

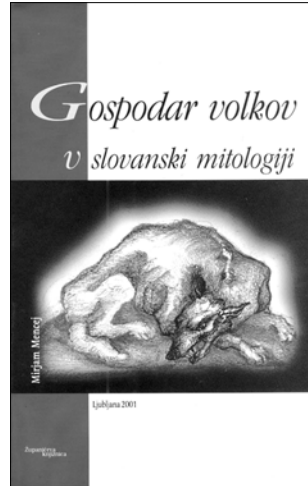
BOOK REVIEWS

Mirjam Mencej

GOSPODAR VOLKLOV V SLOVANSKI MITOLOGIJI (*Master of Wolves in Slavic Mythology*). Zbirka Županičeva knjižnica 6. Ljubljana 2001: Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo, Filozofska fakulteta. 331 pp.

Mirjam Mencej's monograph, published in 2001, provides an overview of folklore associated with the ruler or master of wolves, including legends, spells, rituals, beliefs, proverbs, and mythology, based on the tradition of Eastern and Western Slavic, Baltic, Scandinavian peoples, or generally speaking, the peoples of Indo-European language family and their neighbours, and the Finns and Estonians who belong to the Finno-Ugric language family. Academic anthologies and studies of different periods which have been used as sources in the study enable to provide a broad overview of the motif, which is associated with Artemis worship and which originates in the earlier layer of European tradition. The latter, according to Lutz Rörich, has its roots in the Mediterranean and Minoan-Crete culture. The master or ruler of wolves in the Slavic folklore is a saint (St. George, St. Martin, St. Mrata, St. Nikolaus, etc.), a forest fairy, God, or a wolf; the character also appears in legends, beliefs, spells, and also proverbs. Mincej argues that the concept 'wolf herder' has spread in the specialised literature since 1927 when Jiri Polivka published a study where he claims that he had discovered and established the term on the basis of a few Croatian folktales. It is important to remember that in the Estonian lore, the wolf herder has been widely known and the term has signified two different types of narrative characters – the heavenly, supernatural herder or patron of wolves, and the so-called 'witch-herder', a real person who understood the speech of wolves and could control the predators according to his own will.

The author has singled out legends from the rest of the lore and concludes that the functions of the master of wolves do not entirely overlap in legends and spells. In legends, the master of wolves has three main functions, or, to be more precise, the different aspects of it – the guiding



of wolves, the sharing of specific food or (more predominantly) feeding wolves, and the protection of cattle or people against wolves. In spells, which have been discussed in more detail in the monograph, the main function of the master of wolves (in addition to the above characters, it may be also St. Peter, St. Paul, etc., Christ, next to God, also forest fairies and wolves) is to protect the herd and humans against wolves: the master of wolves either seals or ties up the mouths of wolves and wild animals, encloses the herd, chains them, muzzles them, and unmuzzles them only at the end of the herding season.

The complex of rituals accompanying the spells is most often associated with the name day of saints associated with wolves (St. George's Day, St. Nicholas' Day, Martinmas, St. Andrews's Day, etc.); among the important dates the author also mentions calendar months associated with wolves. In the Estonian folk calendar, for example, February is also known by the parallel name *hundikuu* or 'the wolf's month'. The compliance of names of months to the hunting calendar, i.e. animals associated with it, or its general association with animals, has attracted scholarly interest on various decades. One of the most recent general approaches was presented in 2002 by Alla Luzhnikova on the tenth annual European conference on archaeoastronomy in Tartu.

Remarkably, among the Southern Slavic peoples the so-called 'wolf days' are celebrated on or around Martinmas, whereas among many peoples it is associated with the beginning and end of the herding season, either with the vernal or autumnal St. George's Day, or on St. George's Day versus Martinmas or Michaelmas, marking the end of the herding season and the beginning of keeping the herds inside for the winter.

The name day of the wolf saint is associated with various magic rituals (the closing of the wolf's mouth by various activities imitating closing; hanging up knives and other cutting tools in the shed; making magic circles around the herd), fasting (abstinence from meat), taboos of performing chores and work associated with herding and animal products (incl. counting the herd, darning, shoe-making, fleecing sheep), and special taboos (turning on lights in the stables, visiting other people, lending out objects from the house, going to the woods, and naming the wolves).

The spells, which are discussed at more length in the book, include beautiful metaphors and comparisons, and a unique symbiosis of the verbalisation of a specific ritual and the mythical landscape where the events of the spell take place, before the wolves are told to go to the swamp, bog, woods, glade, no-man's-land, or the Blue Sea. Evidently, the descriptions of space in the spells of different confessions or culture areas are re-

markably divergent. The author appears to have been interested mostly in explicating why in Central and Northern Europe the master of wolves is generally associated with St. George's Day, and among the Southern Slavic peoples and in Southern Europe at large, the phenomenon is associated with Martinmas and the period surrounding it. These mark the beginning of the grazing season or closing the herd in shed for the winter, respectively.

Mincej has once again compared the associations of the phenomenon of the master of wolves with pre-Christian beliefs, especially its manifestations in the texts in the shape of a wolf, an old man, a forest fairy (*leshî, lisun*). Mincej explores in greater length the hypotheses posed by D. Miller and D. Zelenin, which associated Veles/Volos, the deity of cattle and death, with wolf. According to V. Belaj, St. George would have been the child of Perun, born on March 1, who is kidnapped by Veles, and who is released again in spring. According to the interpretation of herders, Veles owns winter, and Perkun rules over summer. Herders who wished for the return of St. George's reign in spring thus performed his ritual return from the otherworld.

The theme of the battle between Perun and Veles, a motif of the archaic Indo-European myth, was studied in the early 1970s by famous Russian scholars V. Ivanov and V. Toporov, who thus laid the foundation for the novel interpretations of Slavic mythology. Mincej's monograph, illustrated with eighteen tables on the distribution of motifs, events, and characters, belongs to this approach.

The monograph provides a thorough overview of this intriguing mythological creature, exploring rituals and reports of various degree of prominence.

Mare Kõiva