

# THE ROLE OF LEGEND IN CONSTRUCTING ANNUAL CYCLE

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## Abstract

The paper is based on the folklore tradition of a mythical being, the Master of the Wolves, whose chief function was commanding or dividing up food among the wolves. He appears in many Slavic and other European legends, and some Southern Slavs also celebrate the so-called “wolf holidays”; a being with the same function appears also in incantations against wolves. It turned out that the incantations are usually connected with the first days of pasturing in the spring and the beginning of summer, while the legends refer to the last days of pasturing in the autumn and the beginning of winter. The legends and incantations as well as the beliefs and customs clearly indicate the remains of a tradition, the intention of which was to explain and to support the changing of time, the binary opposition of winter and summer, as it pertained to the annual cycle of Slavic stockbreeders.

**Key words:** Slavic folk beliefs, legends, folk customs, incantations, the master of the animals, wolves.

In 1961 Lutz Röhrich published a paper on *Herr der Tiere* ‘the Master of the Animals’ in European folk tradition. In the paper he argues that in European folk legends and tales we can find a series of folk beliefs about a master of animals in some form. These legends are, according to him, one of the most ancient layers of European legends and had come to Europe from the Mediterranean basin, more precisely from the Cretan-Minoan cult of Artemis (Röhrich 1961: 343–347). One of the masters of animals briefly mentioned in the paper is the master of wolves known in Slavic tradition.

The majority of Slavic peoples (and some non-Slavic ones as well) are indeed familiar with the folk tradition of some kind of a ruler, commander, leader, master of wolves, sometimes also called wolf herdsman. In this paper I will try to examine the function of the tradition connected with this mythical being, especially, but not exclusively in the Slavic tradition. Parallels with some other European folklore traditions will also be considered.

The tradition of some kind of a master of wolves can be found in various segments of folklore – in legends, beliefs (and proverbs). Very different characters can appear in the role of the master of wolves: saints, forest spirits, God, wolves and many other beings or persons. However, if while trying to determine the characteristics of this person we cling to the notion of wolf herdsman, which was the collective name for these saints and other beings introduced in specialised literature by Jiří Polivka in his study *Vlčí pastíř* (The Wolf Herdsman, 1927), we will not get very far. This name can be found among ethnological records of folk beliefs only one time apiece in Croatia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Ukraine, and otherwise only in Croatian legends which were (mostly) collected in the vicinity of Varazhdin and published under the title *Tales of the Wolf Herdsman* by Matija Valjavec (1890). The name “wolf herdsman” is not found in the legends and beliefs of other Slavic peoples; instead, the more frequently used names are “Master of Wolves”, “wolf saint”, “leader of wolves”, “commander of wolves”, etc. There is no collective title under which we could categorise all the various names, so we have to identify first the function of this being in both folklore genres – legends and beliefs.

There are various legends about the Master of Wolves, but most often one encounters variants of the legend following an identical, typical structure: a man sitting in a tree in a forest sees the Master of Wolves, who is giving out food to the wolves or sending them in all directions to search for food. The last in line is the lame wolf. Since there is no more food, the Master of Wolves says he can eat the man watching from the tree. The wolf – either immediately or after various twists of the plot – actually succeeds in eating the man in the tree.

Various Slavic peoples’ legends assigned many different roles to the Master of Wolves. However, a more detailed examination reveals that all these various activities can be grouped into three main categories. We can establish that in addition to the function which is evident in the many names such as ruler of wolves, leader of wolves, master of wolves, etc. and the various activities which are assigned to this person in legends (driving the wolves, giving them assignments and orders, determining where they shall live, etc.) i.e. the function of commanding the wolves (Function 1), and the

function of allotting food to or feeding the wolves (Function 2) clearly predominate. The function of allotting food or feeding is found in one or another manner in all fifty-one Slavic legends of this type (the Master of Wolves determines what the wolves will eat, apportions food among them, sends them out after a man or into a corral after livestock, takes care of their feeding, etc.). The same is also found in a legend of the Gagauz in Moldavia (Moshkov 1902: 49–50) and in an Estonian variant of the legend (Loorits 1949: 329). We are unable to find these two functions only in a Latvian legend (see Dolenjske novice), while the function of allotting food is not (at least explicitly) to be found in a French legend, although it can be sensed there (Seignolle 1960: 265–6). We also find a third function of the Master of Wolves in the legends, and that is that he protects livestock and/or people from wolves: in a Croatian legend he calms some wolves who want to tear a man apart (Valjavec 1890: 96–7, no.8); the same holds for a Ukrainian legend (Voropai 1993; Čubinski 1872: 171–2) and the same function can also be detected in a Latvian legend.

The same three functions can also be found in the records of beliefs about the Master of Wolves. Croatian folk belief says that the Master of Wolves (wolf herdsman) is Saint George: he summons together the wolves from all over the world and tells them which animal to slaughter (Deželić 1863: 222). In Macedonia, there is St. Mrata who usually appears in the role of the Master of Wolves: he commands wolves and sends them wherever he wants (Raičević 1935: 54). According to a Russian belief most often either St. George or St. Nicholas is considered the Master of Wolves: they were supposed to order them, tell them where and what to eat, and to be their leader (Čičerov 1957: 36–37). In Ukrainian beliefs, St. George or a wood spirit (Po)lisun, who are usually considered the masters of wolves there, send the wolves off to search for food, but also forbid them to attack livestock (Dobrovolski 1901: 135), etc. According to these recordings the master of wolves commands the wolves (and sometimes all the animals) (1st function), allots food to them (2nd function), and, in addition, protects livestock against the attacks by wolves (forbids the wolves to attack livestock, shuts their mouths, i.e. muzzles them, etc.) (3rd function). All three functions are closely interrelated: it seems that the essential component of commanding the wolves (Function 1) is actually the taking care of their feed-

ing – determining what they can (Function 2) and cannot eat (Function 3). Therefore it would probably be better to speak of three aspects of a single function than of three functions, since the second and third functions actually imply the first: the third function is thus simply an aspect or a logical consequence of the first function (that he commands the wolves) and of the second, that he sends the wolves to eat where he decides (i.e. determines which animals or humans the wolves will eat, etc.).

Having identified the three aspects of a kind of a single function in the legends and beliefs about the Master of Wolves, we can see that the being/person with the same function can be identified also in incantations against wolves, which have already been partially considered by Polivka in this regard. In these, the person to whom they refer is not called the Master of Wolves or wolf herdsman or by any other similar name. Incantations which refer to a person who protects livestock from danger from wolves and other wild animals could be found preserved in the 19th and 20th century in Slovenia, Bulgaria, among the eastern Slavs (in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), in Poland (among the Poles and Prussian Germans), in the Czech lands and Hungary among German-speaking herdsmen, in Latvia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, in northern Europe and France and among the Ossetians in the Caucasus, while they are unknown, at least in such form, among other southern Slavs (the same contents can be partially detected in carols sung while walking through the village on St. George's day in Croatia and songs sung by carol singers in Serbia who walk from house to house from the name day of St. Ignatius until Christmas). In this form, shepherds and peasants/animal breeders would make appeals primarily to St. George, but also to St Nicholas, St. Peter, St. Paul and many other saints, God, Christ, forest spirits, wolves, etc. – that is, to those very beings or persons who usually play the role of the Master of Wolves in legends and beliefs (for references see Mencej 2001). If we take a close look at the actions saints or other mythical beings are asked to perform in the incantations, we can see that most of them can be placed into five groups, which appear in the majority of countries in which such forms are known. The person or being to whom they turn with appeals for help locks the mouths of (wolves and other animals); fences livestock in or out (to protect against wolves); sends wolves away from livestock; (in some other way) prevents wolves from

harming livestock; protects livestock (from wolves and other animals).

For example:

*“...Saint Nicholas, take the keys of paradise,  
Close the gullet of the mad dog,  
The forest wolf!  
So that they do not drink the blood  
Or tear the flesh  
Of our lambs and calves ...”*

(Kotula 1976: 420, but also 46, 58, 61–62, 68, 70, 72, 80, 89–90, 92).

*...Make them sleep, Lord, build a railing around a rocky mountain out of the stardust and new moon and righteous sun, before the stray beasts, before the climbing adders, before the evil of man.  
(From Belarus, Gomil region; Romanov 1891: 45–46, no. 168)*

If we look at the activities of persons to whom the people turn to in all of these incantations: muzzling wolves, shutting out livestock, sending wolves away from livestock, other methods of preventing wolves from harming livestock, it becomes clear that the chief and only purpose of the activities performed by the person who is called to perform them is to protect livestock from attacks by wolves and other animals. This means that the person to whom people turn in incantations is attributed the same function as has been attributed to the Master of Wolves in legends and beliefs (3rd aspect). This aspect, as we have stated, also implies the other two: that the command of the wolves is in the hands of the person who is turned to (1st aspect), who at the same time determines which animals the wolves can (2nd aspect) or cannot (3rd aspect) eat. This same function of the person turned to in the incantations therefore indicates that we can recognise him as the same person as in the legends and beliefs about the Master of Wolves, which means that we can refer to him as the Master of Wolves himself. The incantations can therefore also be understood as a part of the common tradition about the Master of Wolves.

In the incantations spoken by eastern Slavs while practicing customs through which they wish to protect their livestock from the danger of wolves and other animals (surrounding their pastures with locks, belts, eggs, etc.), and the legends on which some southern Slavs base their so-called “wolf holidays” and customs associated with them, we encounter a fourth great complex which we must decide whether to include as a part of the tradition of the Master of Wolves, and that is the customs. These customs are ordinarily practiced on the name days of saints who appear in the role of the Master of Wolves and occasionally on other holidays. Eastern Slavs practice these customs mainly on St. George’s day, Poles in Poland practice them on St. Nicholas’ day, Germans in Poland on St. George’s day, in Slovakia on St. George’s day, in Latvia and Lithuania on St. George’s day, in Romania on St. Dimitri’s day, St. Andrew’s day, St. George’s day and during the Martinmas celebrations in the middle of November; the same holds for the Gagauz in the middle of November, in Greece during the Martinmas celebrations, in Finland on St. George’s day and in Albania on St. George’s day and St. Dimitri’s day. Among some southern Slavs (more rarely among the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but commonly in Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria), the customs, incantations and stories which are invoked in order to protect themselves from the danger of wolves are associated with the wolf holidays (*mratinici*, *martinci*, etc.), which last from three to nine days and usually begin on or near the name day of St. Martin (Mrata) on 11 November. The Serbs celebrate still other holidays, mainly of local character, such as the holiday of St. Sava and St. Danilo (in Serbia and among the Serbian populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia), St. Andrew (in Serbia and especially Romania and among shepherds in Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc.), Macedonians also celebrate it on the holiday of St. Jeremiah (Yeremiya), etc. (for references, see Mencej 2001).

Even at first glance, the purpose of these customs obviously corresponds to the function of the Master of Wolves in the legends, beliefs and incantations, since actions are performed in them which are intended to protect livestock/people from wolves – the third aspect of the function of the Master of Wolves. Functional equality is, however, not the only characteristic which unites the legends, incantations, beliefs, and customs (holidays). Many more detailed interrelations appear among them, indicating that the customs are

also a component of the overall tradition of the Master of Wolves. Let us take a closer look at the customs, commandments and prohibitions associated with the danger of wolves. The actions which people perform to ward off the danger of wolves can be placed into a few main groups:

*Fasting* – especially among Serbians, people fast during wolf holidays or during the holiday of a saint considered to be a master of wolves (Pećo 1925: 377; Dimitrijević 1926: 75, 82, 114; Filipović 1972: 218, 188; Petrović 1948: 235, 236; Miličević 1894: 180, 66; Grbić 1909: 24; Antoniević 1971: 165). Also, in some parts of Poland, on the 6th of December, i. e. on the holiday of Saint Nicholas, a patron of wolves and livestock, shepherds and landlords fast in order to prevent wolves from attacking the livestock (Klimaszewska 1981: 148; Klinger 1931: 77; Ciszewski 1887: 39).

*Banning all work* – if people do not respect this prohibition, the wolves and other wild animals will attack the livestock (sometimes applying only to women or shepherds) – common among Serbians, Macedonians, Bulgarians (Filipović 1967: 269; Tomić & Maslovarić & Tešić 1964: 198; Grbić 1909: 10–11, 74; Raičević 1935: 54–61; Marinov 1994 (1914): 696–700 ff.)

*Magically shutting the mouths of wolves* – including all activities which people perform with the purpose that through their actions by analogy the mouths of wolves are closed (most of these activities and prohibitions can be found among Serbians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Greeks): they bind chains and tie up scissors, knives, carding combs, combs, razors, etc., in order to “shut or bind the mouths of the wolves”; they also do not use these implements, hide them, do not touch them, etc., tie a rope around the sheep in order to muzzle the wolves (Petrović 1948: 235, 236; Dimitrijević 1926: 73–74; Grbić 1909: 10–11, 74; Megas 1963: 21).

*Magically protecting the livestock against danger* – comprising mainly walking in magical circles around the livestock (especially among eastern Slavs and Estonians on the first day of pasturing) (Sokolova 1979: 165; Eleonskaia 1994: 146–147; Rantasalo 1945: 92–94, 101–103), locking fences shut with locks, setting up a magic lock at the gates to the corral (from two branches, carding combs, pieces of string, for instance in Macedonia) (Raičević 1935: 54–61)

*Banning all work with livestock and animal products* (wool, fur, etc.) – again, was practiced among Serbians, Macedonians, Bulgarians: no tilling, no ploughing, no counting livestock, no letting them out of the stables and no moving them, no harnessing them (except under certain conditions), no shearing sheep, no eating meat, etc.; also no working with wool – no weaving, no spinning, no knitting, no preparing yarn for weaving, no winding yarn onto looms, etc.; no working on clothing (which was primarily of wool or leather) – no washing, no mending, no dyeing, no sewing, no making sandals, etc.; even no changing clothing or shoes, tailors and shoemakers do not work; nothing made of wool may leave the house. The prohibiting of lighting flames or fires in the stables (probably in order to avoid exposing the location of the livestock to wolves) can also be included in this group (Stanojević 1913: 41; Grbić 1909: 10–11, 74; Ardalić 1906: 130; Begović 1986: 10; Nedeljković 1990: 169; Antoniević 1971: 165; Dorđević 1958b: 396; Filipović 1967: 269; Antonić & Zupanc 1988: 165–166; Kitevski 1979: 55–56).

*Banning movement from one's "own" to "foreign" places* (outside home) – this is shown mainly in prohibitions on letting anything out of the house, trips into the forest for firewood, and probably also in prohibitions on moving and letting livestock out of the stables during holidays (which also fall into group 2) – known especially among Serbians, Macedonians (Tanović 1927: 16–17; Antonić & Zupanc 1988: 165–166 ff).

*Banning the mentioning of wolves* – a taboo word, as the conviction that “if wolves are mentioned, they will come” is deeply rooted among Serbians, Macedonians (Dorđević 1958b: 393–394; Raičević 1935: 54–61).

*Sacrifices* – in Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria during the *mratinci* holidays a black (or of any other colour) rooster is most frequently sacrificed, sometimes along with a hen (Stanojević 1913: 41; Dorđević 1958b: 396 – Serbia; Marinov 1994 (1914): 695) in Russia on St. George's day a wild rooster – as a substitute for a ram – is sacrificed to the forest spirit (which often appears in the role of the Master of Wolves); Albanians, Serbs and Bulgarians roast lambs or kids on spits on St. George's day).



German-speaking shepherds in the Czech area “set free or drive off” wolves on the eve of St. Martin’s or St. Andrew’s day (Wolf-Beranek 1973: 174–175), Slovenes in Žabnice in the Kanal Valley in Italy “hunt the beast” or “chase the wolf” (Kuret 1989: II: 462), while Finns “drive off” the wolves on St. George’s day (Rantasalo 1945: 85–86).

Such a custom in northern Austria is described thus:

*At dusk on St. Martin’s eve the boys set off making a wild din and yelling throughout the village, and banging on lids, ringing bells and yelling, they stop at every house and shout “The wolf is free!” The older youths force their way inside, wearing masks of skins or white sheets and cloths. They imitate wolves and attack the children. Those who “set the wolves free” and the “wolves” perform wild antics around the village (Burgstaller 1948: 11ff, cited in Grabner 1968: 73).*

There are only a few customs that cannot be ranked with confidence in one of the eight groups, but they are all very infrequent and of distinctly local character.

There are many direct correspondences between the various segments of folklore – beliefs, the legends of the Master of Wolves and the wolf holidays, during which people perform rituals for protection against wolves – the first direct correspondence can be found in the conviction that the Master of Wolves determines the distribution of food to wolves on his holiday, whereby on that day (or usually the entire week surrounding that day) people practice various customs or uphold various prohibitions and commandments the purpose of which is to prevent any harm to livestock: in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is believed that St. Danilo, who takes the role of the wolf saint, determines the distribution of food to the wolves on his name day, which is the imperial day of all wild beasts. On this day he orders which wolves will go where over the course of the year (Filipovich 1967: 269). In Serbia it is believed that on his name day St. Sava, who often appears in the role of the Master of Wolves, disperses the wolves and even encourages them to attack people as punishment for working on his feast day (Đorđević 1958b: 397). In Lužnica and Nišava (Serbia) they believe that St. Mrata rules the

wolves and sends them where they need to go all week around St. Mrata's day (Nikolić 1910: 142). Similarly in Pirot (Serbia) they believe that St. Mrata rules the wolves and sends them wherever necessary during the entire week (Nikolić 1899: 90). In Kosovo they believe that on his name day St. Sava climbs a tree, around which wolves gather, and determines the allotment of food for the entire year (Dimitrijević 1926: 73–74). In Macedonia, where St. Mrata (or Mina or Martin) takes the role of the Master of Wolves, the customs practiced during the *mratinci* holidays are explained or based on the story that during the week of the *mratinci*, St. Mrata determines the allotment of food to the wolves (Raičević 1935: 54). St. Mrata punishes those who do not celebrate his holiday by sending wolves after them (Nikolić 1928: 106–107; also Đorđević 1958a: 217). The same holds in Poland for St. Nicholas, who takes the role of master of wolves for the Polish, and who gathers all the wolves around him and determines the distribution of food for the entire year on his name day (Ciszewski 1887: 39; Gura 1997: 132). According to a belief in Belarus, St. George distributes food to the wolves on his name day, i.e. on St. George's day (Demidović 1896: 96).

Many legends also speak of the Master of Wolves distributing food to the wolves, and some of them relate directly or indirectly that this happens on the given saint's name day. In a legend from Bosnia and Herzegovina (in the village of Kola) on the night before St. George's day a boy goes into the forest and meets St. George, who determines the distribution of food to the wolves for the next three months (Šainović 1898: 263–264). The same story appears in a legend from Slavonia (Ilić 1846: 128–129). A Serbian peasant who goes into a meadow on the eve of the name day of St. Sava sees St. Sava apportioning food to the wolves (Dimitrijević 1926: 114–115). In two different versions from Vojvodina, someone/a hunter catches the saint apportioning food to the wolves on St. Sava's day (Bosić 1996: 179, both versions). In a legend from the area around Pirot, on St. Mrata's day a man meets St. Mrata, who is allotting food to the wolves (Nikolić 1928: 106–107). In a Russian legend a man named Prishvin sees St. George on the night before St. George's day (Remizov 1923: 312–316). The same is evident in a version recorded by Vasilev (Vasilev 1911: 126–128) in which a hunter is punished because he "should not spend the night before St. George's day in the forest". We find a similar situation in Ukrainian legends: a brother who

goes into the forest on the night before St. George's day meets Lisun (a forest spirit), who is apportioning food to the wolves (Grinčenko 1901: 11–12; Afanasev 1865 (1994): 711). In another legend, a man who goes into the forest on the night before St. George's day sees St. George surrounded by wolves (however in this legend it is not expressly stated that he apportions food among the wolves, but that he merely warns the man that the wolves are complaining about him because he is eating the food that God has allotted to them) (Voropaj 1993: 355). Also a traveller who meets St. George in the forest meets him on the night before St. George's day (Čubinski 1872: 171–172). Two legends from Belarus speak of two men who go into the forest on the day before St. George's day, and meet St. George there or in the second version St. George, St. Peter and St. Paul, who are allotting food to the wolves (Demidović 1896: 96; Shein 1893: 364–365, no. 213). On the basis of a legend from Gagauz we can assume that the events which occur in the forest (where a man meets an old man who is apportioning food among the wolves) happened on November 21, as the storyteller ends with the words "From this day forward our people shall celebrate the holiday of the lame wolf." Further on in the records we find that wolf holidays are celebrated there from November 10–17, and the holiday of the lame wolf is celebrated specifically on November 21, and that they base this celebration on this legend (Moshkov 1902: 49). Only in one case do we find a saint apportioning food to the wolves on Christmas or on the holiday of *sretenje* (Lang 1914: 217–218; Gnatjuk 1902: 165–166). We can assume that the Estonian legend which speaks of St. George feeding wolves from heaven (i.e. from above), occurred on St. Michael's day or on the 2nd of February, as it is believed that wolves are fed from heaven on these two holidays.

It seems that the name day of the saint who takes the role of the Master of Wolves in a given area is in the majority of cases considered to be exactly the day when the events which are described in the legends occur.

At the same time, many of the legends speak of the fact that it was forbidden to watch the Master of Wolves while he was apportioning food to the wolves. Watching could lead to the death of the watcher or his being turned into a wolf. In a Croatian legend, a man who went to wait for the wolves on Christmas Eve is first taken as food for the lame wolf by the white wolf (who appears here in the

role of the Master of Wolves who apportions food), and then turned into a wolf, because “no-one should go out hunting on Christmas eve” (Lang 1914: 217–218). A man who watches St. Sava distributing food to the wolves is transformed by the saint into a wolf until the following St. Sava’s day because he went hunting “on a day on which one should not go hunting” (Bosić 1996: 179). Two Russian legends explain why St. George, when he meets a hunter in a forest surrounded by wolves, punishes him with the death of his dog (later on in the second version the hunter dies as well), since “one should not spend the night in the forest or go hunting on the night before St. George’s day” (Vasilev 1911: 126–128; Remizov 1923: 312–316.) The introduction to an Estonian legend warns that the saint will send wolves to tear the flesh of anyone who secretly watches the feeding of wolves (Loorits 1949: 329). In the comment to a Gagauz legend we learn that from that time forward (when the event described in the legend occurred), people have no longer gone out into the fields on the day mentioned in the legend, so as not to be eaten by wolves (Moshkov 1902: 49–50).

From the legends which expressly state that the events unfold on the name day of the saint who takes the role of the Master of Wolves, it can therefore be seen that it is forbidden to enter the forest before the holiday of the wolf saint – “It is horrible in the forest on the eve of St. George’s day!” says the narrator of a story about a man who goes into the forest to see the Master of Wolves (Remizov 1923: 312–316).

We also find evidence of this belief in customs for now the group of customs which forbid leaving the house (Group 6) become clear: people do not go into the forest, do not collect firewood, let nothing out of the house, etc. During the holidays men who go outside and shepherds are in particular danger (therefore also the ban on calling attention to oneself). In Bosnia it is told how a man who went into the forest on the name day of St. Mrata met St. Mrata with a pack of wolves and asked him if he was celebrating his feast day. Another story is about a wolf chasing a man who had begun a journey during the St. Mrata holiday (Antonić & Zupanc 1988: 166). Although according to the legends and customs danger lurks mainly in the forest, the dangerous zone begins immediately behind the house (or yard), as this is the border between the organised, safe world and the dangerous world of which the forest is a part.

The legends also speak of the saints sending wolves out into the forest for food on their name days: one he sends after a colt, one after a cow, a calf, etc. They therefore relate that due to the saints' actions the livestock are threatened by wolves. This is also reflected in customs: the purpose of the entire group of activities is to protect livestock from wolves (cf. Group 4), while customs which are intended to ward off the danger of wolves through the use of magic fall into another group (Group 3) – people perform them in order to stop the wolves or shut their mouths. The ban on the mentioning of wolves (Group 7) also falls into this category. Broadly understood, this means that by not obeying this rule one is actually calling the wolf. In the same manner, we can shed light on the ban on working with animals and animal products (wool, skins, etc.) (Group 5) – if you worked with animals or parts of them, you would be showing them to the wolf, calling attention to them on a symbolic level, which could have tragic consequences. Therefore all such work is strictly forbidden during those days.

The customs of setting a wolf free in Austria, in Germany and among Germans in the Czech lands show especially clear parallels with the legends: when the boys/young men perform the ceremony of releasing the wolf or yell “the wolf is free!”, the situation is very close to that in the legends in which the Master of Wolves sets wolves free or drives them off.

The legends of the eastern Slavic peoples and the Gagauz mention the most fearsome of wolves, the lame/limping wolf who comes last of all the wolves to attend the call of the Master of Wolves. This is equally attested to by the wolf holidays, during which some south Slavic peoples practice customs which are intended to protect against the danger of wolves, or due to the danger of wolves observe many prohibitions and commandments. According to Serbian beliefs, on the last day of *mratinci* ‘wolf holidays’, which is in some places called *rasturnjak* (Serbian and Croatian *rasturati / rasturiti* ‘to dismiss’, ‘dispatch’, ‘scatter’) or *razpus(t)* (thus also in Macedonia; Serbian and Croatian *razpustiti* ‘to dismiss’), comes the last, lame, crooked wolf, *kriveljan* ‘the crooked one’ (in Serbia; Nikolić 1910: 142). The Vlachs in Serbia also believe that on the seventh day of *mratinci* come lame wolves blind in one eye, who are attributed supernatural properties (Kostić 1971: 84). In the vicinity of Pirot

the seventh day is called *rasturnjak*. At this time the lame or most dangerous wolf appears (Nikolić 1899: 90). Similar beliefs are found in Bulgaria: in the villages of Kolibite and Trojansko they believe that the last day of the three days of “beasts’ holidays” (13, 14, 15, sometimes 21 November) is *kuculan* ‘the lame one’ (in Bulgarian and Macedonian *kuc* means ‘lame’; Marinov 1994: 694–700). In Moldavia the Gagauz, as stated above, celebrate the holiday of the lame wolf on the 21st of November, a few days after the end of the wolf holidays (Moshkov 1902: 49–50). All this evidence tells us two things: first, that at the end (usually on the last day) of the wolf holidays the lame wolf comes, and second, that this day or this wolf is the most dangerous. Once again we have a situation which closely resembles the situation in the legends.

In the legends, watching the saint while he is apportioning food to wolves most often results in death (and only rarely, in legends from Croatia and Voivodina, in being turned into a wolf). Can parallels be found in the customs as well? A direct link, which in this case would be the death of the man, cannot be expected from the customs which still existed up to recently. Perhaps animal sacrifices (Group 8) can be understood as a substitution for the death of the man; sacrificing cocks or hens during the wolf holidays and on St. George’s day is widespread in Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria. In Russia, after uttering an incantation in which St. George is asked to shut the mouths of the wolves, they “make him the gift of a sheep” (in reality a wild rooster is slaughtered) (Eleonskaia 1994: 148), etc. Thus in the customs as well as the legends some type of death occurs, but whether this sacrifice corresponds with the death of the man in the legends of course cannot be stated with any certainty.

Despite this we can establish that the customs practiced during the wolf holidays no longer represent the unknown – on the semantic level they correspond entirely with the events in the legends. Fasting and the ban on all work (Groups 1 and 2), which have not been mentioned in these comparisons, indicate the severe and sacred nature of these holidays. This way the meaning of customs practiced during the wolf holidays became obvious. In addition, it also became clear that the customs and holidays and beliefs about the Master of Wolves and the incantations which refer to him constitute a whole which cannot be dealt with only in its separate parts.

Even more, every separation is actually a forcible action which we can only use for “technical purposes” – in those places where the wolf holiday customs, legends and beliefs are still alive or were still alive until recently or for which we have evidence from recent ethnological records (some of the southern Slavs), these segments of folklore simply cannot be separated: the customs are based on the legends about the Master of Wolves, the Master of Wolves and his deeds are believed in, and in some places he is addressed in incantations.

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We can therefore assume that all these layers make up the entirety of the oral tradition of the Master of Wolves. However, the message of the legends which speak of the coming, sending for food and feeding of the wolves, is apparently diametrically opposed to the messages about the driving away, restraining, departure, etc. of the wolves in incantations (prayers and carols) to St. George. The function of the Master of Wolves here indicates an emphasis on the aspect of “forbidding”: while the Master of Wolves in the legends sends wolves off to search for food, the being in the incantations forbids the wolves to eat, shuts their mouths, drives them away, shuts them in, etc. What, therefore, is the origin of this contradiction, if both the incantations and the legends refer to the same being – the Master of Wolves – i.e. are the both parts of the oral tradition surrounding this being?

In order to untangle this contradiction, we must understand the times which people associate with the tradition of the Master of Wolves. The Serbs and Macedonians associate the legend and beliefs chiefly with the wolf holidays *mratinci*, i.e. with the days around 11th of November, the name day of St. Mrata (once Martin, then officially Stefan Dečanski), or even earlier (around St. Michael’s day, November 8). The Serbs also include the name day of St. Sava (January 14) (and seldom also others within very local areas: St. Danilo, St. Ignatius, St. Athanasius). The Bulgarians celebrate wolf holidays at roughly the same time as the Serbs and Macedonians, i.e. around the name day of St. Mrata (Martin), and these holidays are also connected with typical legends about the Master of Wolves. In addition, they celebrate wolf holidays which are actually based on this legend, e.g. on Trifun’s days (around February 2) (Marinov 1994

(1914): 490). Eastern Slavs utter incantations which address the Master of Wolves on St. George's day (April 23); St. George's day is also mentioned as a time of action in many Eastern Slavic legends (Vasilev 1911: 126–8; Remizov 1923: 312–6; Voropaj 1993: 355; Čubinski 1872: 171–2; Demidović 1896: 96; Shein 1893: 364–5, no. 213). In Austria, mainly on St. Martin's day (and more rarely around Christmas, New Year's and St. George's day, although in the opinion of Grabner according to their content these incantations rank among the so-called "St. Martin's blessings" – cf. Grabner 1968: 26), herdsmen on their way from house to house performed similar incantations against the danger of wolves, the addressee being the Master of Wolves. In Germany as well, both the incantations and customs of "chasing off" and "letting go" the wolves are practiced on St. Martin's day (in Bavaria also on the name day of St. Simon and St. Jude on October 18 (Höfler 1891: 302), and in some places at the time when the livestock is driven out to the pastures). Germans living in Hungary utter incantations which address the Master of Wolves at Christmas (Grabner 1968: 26), Germans in the Czech Republic on St. George's day, when the livestock are first led out to pasture (Schmidt 1955: 29). Germans in the Czech Republic "set free" and "chase off" wolves on St. Martin's and in some cases St. Andrew's eves (Wolf-Beranek 1973: 174–175); Germans in Poland utter incantations against wolves on the day when the livestock is first led out to pasture (Riemann 1974: 134–135). Romanians celebrate wolf holidays in the middle of November, which is approximately concurrent with the name days of St. Martin and occasionally St. Andrew (Svešnikova 1987: 105). The Gagauz in Moldavia celebrate wolf holidays from the 10th–17th of November, and a little later, on the 21st of November, the holiday of the Lame Wolf (Moshkov 1902: 49–50); the Greeks associate certain rituals which are intended to protect livestock from wolves with the name day of St. Menas (the Greek equivalent of St. Martin, November 11) – they also turn to this saint when they wanted to protect their herds from wolves (Megas 1963: 21). The Latvians associate customs which are intended to protect people and livestock from wolves with the name day of St. George (Ivanov & Toporov 1974: 208), who they consider to be the Master of Wolves himself, as do the Lithuanians (though I was unable to find evidence that St. George is considered to be the Master of Wolves there) (Afanasev 1865 (1994): 712). The Finns likewise practice customs which are intended as protection from wolves on St. George's



day or the first day the livestock is led out to pasture (St. George is also considered the Master of Wolves there) (Rantasalo 1945: 13, 42, 58, 85, 88, 90–92ff.). The Poles petition St. Nicholas for protection from wolves with incantations on the eve of his name day (Gura 1997: 137; Kotula 1976: 38–95, *passim*). Rituals intended to protect against the danger of wolves are performed in Slovakia on St. George's day, and in Albania on St. George's and St. Dimitri's days (Gušić 1962: 170), although I was unable to find any trace of the belief in the Master of Wolves there.

Obviously, of the holidays which people associate with legends and beliefs about the Master of Wolves, and maintain the taboos, commandments and the practicing of customs which are intended to provide protection against the danger of wolves, i.e. incantations which address the Master of Wolves who is supposed to protect them from wolves, the most frequent are the name days of St. George and St. Martin (and occasionally St. Michael).

In the area where the tradition is associated with St. George's day, this feast day is considered to be precisely the day on which the livestock are first led to pasture. Where the livestock were first driven out on some other day, these incantations, customs, etc. were also practiced on those holidays on which the livestock was driven out to pasture (e.g. the Finns also on May 1, etc.). Occasionally, beliefs about the Master of Wolves were even explicitly associated with the first day of driving livestock out to pasture (most often on St. George's day, in some places in Europe also May 1). The holiday of St. Martin (and especially in northern Europe also that of St. Michael) is also one of the most important days of the cattle breeders' year – pasturing is now over and the livestock are led into the barns. This is also true of the holiday of St. Nicholas, who appears as the Master of Wolves especially in the Ukrainian and Polish legends; in Poland this saint is sometimes addressed through incantations (prayers) on the eve of his name day, which to some extent represents a turning point in the year, especially in the pasturing of horses, for which he is the patron saint (Čičerov 1957: 18; Uspenski 1982: 44–55). In a French legend from the area of Languedoc, which with regard to its content is highly reminiscent of the Slavic legends of the Master of Wolves, the role of the Master of Wolves is attributed to *Jean des Loups* 'John of Wolves' (Seignolle 1960: 265–266). However, in southern France the name day of St. John is also

considered a turning point in the herdsmen's calendar: on this day in Provence, flocks of sheep are driven from the Mediterranean shore and headed to pasture in the mountains (Seignolle 1963: 207). They also have a proverb: *Saint Jean (June 24) et Saint Jean (December 27) partagent l'anée* 'St. John and St. John divide the year' (Seignolle 1963: 212).

Obviously the actions, beliefs, customs and legends relating to the Master of Wolves are most often associated with pastoral holidays which represent turning points in the herdsmen's calendar: the beginning and end of outdoor pasturing, i.e. the day on which livestock are led out to pasture and the day on which they must return to the barns (or on which the upper pastures are left for the lower). The same way, other, more local and less important holidays associated with this tradition are in this or another manner connected with the annual herding cycle.

The common denominator for all the saints in the role of the Master of Wolves also proved to be their role in pastoral life. According to folkloristic data they are protectors of cattle and shepherds, they play an important role in the pastoral holidays, in folk literature they are often presented as shepherds, they taught shepherds how to curdle milk, took care of the cattle (judging by folk beliefs, poems, legends, proverbs). The same role is evinced from folk tradition of most of other saints, less important or only locally limited, for example, St. Sava and St. Danilo in Serbia. Obviously the role of Master of Wolves enfolds at least two different fields: they are protectors of wolves as well as of cattle /shepherds at the same time.

However, the situation in Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria seems a bit different at first glance. The wolf holidays (which are at least in Serbia and Bulgaria based on the beliefs and legends of the Master of Wolves) begin around 11 November, i.e. the day on which the holiday of St. Martin is celebrated in central and western Europe (including Slovenia), while in Serbia and Macedonia this saint has been informally renamed St. Mrata. In some places the celebration of these holidays begins as early as around the name day of St. Michael, and Archangel Michael himself appears in certain legends and beliefs as the Master of Wolves. In Romania as well, the holidays which purpose is to provide protection (especially for livestock) from wolves are celebrated in the middle of November.

It therefore seems at first glance that here the holidays associated with the belief in the Master of Wolves are not connected with turning points in the cattle breeders' calendar, as we have established in the case of the eastern Slavs and in central and northern Europe. St. George's day is, indeed, considered the spring turning point in the herdsmen's calendar here, while the autumnal turning point in the area of influence of the Orthodox church is usually celebrated on the name day of St. Dimitri (26 October) – when the herdsmen leases end and the livestock are moved to their winter quarters. The name days of St. Mrata (Martin) and Michael, in the areas where they are considered the Masters of Wolves, are therefore not at the same time as holidays which mark the end of the pasturing season, since this role is fulfilled by the name day of St. Dimitri. Despite this they are chronologically very close to the day in which the livestock is driven back to the barns – they both occur quite soon after the last day of outdoor pasturing: the name day of Archangel Michael is celebrated on November 8, i.e. only 13 days after that of St. Dimitri, while that of St. Mrata occurs on November 11, 16 days after St. Dimitri's day. Customs associated with beliefs and legends of the Master of Wolves therefore appear very soon after the day when outdoor pasturing is concluded. If we compare this situation to that in central, western and northern Europe, we find some interesting parallels. There is a belief among Finns and Estonians that livestock must be returned to the barns on St. Michael's day, which is the last day of pasturing there, because after that day there would be the danger of wolves in the forest – on St. Michael's day, George is believed to take off/open the muzzles of the wolves (Loorits 1949: 327). In places where the custom of "setting wolves free", which is a symbolic representation of that danger, is practiced, it occurs on the day designated as the last day of pasturing. The situation among the Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians is actually similar, except that they lead the livestock to the safety of the barns earlier, on St. Dimitri's day, while according to the beliefs, the threat of the danger of wolves appears a little later (during the wolf holidays *mratinci*) – when St. Mrata "sets free" (sends off) the wolves. The difference between these and the western/central/northern European beliefs and holidays lies mainly in the fact that the temporal difference between the two events is greater here (by approximately two weeks), while for the Finns, Austrians and Germans both occur on the same day. Judging by these comparisons we can assume that

the autumn wolf holidays among the Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians are directly associated with the last day of outdoor pasturing. We can find many indicators which additionally imply that the holiday of the last day of pasturing (St. Dimitri's day) and the wolf holidays *mratinci* are more closely connected than they appear at first glance. Thus we have found evidence in a Serbian legend that it was St. Dimitri himself who opened and shut the mouths of the wolves, i.e. had the function of the Master of Wolves, even though they were under the authority of Archangel Michael (Vasilević 1894: 25). In Romania, St. Dimitri is considered a protector against wolves (Sveshnikova 1987: 121), while at the same time his name day is the day when the pasturing season ends. In addition, on this day various customs are practiced, which are completely identical to those practiced during the wolf holidays – their purpose is to protect livestock and people against wolves, which, as they believe, are particularly dangerous during this time (Svešnikova 1987: 104; Salmanović 1978: 254). The names Mrata and Mitra, the popular forms of St. Martin and St. Dimitri, are also phonetically strikingly similar, which perhaps indicates a closer connection between the two holidays. There are some other interesting similarities: In Greece the short period of nice weather before St. Dimitri's day, which marks the coming of winter, is called "little summer" or "St. Dimitri's summer"; a similar period of nice weather is called "Mrata's" (i.e. Martin's) summer in Boka Kotorska, and in France (as well as in some other parts in Europe) it is called St. Martin's summer (Dimitrijević 1926: 98; Megas 1963: 19–20). Russian scholar Čičerov has shown that the Russian agrarian folk calendar is divided into two cycles in which the name days of various saints recur, i.e. the holidays in one cycle are related to those in the other. Thus e.g. Russian peasants have two St. George's days: a springtime (warm) one on April 23, and an autumnal (cold) one on November 26, which are related – a Russian proverb states that George begins work, and George ends it as well (Čičerov 1957). Such repetition of holidays is found also among the Serbs, between the *mratinci* and St. George's day: in some parts of Serbia they celebrate the *purpic* (named after St. Đorđe – i.e. George), which occurs on November 3, during the *mratinci* holidays (named after St. Mrata, or Martin), or is considered the first day of the *mratinci*. Although in this area the twin to St. George's day as the first day of pasturing is St. Dimitri's day (the last day of pasturing), we can see that the

*mratinci* are (or were) perhaps a parallel to St. George's day in spring.

We can at this point conclude the following: the Master of Wolves and the rituals, incantations and legends associated with him are concentrated around or conceptually linked with the first day of pasturing in spring (which normally occurs on St. George's day, in Europe on May 1 as well) and at the beginning of summer and with the last day of outdoor pasturing (usually St. Michael's or St. Martin's day) in the autumn and the beginning of winter. The Master of Wolves appears at both of the major turning points of the herdsman's season: just as the incantations, legends and beliefs connect the danger of wolves with the autumn saint (usually Mrata/Martin, Michael), they connect it as well with the spring saint – George.

The question arises whether this is a legend/ritual which in some places is more connected with the last, in others more with the first day of pasturing, or if it is a tradition which from the very beginning was comprised of two complementary parts functioning as a whole, or whether, despite our previous finding (that the tradition in all these layers is part of the entire tradition of the Master of Wolves), we are talking about two separate traditions.

In order to answer this question, we must take into account the various beliefs of the Slavs. According to the Russian belief, on the autumn St. George's day wolves gather around the stables and at this point the "month of the wolf" begins (Čičerov 1957: 36–37). From the incantations uttered on the spring St. George's day it is possible to determine that wolves are driven away from the livestock at this time. According to the beliefs of eastern Slavs, during the time of the autumn St. George's day (November 26; sometimes St. Gregory's day, November 23) or from St. Dimitri's day (October 26) to the spring St. George's day (April 23) wolves are set free and attack livestock – in the autumn St. George opens their muzzles (Vitebsk guberniia, Polocki district, Mahirovo), while during the spring St. George's days he shuts their muzzles and distributes only a limited amount of livestock for food (Vitebsk guberniia, Minsk guberniia, Pinsk district, Grodno guberniia, Slonim district, the area of Dvorec) (Gura 1997: 132). According to beliefs in Poland and in the western Ukraine, on his name day (December 6), St. Nicholas unlocks the teeth of the wolves and lets them out of the forest, although accord-

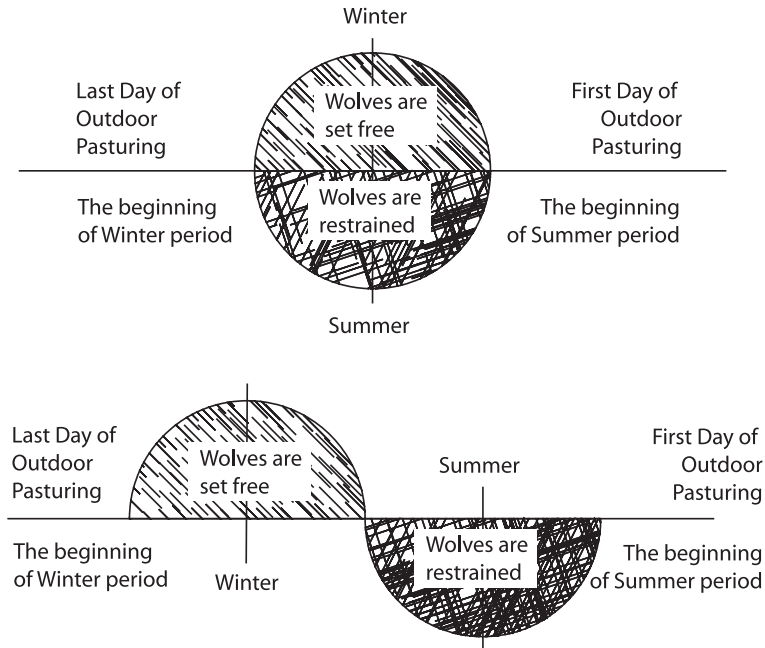
ing to these beliefs this lasts only until the holiday on February 2, when the Mother of God waves her candle and wolves return (Gura 1997: 133). Many Slavic proverbs express folk belief that winter is the time ruled by wolves, and a message about the “driving off” of wolves can be heard in spring, on St. George’s day, in the carol to St. George from Croatia (Bučica): “Give George some bacon, so he’ll chase the wolves from the hills” (Huzjak 1957: 16).

The same image is evinced in beliefs and rituals in Estonia, where they say that on St. Michael’s day St. George removes the muzzles of the wolves which he had put on on his name day (i.e. on St. George’s day in spring – op. M.M.), when they were first chased out, and gives them the right to tear up the livestock which remained in the forest (Rantasalo 1953: 7). In Finland on St. George’s day they beseech St. George (sometimes also the forest daughter and the forest son) to fetter the wolves from the summer to the winter nights, and either lead their flocks home or stuff the mouths of wolves (Rantasalo 1945: 85–88, 102). Thus in Finland as well, on the first day of pasturing, or on St. George’s day, the day before or on St. George’s eve they go into the forest to make as much noise as possible – in order, they say, to “chase off the wolf”. At the same time they direct their pleas to St. George and ask him to fetter the wolves, etc. (Rantasalo 1945: 85–86; cf. above).

All these beliefs clearly indicate some kind of mythical being, about who people once obviously believed that he sets the wolves free in the autumn and captures them again in the spring. The days on which he did this were obviously the first and last days of outdoor pasturing and at the same time the beginning of summer and winter period.

It therefore seems that the oral tradition and rituals of the Master of Wolves are (were) composed of two parts or phases: on the first day of pasturing the Master of Wolves, according to the beliefs, shuts the mouths of the wolves (the wolves are thus symbolically kept away from the livestock for all of the spring and summer until the last day of pasturing, allowing the livestock to roam freely); on the last day he opens them again (during the winter, until St. George’s day in spring, the wolves are again set free, or their mouths are reopened, and thus the livestock must remain in the barns).

For example:



Of course the rituals which we know of through the records of ethnological fieldwork of the 19th and 20th century were not preserved in such a clear fashion everywhere; in individual areas most frequently mainly or only on one of the turning points in the cattle breeders' calendar, i.e. either on the first or last day of pasturing, was preserved. Elements of both are also often partially combined. However, on the basis of these findings we can today divide the tradition of the Master of Wolves into that which in its nature and purpose pertains to the first day of pasturing and that which pertains to the last day of pasturing:

1. On the last day of pasturing: The Master of Wolves opens the mouths of the wolves; wolves are set free; livestock must be kept in barns.

\* legends about the Master of Wolves dividing food up among wolves, sending them off for food;

\* wolf holidays among the southern Slavs, which are associated with this legend and warn of the danger of (unfettered) wolves;

\* the custom of setting free the wolf (*wolfablassen*, *-auslassen*), which is practiced in Austria and Germany and by Germans in the Czech lands;

\* the holiday of the lame wolf among the Gagauz.

2. On the first day of pasturing: The Master of Wolves closes the mouths of wolves; wolves are restrained; livestock is let out to pasture.

\* Incantations, sometimes accompanied by rituals through which the mouths of wolves are shut or the petitioning of a saint or other being to do this;

\* the custom of driving out/chasing off the wolf (*wolfaustreiben*) (Finns, Estonians, Austrians, Germans);

\* carols/incantations (on St. George's day, St. Martin's and St. Nicholas' day, Serbian ones from St. Ignatius' day until Christmas) in order to ensure the safety of livestock from wolves during the summer pasturing season;

So, it seems that in researching the tradition of the Master of Wolves we have come upon the traces of a tradition the purpose of which was to provide a basis for the changing of time within the cattle breeders' annual cycle. This refers to the alternating (binary opposition) of two parts of the year, winter and summer, i.e. pasturing outdoors and wintering in barns, all of which, judging by the standards of ancient beliefs, is caused by the Master of Wolves or someone who appears in the function of the Master of Wolves.

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