

## TRACES OF INDO-EUROPEAN SHAMANISM IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Éva Pocs. Budapest, Hungary

Since the investigation of M. Bošković-Stulli, C. Ginzburg, T. Djordjević, the Hungarian G. Róheim, G. Klaniczay and others,<sup>1</sup> it has been clear that remains of an ancient shamanism can be found in Central-SE-Europe. The data partly refer to a mediator practice surviving up to the modern times, partly to belief elements integrated into the belief system of witchcraft.

It was Ginzburg, who, with his rich documentation, first proved the integration of 'pre-witchcraft' fertility rites into the institution of witchcraft by examining the rites of the North Italian *benandanti* who were wizards born with a caul and had shamanistic features. Olaniczay draw quite similar consequences from the exploration of the same process concerning the benandante-like wizards of the NW Balkans: the Slovene-Croatian *kresnik* and the Serbo-Croatian *zduhač*. The most important role of these wizards was to guarantee agrarian fertility for their communities, within the framework of the connections between the living and the dead visiting the human world periodically. They communicated with the other world through soul journeys in a trance state. These other-world journeys were connected with fighting with demons or with the dead or against the souls of the neighbouring territory's wizards. The aim of the soul fights was to obtain good weather or the corn taken away by hostile demons or stolen by the dead.<sup>2</sup>

A close parallel of the *zduhač*, the Ossete shaman, has already been recognised by Moszyński. Ginzburg – following Dumézil – also called the attention to important similarities between the Ossete shaman on the one hand and the benandanti and the SW-Balkan wizards on the other. Certain similarities can also be found in the German beliefs of the Alp region. Other features lead back to the remains of Baltic belief systems. It is clear that what we find here, are the remains of former shamanistic activities that have common Indo-European historical roots.<sup>3</sup>

Based on Slavic, Rumanian and Hungarian data I revealed two further types of wizards with shamanistic abilities. The ritual and beliefs connected with them show a close relationship with one of the basic myths of the Indo-European mythology: the fight of the heavenly, thundering storm-god against the underworldly, water-retaining chaos-dragon. The opposition of the heavenly 'fiery' deity and the underworldly 'watery' monster is a mythological universalia the remains of which were found – beside the written relics of the Greek and

German mythology – also at East-European peoples. The Lithuanian material, for example, is very rich in this respect. A rich East Slavic material showing a close relationship to the Baltic one is presented in the works of Jakobson, Meletinsky, and last but not least of Ivanov and Toporov.<sup>4</sup> Ivanov and Toporov compared their data gained by comparative linguistic method to Indo-European and Indo-Iranian mythological systems, and by placing the dichotomic oppositions characterising the myth into a binary symbolic classification system they succeeded in establishing the basic congruities.<sup>5</sup>

In the basic opposition of the presumed Balto-Slavic myth the fertility-bringing storm-god Perkunas, or Perun (the equivalent of Thor, Jupiter, Zeus, etc.) stands on the divine side. His figure remained known until the modern times in Baltic and East Slavic traditions. His attributes are the thunderbolt, lightning, oak tree, and horse. On the other side stands the water-retaining, or flood-making, thunderstorm-raising (i.e. the water-regulator) chaos-dragon or snake. The equivalent being in the Indo-European (ancient Indian, Thracian, Greek) mythologies is the cow-stealer, cow-riding demon. The same opposition is represented also in the fight between the gods Perkunas/Perun and Velnias/Veles/Volos, in a Balto-Slavic variant of the myth. The reconstructed figure of the latter is a Balto-Slavic chthonic deity appearing also in snake form, and related to cows and 'other-world pastures', and at the same time to spinning and wool. In the fight with Velnias/Veles, Perkunas/Perun sets the cows free, or hits Veles hiding underneath the cow with thunderbolt struck by stones.

Both in Eastern and South-Slavic folk-belief, there are clear correspondences referring to the Veles-cow connections. Ivanov and Toporov also called the attention to the traces which may lead us back to the Perun-Veles fight. There is no way here to detail their convincing linguistic consequences, only to mention three linking point of it: a Bulgarian St. George's day ritual song describes that three snakes or a three-headed dragon close up the water and the milk; or the motif of the witches' 'milk-closing' activity on St. George's day; and the cow-patron characteristics of St. George.<sup>6</sup> Their consequences are proved by data of Rumanian, Slovakian, and East-Hungarian belief legends on the Devil hiding among cows from St. Elijah's lightning arrows, or like the milk-collecting of the witches appearing in snake shape, or like witches who come to their underworldly gathering either in cow shape or riding a cow and who are defeated by lightning. Slovakian, Rumanian and Hungarian data refer to the cow-shaped or cow-horned witch or to fairies riding the bull who are the 'queen of the nice cows'.<sup>7</sup> Other researchers have also pointed out certain folklore elements belonging here<sup>8</sup> (however, the Rumanian material showing partly Eastern, partly South-Slavic connections and the corresponding Hungarian folklore motifs – most probably coming from our Indo-European neighbours – are

much less known). One can find a rich South-Slavic legend tradition of the fights between the fiery, heavenly dragons, eagles, ganders (the figure variants of the thundering deity) playing guardian spirit role and the watery, underworldly, hail-bringing dragons both in South-Slavic and in Rumanian areas. The victorious party uses lightning, thunderbolt and fire throwing from its mouth as weapons against the watery dragons' ice and hail. Besides, similarly to the Baltic and Russian legends, the figure of Perkunas/Perun in the fight against both types of enemies was often replaced by St. Elijah.<sup>9</sup> In this context the dragon fight has already lost its original cosmic frames, and is narrowed down to the fight between the village-attacking demon and the guardian saint who defends the community from demons and who secures the fertility of the 'own' village. The demon of the underworld – according to the patterns of the Russian and South-Slavic heroic epic's dragon fights – often takes the shape of the dragon of the neighbouring, hostile clan or alien people; thus indicating a characteristic stage on the way leading from myth to heroic epic (e.g. in Bulgarian legends St. Elijah and his assistants defeat the neighbouring village's hail-bringing dragons in a heavenly lightning fight). However, the dragon and the dragon-snake appear also on the divine side: the South-Slavic *zmaj* or *zmej*, sitting on top of the mountain or of the oak tree, who is flying, thundering, throwing lightning bolts and fire; as well as the Rumanian *zmeu* dragon-snakes who can make thunderbolts by knocking their heads together or by their clubs. Besides, the fiery eagle, cock, gander or crane, called also *zmaj* or *zmej*, is also known among the Serbian and Bulgarian 'divine' animals (the word *zmaj/zmej* means snake or dragon).

Putting aside now the problems relating to the original or secondary duality of the fiery and watery dragons, we have only to mention that the same dragon can be a heavenly and underworldly being at the same time: also the heavenly dragon often hatches out from an egg, of a snake, frog, fish, or a lizard, living in caves, in puddles or at dark places – similarly to the dragons remaining in water and caves for ever. Unseen to man for seven or nine years, they hatch out and after receiving the milk offering (that is often due to the underworldly dragons) they grow wings and fly up: 'gets from the black world to the white one, becomes a *zmeu* and flies up to the sun', as it is said about the Rumanian puddle-dragon *balaur*. Thus the fiery dragons are defeating their own underworldly variants in the legends of underworld fights.<sup>10</sup>

From among the wizards with shamanistic abilities the figure called *zmej*, *zmaj*, *zmija*, *zmajevit čovek* ('snake', 'dragon' or 'winged man') is relevant in our context. His practice is best known in Bulgaria and East Serbia.<sup>11</sup> The beliefs consider them sons of the fiery dragons and eagles, both of whom stand on the divine side of the above opposition. According to Bulgarian beliefs,

these beings are also the mythical animal-ancestors of the clans. As the centre of these data is Bulgaria, we might also think of Bulgaro-Turkish totemic traditions, but the motifs are also known from the East, and South Slavic heroic epics in the same context that Jakobson, on the other hand, regards as traces of Slavic totemism.<sup>12</sup> Anywhere the question of ‘the fathers’ of the wizards stand, the Perun relations are clear in the traditions of these wizards. When the wizard falls into a trance during the storm, his soul flies away and is carried away by the heavenly eagle, snake or dragon, i.e. his initiating and escorting spirits are the animal forms equivalent to Perun. Furthermore, the other-worldly battles of the wizards where their souls appear in the forms of snakes, lizards, eagles, cocks, dragons, are the equivalents of the mythic fights between Perun and Dragon, where the wizard-souls join the divine side. The aim of the battles is to promote fine weather and good harvest by killing or expelling the evil, infernal dragons who are responsible for hail. In such fights the wizard souls shoot lightning and throw stones at the dragons, and they use torn-out trees as weapons; the fights are accompanied by different meteorological phenomena similarly to the air battles of the dragon guardian spirits. According to other data, and this again relates to Perun, the wizard souls participate in the fight as the assistants of St. Elijah. Anyhow, the *zmaj/zmej* wizard belongs to the figure of Perun – in fact, he must have been Perun’s mediator.

However, scholars dealing with Baltic and Russian material found features referring to shamanistic practice not in relation with Perun, but in relation with its counterpart Veles. We can put into this group those who foretell future in the name of Veles in the 13th century chronicles, the wizard named ‘the grandson of Veles’, the wizards named Volx, who have ecstatic capacities and whose name is also related to Veles. The relation between the \**Vel*-root of the god’s name and the German *Valkyrja*, *Valhalla* (‘the realm of the dead’) words belonging to the ‘shaman Odin’ is also proved.<sup>13</sup> What I suppose is, that there should also be a trace of the deducted Veles-shaman in the folk beliefs of the modern age if the figure of Perun’s initiated could be so well preserved in the very archaic Rumanian–Bulgarian–Serbian materials. Mainly the parallels resulting from the researches of Gimbutas and others in the Baltic area served for me as a base to interpret a ‘suspicious’ circle of motifs as such a trace. The Lithuanian Velnias had his clearly distinctive dead, cow, and fertility deity features and was the god of women’s fertility, of the night world, and of the death – and, on the other hand, he was the deity of richness, trade, stealing and cheating. He brings supernatural gifts. He lives in the underworld hidden from man for seven years and anyone who catches sight of him will die. Beside the fish, dragon, black horse and goblin figure variations his most important incarnation is the snake, surviving up to the 20th century. Traces of similar beliefs

are known also in East-Slavic territories, where Veles became also the *female* guardian spirit of the cow stable.<sup>14</sup>

Such exact correspondences of the snake-Veles and of the treasure-bringing goblin beliefs are known in Rumanian, South-Slavic and even in Hungarian context, so that we rightly may suppose historic relations. Rumanian and South Slavic belief legend motifs relate to obtaining the ability of second sight, of future telling in the possession of a snake head or snake skin, or with the help of snakes, reptiles or underworld dragons living underground for seven or nine years and not seen by man; furthermore, to milk offerings to the snake, and to milk or cheese as the tools 'to see the other world'. In possession of the snake one can see the other world and the soul battles of the abovementioned demonic cow witches: in the fight, the witch souls use the tools of spinning and wool processing.<sup>15</sup> Here perhaps we have at hand the proper thread leading us to the Snake-Veles, who is a chthonic deity connected with cow, spinning, and wool. However, concerning shamanism related to him (or her), we have more concrete evidences than legendary motifs: the practising wizards who are regarded more or less witches in the modern age in this area. All these Bulgarian, Rumanian, and Serbian wizards have helping spirits, and they obtain the ability to fall into a trance after they have obtained their spirits. These birds or snakes clearly maintain their 'shamanistic' origin: by the help of these animals the soul of the wizard can leave her or his body and put on an animal shape. The spirits help in healing, love magic, in future-telling, seeing the dead, regaining the stolen objects, finding the treasure hidden in the earth. This helping spirit named *spiritus* or *zmaj/zmej* is quite often no other than the 'underworldly' snake, reptile, fish, not seen by man and collected from puddles, clefts or caves; or chicken, the semantic equivalent of the snake, i.e. the underworldly snake/dragon variants of the above opposition. If we add to this the legendary data on those who are initiated in the underworld, in the underground realm of snakes or by the queen of the snakes,<sup>16</sup> then we may say with a rather high probability that we do see the traces of a mediatory practice which is related to obtaining knowledge about the dead, the treasure, theft, or enrichment, and at the same time related to the very figure of Velnias/Veles.

We are still far from solving the question as of the origin of these types of wizards concerning both their shamanistic abilities and the mythical and ritual framework of their activity. However, from all these traces we can reconstruct a dual system of shamanism that existed within the frames of the same Balto-Slavic (Indo-European?) mythological and ritual system. Simplifying the pattern: these are the rituals of the initiated of the heavenly, fiery deity and at the same time of his mythical counterpart, the underworldly snake/dragon. ('white' shamanism in connection with agrarian fertility of the community practised by

men, and 'black' shamanism in connection with 'female' knowledge about the dead and fertility.) On the basis of its mythological framework, this type of shamanism might be interpreted as a Slavic (Balto-Slavic?) variant of an ancient, common Indo-European shamanism that can complete Ginzburg's Scythian–Celtic–Thracian sequence with Slavic (resp. Balto-Slavic) elements.

### Literature

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<sup>10</sup>See Note 9, Marinov, pp. 207-208 and Note 7, Pamfile, p. 314; see Note 7, Mușlea, Bîrlea, p 182; see Note 9, Georgieva.

<sup>11</sup>See Note 9, Marinov, pp. 208-209; see Note 2, Moszyński, pp. 654-655; Vakarelski, H. *Bulgarische Volkskunde*. Berlin, 1969, pp. 233-234; see Note 7, Dukova, p. 235, 238; see Note 2, Zečević, pp. 149-151 and Georgieva, pp. 79-85.

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## NENETS PERSONAL NAMES

Elena Pushkareva. Moscow, Russia

Both linguists and ethnographers have studied Nenets personal names<sup>1</sup>. Series of Nenets personal names have been recorded in the *Nenets-Russian Dictionary*<sup>2</sup> and the *Reference Book of Christian Names of Peoples of The Russian Federation*<sup>3</sup>. Despite the fact that there are available studies on personal names, being a part of people's spiritual culture, a reflection of its historical fate and landmarks of remote and unexplored epochs, the anthroponyms are of indisputable interest to researchers. In the present paper the author devoted her attention on phenomenon of giving names from birth to death and after death among Nenets.

The problem of Nenets personal names is rather knotty and complicated. Quite often children do not know the names of their parents, not to mention the