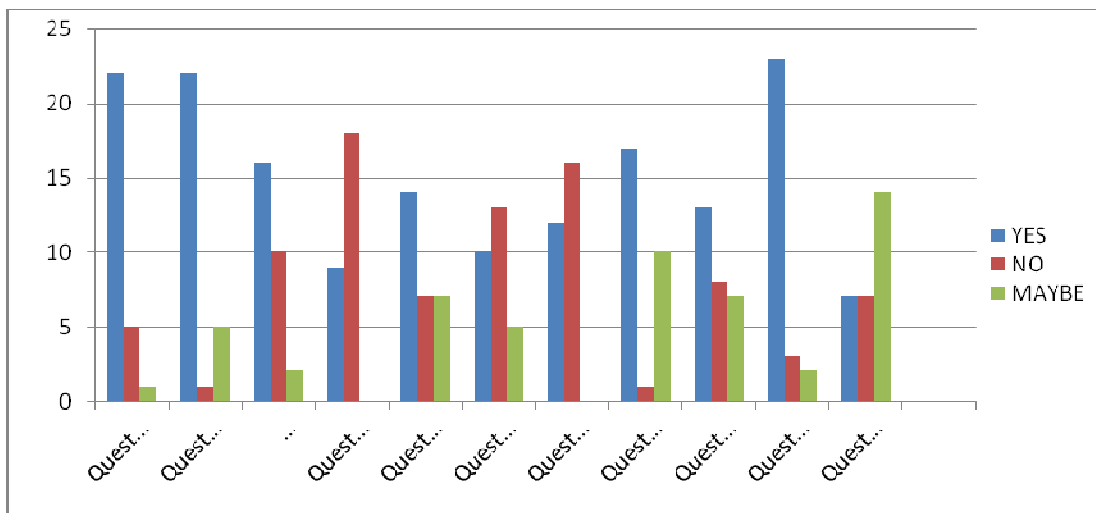


Chart 4

These students named Vesna, Perun, and Triglav as Slavic gods and one of them mentioned Babaroga – a creature that the children are sometimes scared with. Five students think that

Greek and Roman mythology are more important than Slavic. However, in my opinion, they are all equally important.

SLAVIC MYTHOLOGY AS A PART OF OUR LIFE

We should believe in Slavic Gods. We believe in wisdom, goodness and beauty hidden under their countenances. Slavic Gods are the founts of life, power and happiness. Belief in our Gods is the heritage which we continue. Slavic Gods, worshipped for millennia are the most beautiful images of the Divine Power and closest to our hearts.

We believe that Gods give meaning to our existence, we believe they protect the actions of our grandfathers, our actions and that of our children and grandchildren from being forgotten. The most valuable things will be passed on and will exist in the eternal cycle of reviving life. We assume that the death of a man ends certain stage. It is the condition of the transformation into a new form of existence. It is a shed of the old, exhausted form. The noble and persistent ones will be rewarded with entering into continuously higher and higher levels of existence, more conscious, more significant and closer to Gods.

The knowledge of mankind has not reached the level which would allow to determine the essence of the universe, yet we are conscious of its constant growth. Now we can become a part of this growth. Permanent progress fills our life with meaning and endows us with faith in survival of our actions. We practice strict ethical rules. We live properly, honestly and nobly. We condemn laziness, cowardice, recklessness and hypocrisy. The most villainous for us is treason. We are the enemies of meanness, and most of all we condemn lack of will to overcome it. We propagate the things which are the best in us. We bear responsibility for our actions. We grow and we create, for this is our destiny. We are the defenders of our values, families and of our community. We defend the right to live on our own territory, we defend the space of our civilisation. This duty arises from the most obvious laws of nature.

Our rituals focus on following the rhythm of nature, on finding wisdom in the laws of nature and in the divine rights present in it. Our rituals cultivate the relation with our ethnic and spiritual community. Common prayers and common meals. Homage paid to our ancestors. The obiate sacrifice made to our Gods. We bring back meaningfulness to our ancient native feasts. We believe in reason, the source of human cognition. We believe in our powers, the reason for constant change. We believe in the soul, the divine element in men.

Our community surrounds us with help and support. Together we bring out the most valuable things in us, the only things which are worth noticing. A crooked cross, a triskelion, a circle and an even-armed cross are the symbols of Slavic faith believers, the symbols coding the knowledge about the order of the Universe.

Glory to Gods, Memory to Ancestors!

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