

NEWS IN BRIEF

COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY ON THE EARTH AND HUMANKIND: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The 12th Conference of the International Association on Comparative Mythology (IACM) under the general title *Myths of the Earth and Humankind: Ecology and the End of the World* took place in Sendai, Japan, on June 1–4, 2018. The conference was hosted by Tohoku University, with Professor Hitoshi Yamada as chair of the organizing committee. These annual IACM meetings started at the founding conference in Beijing, China, in 2006, and were followed by eleven symposiums organized in various countries. Professor of Sanskrit Michael Witzel (Harvard University) is the president of the IACM (for more information on the Association see <http://www.compmyth.org>).

In spite of the long journey that had to be undertaken by the participants to come to Japan, the forum turned out to be representative: 36 scholars from 14 countries delivered their papers during three and a half days. We had the great opportunity to listen to all the presentations, because there were no parallel sessions – a rare occasion nowadays. The program was compiled so logically that in our review we will follow the order of the papers.

The opening of the conference and the first lectures were given in the ancient Komyoji Temple, in a special atmosphere of a Buddhist shrine, calm, harmonious, and beautiful. For the first time in our academic life, all the participants, including us, had to be barefoot during the whole day of the seminars. Since we specialize in the Slavic ethnology and linguistics and have never been lecturing in temples, it was a very impressive experience – most probably not only for us.

Other sessions were held in the modern and high-tech rooms of Tohoku University, on the premises of the Tohoku Center for Creativity.

As usual at the conferences of the IACM, all the reports were interesting and innovative. This time it was partly due to the variety of aspects of the announced theme, including catastrophes, ecology and the end of the world, but certainly also by the variety of world mythologies, presented in the reports: European (Slavic, Baltic, German), Indian, Japanese, Mayan, Chinese, Indo-Pacific, and African. The major topic was linked to the notions of the elements of nature, such as water, fire, earth, and air, their qualities and ontological forms (lakes, mountains, etc.), activity (flood, earthquake) and the calamities they can cause. Death and funeral rites, childbirth and creation, as well as royal kinship were also analyzed. The data used for research varied from myths and narratives to folklore and rituals, fiction, poetry, and films. Scholars of comparative mythology and epics, and cultural and literary studies as well as folklorists, anthropologists, linguists, translators, ecologists, and biologists discussed in detail the theme of catastrophes from various points of view.

The first session, **New Perspectives in Comparative Mythology**, consisted of four speakers, who discussed the most important issues touched upon at the conference.

Yuri Berezkin (St. Petersburg, Russia), a prominent scholar of comparative mythology and narratives, the author and compiler of the widely known analytical index of the mythological folklore motives in different regions of the world and their thematic categorization (ca. 55,000 texts, ca. 950 traditions and ca. 2500 motifs, i.e. narrative episodes and descriptions of mythological ideas; see www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin/), spoke on the topic *The Southeast Asian Homeland of the Cosmologies*. He argued that the emergence of particular ideas and stories was not a uniform process stimulated by patterns intrinsic to human mind or by ecological conditions, but rather a creative development under the regional specificity and historical chance. According to the index, a vast majority of cosmological tales are concentrated in the Greater Southeast Asia (from Middle India to Southern China). The American parallels for many of these tales provide an argument in favor of their emergence in 17,000–20,000 BP at least. This area was the homeland of the world's most complex and elaborated cosmological cycle. The mapping of the variants and the comparison of their details suggest that the transcontinental spread of many other most important myths related to the origin of the world and people (like the earth-diver, the swan-maiden, etc.) had also begun in the Indo-Pacific region.

Michael Witzel (Harvard, USA) gave a lecture titled *A Different Version of the Flood Myth*. He argued, contrary to the universal and well known myth, according to which the flood derived from the ocean rising, rain, emptying a bowl, etc., that it arose from an emptied lake or pond. This version is known in several areas, from Khotan (in Xinjiang), Kashmir, the Kathmandu Valley and tribal areas in Nepal. Witzel suggests that perhaps this idea of the origin of the flood can be extended to northern China and (in a fairy tale) to Japan.

Steve Farmer (Palo Alto, USA) in his report *Myths of Global Destruction in the Early Anthropocene: Neurobiological, Historical, and Ecological Perspectives* traced the cross-cultural origins and growth of extreme “correlative” or “fractal” cosmologies linked to complex man-the-microcosm schemes that at times did help mitigate human destruction of the environment. The paper first discussed the origins of these systems in brain-culture networks dependent on evolving modes of literate technologies over thousands of years. It then discussed how the increasing abandonment of these holistic models in the 20th century, reflecting the growing complexities of molecular biology and genetics, coincided with what has been referred to as a “great acceleration” in anthropogenic influences on the planet in the last few decades.

Makoto Yokomichi (Kyoto, Japan) read his paper titled *Comparative Mythology of the Brothers Grimm and Their Successors*. He alluded to the pioneering works on comparative mythology and folklore of the 19th century, especially developed by Max Müller and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Wilhelm Grimm's “Grimms' Fairy Tales”, in spite of its world fame, has not been studied enough. Few researchers know that the edition has valuable notes on comparative mythology. The ideas of the Grimms, Wilhelm Mannhardt, and Johannes Bolte are still very significant for the modern studies of the world mythology.

In the section **Mythology of the Americas and East and South-East Asia** six reports were presented.

Martín Cuitzeo Domínguez Nuñez (Mexico City, Mexico) delivered his paper *The Fire of Sky: A Myth from two Indigenous Groups in Northwest Mexico*. The myth of Pa

Ipai and Koal, two ethnic groups with endangered languages, tells a story about the fire of the sky and its relation to the end of the world and the local notion of time. The myth was analyzed through an approach which combines anthropology with semiotics, in order to understand the connection between its symbolism and the Pa Ipai and Koal cultural context.

Lucie Vinšová (Brno, Czech Republic) in her report *Humans as the Keepers of the Universe: Water Cycle in Native Colombian Cosmology* provided insight into mythological and cosmological motifs as represented in the beliefs and rituals of Misak and Nasa tribes (the communities of the mountainous areas of south-west Colombia), linked to the importance of water (creation myths, water creatures, the birth of legendary chieftains, etc.). She also showed the way the importance of water is manifested in religious and healing rituals, and the original role of human beings as keepers of this life-giving force.

The presentation by Štěpán Kuchlei (Brno, Czech Republic) dealt with Cambodian and Thai myths that are closely linked to Tonlé Sap Lake and to the ancient traditions of the south-east Asian notion of kingship, strongly intertwined with the history, religious rituals, and agricultural cycle of the whole area. An old Khmer story claims that the origin of Boeung Tonlé Sap, Cambodia's Great Lake, is a result of the disappearance of a rich, marvelous city. This city was – because of its ruler's unjust deeds – sinking deeper and deeper, until the area became a lake, Tonlé Sap. Out of the lake a huge buffalo garlanded with lotus flowers emerged from the depths, carrying on its back the most sacred object of the sunken city, a Buddha statue made of emerald. The myth has it that many years later the statue was found floating in the river by the Thai town of Chiang Rai. Until today, the emerald Buddha represents one of the most sacred objects of the Thai royal treasury.

Bong-Youl Kim (Gyeongju, South Korea) in *The Narratives of Odysseus and Seok Talhae, a Study in Maritime Culture and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: On the Origin of Rationality* examined maritime culture and the birth of rationality by comparing the mythic narratives of Odysseus and Seok Talhae. According to the theory of the “dialectic of enlightenment”, as expounded by Horkheimer and Adorno, rationality enabled advanced science and technology, but it also caused a civilizational crisis. Furthermore, this dialectic has reached its peak in our world. The two epic heroes represent enlightenment and rationality, since both have broken out from the mythical veil of older cultures. This rational worldview can be traced back to the sea peoples, who first appeared in the 13th century BC. Both Odysseus and Seok Talhae use cunning and deceit to win. But unlike Odysseus, Seok Talhae became a king by respecting the pre-existing order. Thus, that myth suggests a possible transformation to a civilization of coexistence and peace.

Michal Schwarz (Brno, Czech Republic) read a paper titled *Mountains and Monsoons: Difficult Ways to Harmonize the Spirits*. Mountains and waters as wild and dangerous, especially in mutual interactions, play an important role in Asian mythologies. The paper, besides describing different natural conditions along the coast of East Asia and comparing corresponding religious or mythological explanations of regular vs. irregular monsoons in connection with mountains, analyzed the motif of mountains and the role of mountain spirits from the perspective of ritual practices described in research papers as well as in Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese folktales. The types of mythological narratives about mountains may be explained from the point of view of lowlands as the most common habitat of Homo sapiens.

Emma Zhang (Hong Kong) in her paper *No End in Sight* presented to the participants the Chinese myth of Nezha, solidified and popularized in the 16th century. Nezha is the only Chinese mythological figure who actively rebels against and attempts to murder his father. Unlike many patricidal figures from Greek myths, such as Cronos, Zeus or Oedipus, who successfully overthrow the reigns of their fathers and establish a new world order, Nezha's desperate rebellion ultimately ends in the defeat of the son. Dr. Zhang argued that the Nezha myth gives an insight into the phenomenon, arguing that although there have been countless rebellions throughout Chinese history against despotic emperors and rulers, the system of a centralized patriarchal hierarchy is as stable as ever in modern-day China, in spite of the change of ideologies.

This paper served as a good transition to the next session, **Mythology and Modernity**. **Sachie Kiyokawa** (Kobe, Japan) dedicated a paper to the influence of "Northern Mythology" on Victorian Britain. As an example of a Victorian poet fascinated by the idea that European nations initially shared the same myths, and in the course of medieval adaptations to each nation's culture they became separated from each other, the oeuvre of William Morris was chosen. Young Morris was an ardent reader of B. Thorpe, so he even retold Thorpe's translation of a Danish myth, as a short story titled "Lindenberg Pool" (1856). To Thorpe's version Morris added discernibly Gothic details, and a timeless narrator gazing at the past. Through comparing Thorpe's and Morris's narratives and how northern myths were accepted in Victorian Britain, the contributor revealed the significance of World Mythology, not only in structural analysis but in regard to cultural effects, especially poetry and prose.

This aspect of research was continued by **Seán Martin** (Edinburgh, UK) in *Facing Rebirth: Apocalyptic Themes in the Fiction of David Lindsay*, discussing Scottish metaphysical author David Lindsay (1876–1945). This author appropriated apocalyptic myths from the Norse tradition into his novels "A Voyage to Arcturus" (1920) and "Devil's Tor" (1932). The scholar examined how Lindsay used Norse material in "Arcturus" for his own purposes, reflecting apocalyptic undercurrents in post-Great War culture. "Devil's Tor" can be read as a literal prophecy of apocalypse, being published eight months before Hitler came to power.

The paper by **Louise Milne** (Edinburgh, UK) also touched upon the theme of apocalypse: *Apocalyptic Myth and Dreams in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*. The paper explored the relations between dreams, apocalypse and myth in Tarkovsky's cinema, considering its sources in dream-cultures of the Cold War. The films "Ivan's Childhood" (USSR, 1962), "Stalker" (USSR, 1979), "Nostalghia" (Italy, 1983), and "The Sacrifice" (Sweden, 1986) were examined. Milne argued that, in creating these filmic narratives and sequences, Tarkovsky updated mythic themes, images, texts, and ideas, to interpret and express the collective traumatic experience of World War II and the Cold War for his own and later generations.

Ideological issues and the notion of creation, contrasting with the apocalyptic themes, were in the focus of **Aleksandar Bošković's** (Belgrade, Serbia) paper *Classic Maya Myths and Politics: Creation and Destruction of the World*. He shed light on the sources and assumptions that led to the beliefs that ancient Mayan (and Mesoamerican in general) ideologies and worldviews were largely influenced by the idea of periodic creation and destruction of the world. A rich body of material confirms this idea.

Marcin Lisiecki (Toruń, Poland) in his paper *The Power of Unbelievable Stories: Motifs of the End of the World and Human Extinction in Polish Urban Legends* aimed to describe Polish urban legends about the end of the world. The paper dealt with contemporary popular culture – urban legends, which the scholar considered to be a neglected field. He discussed theoretical questions, such as whether urban legends belong to the contemporary mythology, whether they continue the motifs of folk tales, whether they are unique popular stories, etc. The contributor also spoke about the sources, meanings, and goals of retelling urban legends in Polish tradition.

This paper provoked a discussion on how thoroughly urban legends are discussed in other countries where the tradition of keen attention paid to those texts is long and fruitful, and has resulted in many publications.

Takeshi Kimura (Tsukuba, Japan) in his report *Myths of Automata: From Talos, Pygmalion, Golem to Robot* attempted to compare the ancient mythic narratives of technology and the contemporary secular narratives of robotics, so as to examine what mythic narratives are. Old myths of technology and automata and the contemporary social concern raise, as Kimura said, several interesting questions regarding an imaginative reason to generate mythic narratives, an asymmetrical gender-sexual relationship (Galatea / Pygmalion and female robot Sophia / robotics engineer David Hanson) and a technological and magical relationship (Talos and Golem / Programmed Robots and Powered Class / Ordinary Class). To follow Levi-Strauss, our contemporary societies, which have “never been modern” according to Latour, are continuing to form mythic and bricolaged narratives. If we follow Eliade, contemporary secular narratives are nothing but camouflaged “sacred narratives”. Thus the scholar sees the development of archaic myths as a permanent process.

The section **Indo-European Mythologies** with 10 lectures altogether was open by **Václav Blažek** and **Michal Schwarz** (Brno, Czech Republic) who presented their paper *Divine Beings Connected with Earth in Indo-European Traditions and Beyond*. They drew attention to the divine names connected with “earth” in various Indo-European traditions: Iranian (Avestan *Zam-*), Anatolian (Hittite *tēkan*), Greek (Γαῖα, Δημήτηρ, χθών, gen. χθονός), Italic (Latin *tellūs*, *-ūris*, *Tellūmo*, *-ōnis*), Celtic (Middle Welsh *Dōn*), Germanic (Icelandic *Jörð*), Baltic (Latvian *Zemes māte*, Lithuanian **Žemepatis*, **Žemina*) and Tocharian (Tocharian B *keṃ-ñäkte*). The authors concluded that there probably was a common theonym “Earth” in Proto-Indo-European, appearing as various derivatives of **dhǵhem-* “earth” in the daughter language branches.

Joseph Harris (Harvard, USA) spoke on the topic *Some Uses of Apocalypse: Instrumentalizing Ragnarök*. After describing the famous Old Norse apocalypse, world-ending “Ragnarök”, and briefly locating it in the eschatology of world mythologies, the paper centered on human uses of such an apocalypse in medieval Scandinavia. Since Ragnarök is “the affair of the gods” (its variant “the twilight of the gods”), the question about what place it has in the life of mere humans and how they utilize the myth sounds actual. The most interesting testimony comes from Old Norse-Icelandic poetry and from continental Scandinavian runic inscriptions, but a verbally related Old Frisian text was also included.

Kazuo Matsumura (Tokyo, Japan) in *Comparative Epic Literature* was studying the common motifs in the four old epics: Greek “Iliad” and “Odyssey”, and Indian

“Mahābhārata” and “Rāmāyana”. As was shown, the combinations of motifs in the four epics are as follows:

- the Iliad: earth’s burden, kidnapped wife, fight;
- the Odyssey: voyage across the ocean;
- the Mahābhārata: earth’s burden, fight;
- the Rāmāyana: kidnapped wife, voyage across the ocean, fight.

So a reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European epic can be assumed: heroes make a voyage across water to recapture a kidnapped wife. The two sides fight and this results in a massacre. This massacre is the intended plan of the chief god to alleviate the earth’s burden. In Greece and India tradition has divided the original epic into two, although the combination of the motifs is different.

Lisa Fujiwara (Tokyo, Japan) read a paper titled *St. Augustine’s Attitude toward the Styx in Crisis Situations*. One of the famous myths about death is that once people die, they descend to the underworld, cross the Styx, and finally go to the world of death. In this myth, burial is a prerequisite for crossing the Styx. St. Augustine was acquainted with this myth as described in *Aeneid* (VI: 327–8). When the Roman Empire was invaded and ravaged by the vandals in the 5th century, many Romans were killed and most of them were left unburied due to the chaotic situation. Augustine mentioned this catastrophe and noted how to deal with those unburied in the *City of God* and in the *Care for the Dead*. He went as far as to say in the *Care for the Dead* that Christianity must reject the myths that forbid the unburied to cross the Styx. Apparently he regarded Virgil’s lines depicting the burial as a requirement for crossing the Styx as false and rejected the very myth.

Signe Cohen (Columbia, USA) in her paper *End Games: Dice, Board Games, and the Apocalypse in Indo-European Mythology* showed (while Albert Einstein famously claimed that God does not play dice) that Indo-European gods, goddesses, mythical kings, and heroes do play both dice and other games, with the fate of the universe at stake. She analyzed Vedic and later Sanskrit texts about dice play, kingship, and the ages of the world. She also investigated the Old Norse texts about board games, dice, kings, and Ragnarök, and Celtic sources relating board games to kingship, decay, and cosmic regeneration. She argued that games, divinity, kingship, and apocalypse are so intertwined in Indo-European myths that we may postulate that these connections are Proto-Indo-European in origin.

Nataliya Yanchevskaya (Princeton, USA) in the paper *At the End of Times* compared a series of eschatological myths and folktales of different Indo-European traditions, concentrating on the South Asian, Iranian, Greek, Scandinavian, Germanic, and Slavic materials. Having analyzed the common motifs, she attempted to reconstruct characteristic features of the Indo-European eschatological proto-myth. A special attention was paid to the Indo-European deities of time, fate, and death and their role in eschatology as well as to the concept of Cosmic cycles and “ages” of the universe.

Joanna Jurewicz (Warsaw, Poland) in *Death, Mahabharata, and Storytelling* analyzed the problem of death in the Mahābhārata, using the frames of oral storytelling and the concept of literary viewpoints. This approach is adequate in the interpretation of the philosophy of ancient India which preserved its tradition in oral form, and this fact could motivate abstract thinking of the composers. Jurewicz contributed to a better understanding of the situation of a bounded and liberated man. In the former case, the

terrifying experience of death can be seen as the ontological situation when the story becomes real for its listener. In the latter, the construal of a new viewpoint from the absolute level and its fusion with the empirical one results (besides the radical ontological and cognitive transformation of the agents) in ironical attitude, expressed in the description of Kṛṣṇa as *prahasann iva*, when he begins to explain to Arjuna the sense of death from the absolute viewpoint.

Boris Oguibénine (Strasbourg, France) in his *Earth in the Rigveda* focused on lexical elements as markers of mythological motifs in the Rigveda. By analyzing multiple items meaning “earth” and their contexts, he attempted to explain the construction of semantically varying narratives that gave birth to Vedic myths about Earth and, second, used comparative (primarily, Indo-European) data to find the specific features of these myths.

Eijirō Dōyama (Osaka, Japan) discussed the topic of *How to Be a Hero in Ancient India: Unusual Birth and Abandonment of Children*. He argued that miraculous life stories are characteristic of heroes in numerous myths worldwide (an unusual conception, e.g., by god-human intermarriage, parthenogenesis; an unusual delivery, e.g., from the mother’s side, from an egg; abandonment after birth, e.g., in a river, on a mountain; being raised by a non-human; slaying a monster, e.g., a dragon, serpent, and so on), but they differ from culture to culture. Two motifs – unusual birth or conception, and abandonment of newborn children – are characteristic of the heroic myth in ancient India. The paper investigated how these two motifs are expressed in Vedic texts, as well as in Mahābhārata and Purāṇas. Close observation revealed that many heroes can speak when they are still in the womb, and a newborn child is almost always abandoned by his biological mother. By analyzing these and other characteristic patterns in terms of mythological symbolism, Dōyama explained what ancient Indians thought heroes were like and what they thought the requirements were for a child to be a hero.

Sunil Parab (Dehradun, India) in his *Literary and Observational Study on Disease as a Medium for End of the World by Gods* focused on diseases and mythical stories associated with the emergence of diseases. Interestingly though, in many cultures diseases are not considered as acts of the devil but rather as punishment by the gods. The Vedic literature associates gods with the emergence of diseases and also focuses on the way to eliminate them. The Indian epic mythology shows Daksha Yagna as responsible for the emergence of multiple diseases. Indian folklore is full of regional references as well as remedies associated with diseases. The paper also compared the observations from Indian mythology with mythical stories associated with disease as a medium for the end of the world across different mythical cultures. In the conclusion the mythical emergences of diseases accepted by Indian medicine (Ayurveda) through Indian mythology vis-à-vis etiology of the same diseases in the modern western medicine were discussed.

The section **Mythology of Japan and Ancient Egypt** contained four papers. In *The Metamorphosis of “Bateren” and “Kirisitan”* **Koko Nango** (Kobe, Japan) stated that for Japanese myths is not typical to describe how human beings transform into animals or natural effects without death, while in European myths and narratives such motif is widely spread. In his paper Nango aimed to rethink the motif of the metamorphosis of “Bateren” (the Christian missionaries from Europe, who arrived in Japan in the 16th c.) and “Kirisitan” (converted domestic Christians, left in Japan after expelling the missionaries from Japan and executed brutally if they did not abandon their faith), which

are both constructed by mixing Japanese and European mythic images. But people kept having the images of “Bateren” and “Kirisitan” as magicians who can use supernatural power. There are various depictions of such magic of “Bateren” and “Kirisitan” in the narratives. One “Kirisitan” of the narrative transfigures into fog, another changes himself into an insect. Such motifs of metamorphosis raise a question of their origin, therefore, these narratives must be reconsidered by comparison with European myths.

Hitoshi Yamada (Sendai, Japan) spoke on the topic *Crab and Serpent: Tohoku Legends of Flood and Earthquake in Comparative Perspective*. As the Japanese Archipelago has repeatedly been struck by natural disasters since time immemorial, and especially after the severe tsunami calamity in 2011, a growing interest in disaster studies can be seen in natural and social sciences as well as in the humanities. H. Yamada compared the legends about natural disasters, collected in the Tohoku region, with parallel tales from Eastern Asia, and argued that some of such traditions may reflect people’s real experiences and their wish to hand down emergency instructions to descendants. Of particular interest are legends about the conflict between a crab and a serpent, which causes or stops the flood. This type of narrative is known in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and probably China, so it is widespread in Eastern Asia. Besides, there are legends about specific places which are said to be safe in the case of a flood or an earthquake. These may be based on local inhabitants’ experiences and knowledge, which should be re-examined from today’s scientific point of view.

David Weiß (Tokyo, Japan) presented *Wu Taibo: A Confucian Japanese Founding Myth*. This myth is an alternative founding myth, in comparison to the well-known myth of Amaterasu, which enjoyed popularity among Japanese Confucian scholars especially in the early modern period and claimed heavenly descent of the Japanese emperors. In contrast to the Amaterasu myth, Wu Taibo myth traced the sovereigns’ genealogy back to a Chinese prince. The Japanese scholars who endorsed this myth were less interested in emphasizing Japanese uniqueness than in showing that the Confucian teachings had been transmitted to Japan at an early date. They argued that Japan was the last stronghold of Confucianism since the Confucian Way had only been maintained in Japan, whereas it was forgotten on the Asian continent. Again, this paper drew attention to the usage of myths for ideological aims. The Wu Taibo myth was given a political interpretation during the 17th century, when Neo-Confucianism came into its own in Japan and brought with it the necessity to find an acceptable position in the sinocentric world order.

David T. Bialock (Los Angeles, USA) presented *A Serpentine Story: Reading a Japanese Myth at Earth Magnitude*. This paper explored how a period of natural disasters and war gave rise to a new form of geomorphic history centered on *Kojiki*’s (the oldest extant chronicle in Japan, a collection of myths, early legends, songs, etc.) ancient chthonic myth of the serpent (*orochi*) – the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*). Performed by blind biwa reciters attuned to the chthonic energies of serpent and dragon deities, this new geomorphic history was a cultural response to a series of converging natural, climatic, and human disasters in Japan’s early medieval period (late 12th to 14th centuries). After following its twists and turns in the Heike, the paper then carried its analysis of this ancient serpentine myth, reworked over the centuries, into the modern period – in the contemporary novel *Lake of Heaven* (*Tenko*), written by Ishimure Michiko.

Keiko Tazawa's (Tokyo, Japan) paper, *Water in the Ancient Egyptian Myths*, explored the function of water in the Egyptian myths. As in many creation myths in the world, water is an essential element of creation in ancient Egypt. The scholar analyzed not just primordial water, but also many other types of 'water', beginning with tears or libation water through rivers and watery places to 'water of life' in the resurrection ritual for the dead kings in their relations with Re and Osiris. The narratives and mythical fragments were picked up from funerary texts, wisdom literatures, magical texts, hymns, literatures, and offering texts, and connected to each other. The study demonstrated that in ancient Egypt water possessed not simply generative power, but moreover, the power of immortalizing and giving 'the second life' in the afterlife.

According to **Attila Mátéffy** (Bonn, Germany), Hungarian folklore is quite rich in various eschatological prophecies. In his paper, *The Emergence of Other Beings Instead of Humankind at the End of the World: Some Hungarian Eschatological Legends and Fragments Corresponding with the Mongolian Buddhist Concepts*, he argued that though the biblical classical form of eschatological prophecies exists in Hungarian folklore, the orally transmitted heritage is still dominant. There are some eschatological legends and fragments, motifs of which can be found neither in the Christian traditions nor in the collections of *Sibyline Oracles (Oracula Sibyllina)*. The latter also influenced the traditional Hungarian eschatological folk beliefs, but surprisingly appear in some Mongolian Buddhist traditions. The scholar listed the most relevant motifs which are: seven years of drought or barrenness as a premonitory sign of the end of the world; the leaves of the walnut-tree will have been shrunken; once the humankind disappears from the Earth, other beings come instead of it; exterminating or sulphurous rain, etc.

Mare Kõiva (Tartu, Estonia) spoke on the topic *Mer-People in Baltic-Finnic Tradition*. Since Baltic-Finnic ethnic groups live on the territories rich in water bodies and along the shores of the Baltic Sea, their tradition abounds with narratives and beliefs related to mer-people, water spirits, defenders of fish and boats, and kindred beings. Sea fairies and closely related beings, such as sea cows and horses, sea shepherds, fish-tailed mermaids and the pharaoh people, ship-bound Klabautermanns, form a separate corpus of texts in their heritage. Folklorists commonly classify stories concerning them as legends, memorates, or personal experience stories, which are characterized by the narrator's belief in the veracity of the encounter, logic-defying meetings with representatives of the supernatural world, and communication with them. The paper examined etiological stories of the pharaoh people, mer-people, sea cattle, and ship spirit Klabautermann (*kotermann*), about whom it is believed that they represent older mythological beings. These are mostly vernacular beliefs, as the scholar argued, but some have been influenced by newer North-European folklore layers.

Irina Sedakova (Moscow, Russia) in her paper *Mythological Creatures of Transition and Beginning* analyzed and compared three types of mythological creatures typical of the time of transition and beginning of calendric, lifecycle periods and the start of any activity. She shed light on the archaic seasonal mythological creatures of the opening period of the New Year, e.g., the Twelve Days (Yuletide) (with wide Balkan, Slavic, and Finno-Ugric mythological parallels) and the Balkan and Slavic Fates who visit the baby and its mother after the childbirth. The third type of creatures are new "global" demons of beginning, the evil spirits of procrastination, which prevent people from working. The pictures of these mythological creatures started to circulate on the Internet,

depicting definite traditional features of evil spirits (a tail and horns). The study aimed to discover fundamental similarities and differences of the dangerous creatures and to investigate the dynamics of their transformation in time and space up to modernity.

Marina Valentsova (Moscow, Russia) devoted her presentation to the practice of charming hail away in Slavic traditions. She noted that although meteorological magic or weather modification with the help of magic is known to all Slavic peoples, there are substantial differences in various local traditions, including such peculiarities that result from old contacts with the neighboring peoples. For example, Eastern Slavs have mainly occasional and individual enchantment against hail; in the Carpathians and Balkans there were special people – *oblakoprogonniki*, etc., who possessed magic power to drive away the thunderclouds and concerned themselves with hail suppression in favor of the whole community. Similar beliefs and analogous personages among Romanians, as well as specific elements of the weather enchantment of Hungarians, notable in the Carpathian-Balkan Slavic traditions, allow us to speak about complex processes of repeated borrowings and mutual enrichment within this region with a subsequent formation of a peculiar complex of meteorological enchantment with archaic roots, which “sprout” till nowadays.

Emilia Chalandon (Kobe, Japan) read her own translations into English of the *Two Stories from Japanese Mythology Retold*, which she intends to publish and thus to make Japanese mythological tales accessible for those who do not read Japanese. These texts are supposed to be published in French and English.

Each paper was followed by a lively discussion, questions, and drawing parallels. The program and the abstracts are available at http://www.compmyth.org/static/IACM_Sendai_2018_program_FINAL.pdf. In 2019, the 13th conference of the IACM will take place in Estonia.

The topic of the conference dealing with catastrophes was “illustrated” by an excursion to the coastal sites of the Pacific, where in 2011 a natural catastrophe betided: the deadly 20-meters-high swath of the destructive tsunami ruined the coastal part of Sendai and washed away more than 20,000 people. There are several memorial locations of religious and secular symbolism there. A museum, ruined houses and remains of the streets are kept so as to commemorate the people who died in this natural disaster.

Irina Sedakova, Marina Valentsova

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