

CHTHONIC SLAVIC MYTHICAL CREATURES (ETHNO AND LINGVO-CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS WITH A VIEW TO THE BULGARIAN, CZECH, AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES)

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Abstract: Low Slavic mythology is more than a collection of mythological characters, plots, and motifs; it is also a code of culture that enables us to understand the various layers of the Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian cultures. In addition, language, which preserves traces of different stages of the mythological assimilation of nature and society by human consciousness, is essentially a multi-layered myth. The present paper aims to examine some mythical chthonic creatures in linguistic and cultural aspects. The focus is placed on the onomasiological specifics and differences within the context of the different cultures of Bulgarians, Czechs, and Russians.

Keywords: chthonic mythical creatures, linguoculturology, Czech, Bulgarian, Russian

Mythology can be defined as the generalised primary worldview system of a particular community. In this way, myths are formed through a collective understanding of the world's structure, the essence of natural phenomena, and the function of area-specific customs. The idea of the universe's structure in the pagan culture was built mainly through the characteristics of the gods and heroes, their inherent functions, qualities, and family relationships. Many cosmogonic, eschatological, anthropogenic, and genealogical myths are built upon this theory. On the other hand, the creatures of lower mythology do not have such a significant influence on world order but are closer to humans. Besides reflecting on his daily activities, aspirations, and fears, they also speak to the phenomenon of being – social and personal difficulties individuals face daily and must overcome. The analysis and comparison of mythical creatures spread across the Slavic geocultural areas allow us to understand how these creatures are integrated into modern culture and worldviews of the given language speakers and how they contribute to the evolution of moral values. In science, there has been controversy regarding the correctness of the concepts of mythical creatures and mythical beings, owing to their intertwining appearances of reality and imagination and the lack of absolute reliability in historical information regarding the "existence" of such creatures, as well as their role as an intermediate between the living and dead worlds in popular beliefs. We accept in this study the use of synonyms - mythical creatures, mythical beings, mythical images, mythical characters, and beings – as the material we analyse is similar to three as different cultures as possible, indicating a pluralism in understanding by scientists and a broader scope of concepts. As a second point, we believe that determining whether an object belongs in the realm of reality or the field of imagination is highly historically dependent (what is the undisputed fact to the modern man living in the 21st century was absurd fiction thousands of years ago).

The specificity of the characters from the lower mythology requires the use of interdisciplinary approaches and the compilation of an algorithm for complex analysis, which is based on the theoretical and methodological basis of the linguistic and cultural (S. Vorkachev, V. Karasik, V. Maslova, etc.), folkloristic (A. Afanasiev, Vl. Prop); folklore-ethnographic, ethnolinguistic (L.N. Vinogradova, J. Bartminski, S. Vorkachov, V. Karasik, V. Maslova, etc.) and onomastic (A. Ufimtseva, E. Karsenat) scientific disciplines.

The **subject** of the present research is some Chthonic mythical Slavic creatures as an element of the Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian linguistic culture. It is important to note that the application of theoretical information is subordinated to the primary **aim** of the present text, which is to study the mythical Slavic beings through a complex analysis to understand their essence and characteristics. In addition, the study has the additional objective of clarifying the role of mythological characters within the linguistic culture of representatives from southern, western, and eastern Slavic languages and juxtaposing mythical creatures from Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian linguistic cultures. Considering the purpose and objectives of the study, the following **methods** were employed: lexicographic excerpt, descriptive method, comparative method, method of definitional analysis, mode of semantic analysis, and practice of etymological analysis. There is a sense in which the Slavic mythical creatures of lower mythology represent the whole of human reality. Still, at the same time, they embody the individual's hopes, beliefs, fears, and expectations. All this leads to the appearance of hundreds of varieties of these creatures, and the limitations of the scientific genre of the present study do not allow us to analyse each of them comprehensively. In the present study, we will pay attention only to the mythical creatures полудница (transliteration: poludnitsa), клеканица (transliteration: klekanitsa), полунощница (transliteration: polunoshtnitsa). Due to their relation to the time division in the day, we chose these three creatures.

A critical factor in determining the topicality and application of this research is the growing interest in modern linguistics, which seeks to understand how the national-distinctive mentality manifested itself in language and the desire of scientists to reconstruct how objective reality was reflected in human consciousness in ancient times.

Despite their apparent fixed characteristics and undeniable dynamism, mythic Slavic images are challenging to describe and systematise because they are affected by varied religious, cultural, and social factors. For example, the adoption of Christianity by the Slavic peoples changed how some creatures were understood, adding specific features to their appearance and meaning. As a protector (there was a "dragon-master"), a bringer of happiness, a protector, but in Christianity, he represents the sinful temptation, the demonic (Archangel Michael defeats the dragon - Satan Lucifer; St. George defeats the dragon, etc.)).

The following criteria will be applied to each chthonic creature:

1) Name of the mythical creature (semantics and etymology);

- 2) A habitat for the creature;
- 3) The features of the creature;
- 4) Time of appearance;
- 5) Symbolism of the image of the creature;
- 6) A phraseological unit with a current mythical creature as a component.

We have been drawn to analysing phraseological units because they have been essential to studying mythical creatures. Naturally, the relationship between language and mythology is reflected in a language's distinctive lexical-phraseological fund. The phraseological units serve as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural information.

The mythical female character – *poludnitsa (polednice)*, is widespread in the Czech and Russian lands. In preparing the present study, no analogue of this creature was found in the Bulgarian context. Accordingly, its nature is, to a certain extent, unknown to the Bulgarian people. In this connection, E. E. Levkiewska's thesis, based on a comparative analysis, emphasises that the image is typically West Slavic but is also present in the traditions of Russians from the northwest and the Siberian regions [Levkiewska 2009: 154].

In the Czech linguistic culture, *polednice (polednice, polodnice, poludnice)* is one of the creatures that are the following prisoners of the space between the world of the living and the dead. Traditions say these are the souls of maidens who died before their wedding or the souls of sinners who have no place even in hell.

This is why these creatures roam the earth, wandering forever in the fields and meadows. The origin of these mythical creatures is based on the personification of danger, which, since ancient times, people have detected in the mid-day time - *at noon*. The tension of this hour of the day is argued by the presence of old beliefs of the so-called "wild hunt" carried out by demons. According to legend, this hunt portends war or death, and anyone who sees it will lose their life or become one of the hunters. The roots of the idea of this hunt can be found in the comparative mythology of Jacob Grimm (*Deutsche Mythologie* –1835), where he introduced the term – *Wilde Jagd*, speaking of a phenomenon related to the pagan period of the German lands but similar mythological phenomena throughout northern, western, and central Europe [Grimm 1850: 345].

Another circumstance that argues the significance of this day range is the presence of similarly known demons in other cultures - *daemon meridians* (Latin) and *Mittagsdaemon* (German). This demon is also mentioned in Old Czech literature and is called *běs polední* [Mahal 1907: 105].

The Czech *polednice* appears among people precisely at noon (Among the various Slavic peoples, this period varies between 12:00 and 16:00). Still, its location in the agricultural calendar is also essential for its nature, namely its appearance in the fields in the phase between the germination of the sown cereal crops and their harvest. Its name derives from when it's going out among people – at noon (*poledne*). In the superstitions of individual Slavic peoples, there are identical names related to the space in which such a female creature appears or to the attributes it carries (for

example, *serpjelbaba* (the grandmother having a sickle), *hits* (the one who wanders the fields of rye) and others.).

Like other mythical creatures, its appearance has features specific to each area in which it is distributed. According to Levkiewska, the features of the formation are regional - iron teeth and zoomorphism [Levkiewska 2009: 155]. The most frequent can be defined as - *the white colour of her clothes and hair, exceptional height, pale skin, hideous face, and ringing voice*. We remind you that for the ancient Slavs, the white colour was associated with death, not purity and sanctity, as it is in modern understandings. In Czech legends, it is said that she brought a storm, was accompanied by a whirlwind, and carried people away. In some areas, there are legends that she asked riddles (just like the ancient Sphinx) to those who encountered her. Mahal also mentions that in the Moravian lands, the people describe her as *a nasty old woman with an ugly face and horse's hooves* (A zoomorphic feature that can be seen as a vivid symbol of the demonic, to be associated with the pernicious, but also with the earthly and accordingly to justify people's views that these creatures are servants of the devil or rejected by all worlds, forcing them to live in the "nobody's" space between earth, heaven, and hell and to preserve in their appearance a particle of all these worlds.). Still, the fear of her is not regional but universal because whoever meets her can be "rewarded" with a severe illness or lose his life [Mahal 1907: 102]. An interesting detail is that in the ancient understandings of the Slavic peoples, she is often described as an enchanting young maiden, which brings her closer to the Slavic mermaids and fairies (forest and aerial). The wearing of white enchanted clothes by the female creature *polednice* has also been cited as a distinctive feature by Vladimir Vondrachek and František Holub. According to them, *polednice* is a demon of time, covered in white, evil, and taking children [Vondrachek, Holub 2012: 106]. Mahal and Lewkiewska pay particular attention to the fact that red clothes are sometimes worn instead of white ones [Lewkiewska 2009: 154-155]. The red colour can be symbolically characterised as a unity of opposites (the colour of evil, glory, majesty, fire, and danger). With its extreme diversity, it occupies, in our opinion, the right place in the appearance of the mythical female creature under consideration.

Her character as a cruel enemy of children and women in labour allows her to be equated with a female creature typical of the Russian tradition - *удельница*, who, according to beliefs, harasses underage children, injures pregnant women, takes newborns with her or damages them and makes them irretrievably sick.

According to modern dictionaries, this mythical creature is understood as:

- 1) Bytost objevující se za poledne [Mythical creature appearing at noon] [Chervena 1989].
- 2) Divá ženská bytost objevující se za poledne [A mythical wild female creature appears at noon] [Chervena 2018].

There are no other features characterising the image of this creature apart from the gender – female.

The location in the chronotype, but refracted through the prism of the already mentioned inherent characteristics of the female creature *polednice*, could be considered as a basis for correlation with the other two chthonic creatures - *půlnočnice* (a woman who appears at midnight, the name comes from *půlnoc* (midnight) and *klekánice* (a woman who comes after the ringing of the prayer bell; the name comes from *klekání* (ringing of the morning or evening prayer bell)).

As stated, such a creature is absent in the Bulgarian folk culture. In the Russian folk tradition, it is only partially widespread, which also explains the need for phraseological units in the Bulgarian and Russian languages. Interestingly, phraseological units are also absent in the Czech language. Our observations are summarised in table number "1. *Полудница (Poludnitsa)*".

<i>Table 1. Полудница (Poludnitsa)</i>			
	<i>Bulgarian language</i>	<i>Czech language</i>	<i>Russian language</i>
A name	—	polednice	полудница
Variations, own names,	—	polodnice, poludnice	полуденица; полуденница
Habitat	—	It is not specified where he lives, but he appears in the field.	It is not defined where he lives, but he appears in the area.
Time of appearance	—	At noon	At noon
Phraseological units	There are no phraseological units with a component <i>poludnitsa</i> .		

The appearance of поледница (the polednice), as we have already explained, is associated with the middle of the day, and for the female creature **klekánice**, going out among people is closely influenced by religion, saying the obligatory prayer after sunset and the ringing of the evening bell. According to our understanding, the female creature placed within the historical chronotype is a product of Christianization and perhaps a transformation of a pagan female creature, polednice. The destructive power of the klekánice being is intended to punish those who violate the commandments go outside after the last bell, and fail to pray. In addition to its habitat being determined by its functions, it lives in old bell towers and church spires. The name is from klekání (ringing a bell for morning or evening prayer). During our research, we could not locate any phraseological units containing a component of this mythical creature, and modern dictionaries do not include it. As a result of our observations of the place of the legendary female creature in Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian culture, we can conclude that the klekánice is a creature that is unique to Czech folklore.

Similarly, time limits dictate the appearance of the female creature in the human world – **půlnočnice** (полунощница; transliteration: polunoshtnitsa), but in the midnight hour, her task is only to foretell the imminent demise of the mortal who matured her. The amount of information available about this mythical creature is minimal. No phraseological units can be found in the Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian lexicographic sources. The Czech name comes from the lexeme půlnoc (midnight). In Czech folk beliefs, this being is described with several symbolic elements:

- 1) Their white clothes symbolise death for the ancient Slavs.
- 2) It is possible to interpret loose hair as a symbol of freedom and self-determination, in contrast to the traditional braiding of engaged and married women's hair.
- 3) Three characteristics of all chthonic creatures are associated with time – sickle, scythe, and whip.

Therefore, this creature is unique to Western Slavs and not representative of other Slavic peoples.

To sum up, all of the chthonic creatures examined are unique in some way by combining elements of the attempt of a person to make sense, explain, and respond to the throbbing changes occurring in their surrounding environment over time. Personifications of human fears can always be found in these creatures.

The lack of individualisation in the mythical creatures we analyse is striking. The Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian languages have many variations of a given name, but personal names are scarce, which can be explained by the fear man has of the power of the word. For centuries, people have sought to name mythical characters in a manner that is as euphemistic as possible to appease these unknown evil forces.

In the relatively few phraseological units that have the name of a mythical creature from Slavic mythology as a component, we can see the impact of Christianization on rituals, traditions, and

characters as well as on the mythological representations of the Slavic people regarding daily vicissitudes. Some lexemes have become archaic due to modernisation and urbanisation, reducing the frequency of the considered creatures in Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian culture.

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