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SLAVIC MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES: SPECIFICS OF THEIR ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION

Abstract. This paper synthesises the specifics of scientific classifications and descriptions of mythical characters. Throughout the article, the authors discuss a complex algorithm they developed for comparing reports and analyses of mythical creatures, presenting and arguing its merit.

Keywords: Mythic Slavic creatures, classification, Slavic languages.

Besides being a collection of mythological characters, plots, and themes, Low Slavic mythology can also be regarded as an expression of traditional code, allowing us to access the various layers of the linguistic culture of the Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian populations. Similarly, language, which has preserved traces of the multiple stages of the mythological assimilation of nature and society by human consciousness, is fundamentally a myth with different layers. Our paper aims to develop an algorithm that will allow the analysis of the Slavic mythical creatures characteristic of Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian culture to the fullest extent possible.

Mythic Slavic creatures are challenging to describe and systematise due to their considerable number of vaguely fixed characteristics and undeniably expressed dynamism, determined by different religious, cultural and social factors. In addition, the adoption of Christianity by the Slavic peoples changed the way they understood several creatures, giving rise to new features and meanings associated with them (the dragon in the past was considered a protector (there was a "dragon – owner"), bringer of happiness, guardian, defender, but in Christianity, he represents sinful temptation, demonic (Archangel Michael defeats Satan Lucifer; St. George defeats the dragon, etc.)). Consequently, we present in synthesis the critical discussion points associated with the classification and characterisation of mythical Slavic beings. The Mythology of the Slavs, written by Alexander Geishtor, categorises Slavic spirits and demons into five groups: shades of the deceased (such as vampires and goblins); water creatures (such as water spirits and mermaids); forest creatures, such as the werewolf and the лесник (a forest spirit whose appearance is limited to spring and is believed to haunt dark and gloomy forests); airspace creatures (such as the dragon) and domestic spirits (such as the

домовник) [1, 47]. The classification of Ivan Hudec is based on a distinction between higher and lower deities (Hudec asserts that the leading representatives of the higher deities, such as Svarog, Perun, and Veles, are the same species as Slavs throughout the world). The higher deities are particular gods with specific names and destinies, while the lower deities are lower deities. The inferiors, according to him, are interchangeable [2, 130]. He has a more developed division of subordinate deities (demons) (in contrast with Gaystor). According to him, there are demons of the elements, demons of time, demons of fate, forest demons, field demons, house demons and human demons.

In determining the classification of Hudets, it is essential to consider the relationship between the world of the indicated types of demons and the world of the dead. According to ancient Slav belief, deceased relatives protect their living relatives. Additionally, it suggests that the relationship between humans and demons has a dual nature.

Vanya Zdenek distinguishes the natural spirits of elements, plant demons, fate demons and guardian demons based on the demonolatry characteristic of the ancient Slavs (the worship of nature spirits, the countless creatures that revive the natural laws and forces that surround man) [3, 104]. He found the noticeable nuanced difference between the demonic creatures in their essential connection with the respective elements – fire, water, and air.

Using a particular set of differential signs, researchers at the Department of Ethnolinguistics and Folklore of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences presented a scheme in 1989 for categorising mythical creatures. These signs are part of the spectrum of universal semiotic oppositions: beneficial vs harmful, male vs female, us versus foreign, visible versus invisible, up versus down, right versus left, white versus black, etc. Differential signs indicated by scientists may vary in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Most universal is the degree of reality – the unreality of the mythical creature and its

function, including its place and sphere of patronage and habitation. One of the most widely used and applied analysis models in scientific research is that of Lyudmila Vinogradova and Svetlana Tolstoy. The work is based on a complex examination of mythical female figures from various Slavic cultures, including mermaids, goddesses, self-divine figures, and villas. Using a generalised system of selected signs, mythical Slavic creatures were described, characterised, and compared.

Their classification scheme covers all the necessary aspects for implementing a detailed analysis and a comparative plan. Still, the presence of other sections shows that, despite its comprehensiveness, more is needed to guarantee absolute comprehensiveness. There is also some controversy about the characterisation and role of dynamic images. (This term is not imposed in the scientific literature; it is used in the present study's research). in "lower mythology". In these cases, the dynamics of the image development are observed, i.e. while they were perceived as gods or at the top of their hierarchy, their transformation into demonic creatures following the change of religion earned them a place in folklore and a „transitional form" (these are beings such as sorcerers, magicians, who have human appearances, live among people, and possess demonic powers; Baba Yaga is an example of a female figure.). Several fundamental scientific works are available in the Bulgarian context, including Bulgarian Folk Mythology (1993) by Ivanichka Georgieva and Encyclopedia of Characters in Bulgarian Mythology (2020) by Zoya Barbolova. The works in this collection contain mythological beings integral to Bulgarian folk culture. Barbolova pays attention to etymology, analogous characters in the mythologies of other cultures, and dialectal variations in the naming of creatures. A specific focus of Barbolova's work is etymology, comparable characters in myths of different cultures, and regional variations in the naming of creatures. Georgieva investigates the origin and primary function of legends and the relationships between mythologi-

cal stories in other cultures to identify supranational regularities in human development.

As a result of all that has been stated, the issues about mythical Slavic images are still relevant today, as they are considered cultural symbols and information sources that can be used to reconstruct the worldviews of various cultures. Scientists employ multiple methods to determine the most effective way to systematise and analyse these data comparatively. These methods are diverse and distinctly in-terdisciplinary. Furthermore, researchers have yet to be able to establish a reliable, theoretically grounded classification system to unite all varieties of mythical creatures.

Because of the pluralism in science regarding the systematisation and survey of mythical Slavic beings, we propose an author's algorithm that allows us to analyse the unique characteristics of these beings and track the dynamics of their image development at a diachronic and comparative level (see Scheme 1).

Scheme 1.
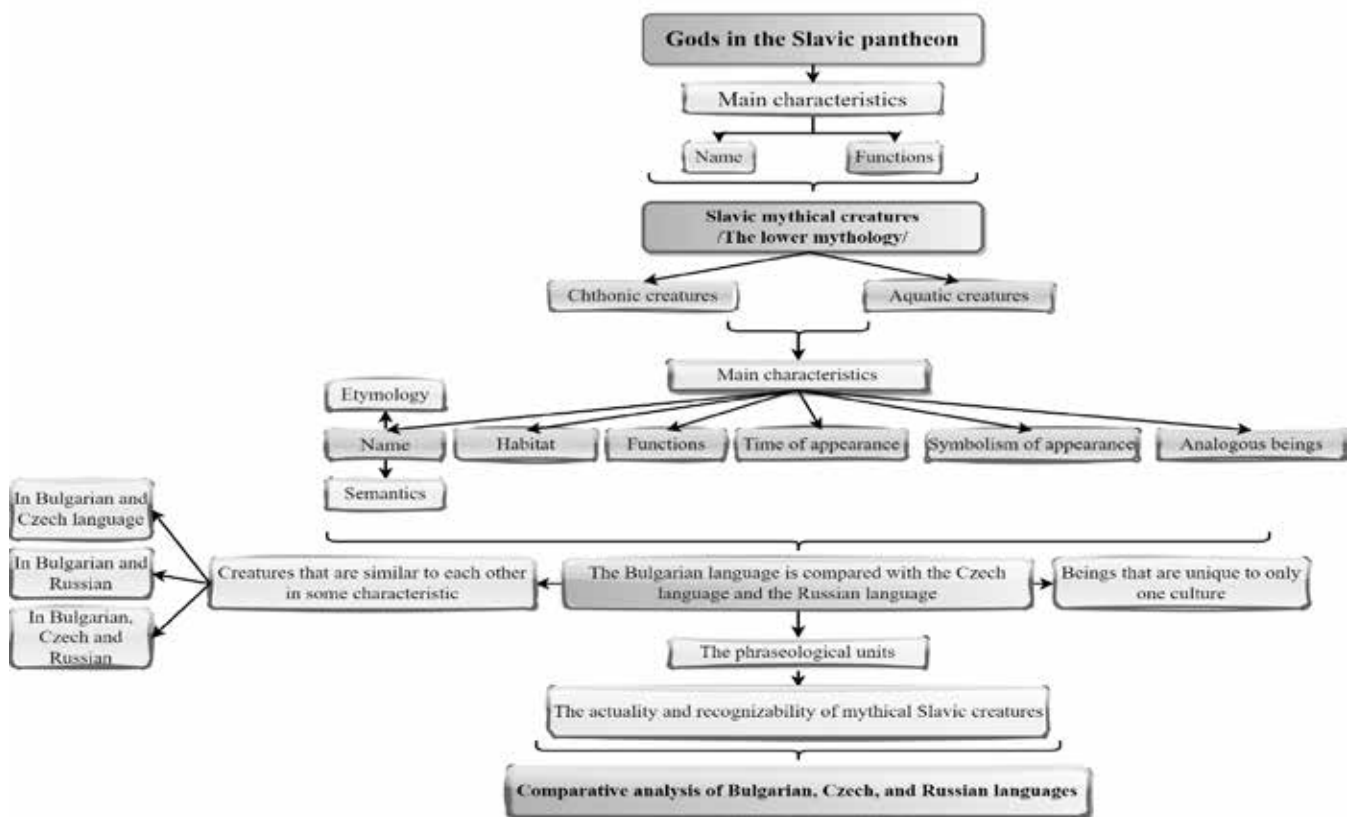
As a result of choosing to use the term lower mythology in the present study, we acknowledge the existence of higher mythology, but only at a certain point in the evolution of the Slavic culture. In contrast, we selected a group of dynamic images characterised primarily by their variability over time. The significance of this implies that we should begin our algorithm with the principal gods from the Slavic pantheon, examining their names, features, and functions, before looking at creatures that form the basis of ancient Slavic beliefs and modern folklore cultures in Bulgaria, Czech, and Russia. A central element of the classification algorithm we have developed is the area in which the mythical creatures are directly related, that is, aquatic and chthonic creatures. A central element of the classification algorithm we have developed is

the area in which the mythical creatures are directly related, that is, aquatic and chthonic creatures. As part of our analysis of mythological creatures belonging to one of the two groups identified by us, indicators will be applied – name, habitat (specification of whether the creature is in a forest, lake, river, or home), functions, time of appearance, symbolism in appearance, and analogical beings in other cultures. Having already highlighted the importance of phraseological units in the study of mythical creatures, we have paid particular attention to the analysis of these units. Furthermore, it is natural for the relationship between language and mythology to be most evident in its peculiar core – the lexical-phraseological fund of a given language. The people transmit their cultural information to the next generation through phraseological units.

The algorithm compiled by us does not pretend to be exhaustive and comprehensive. Still, we believe that it meets the goal to the maximum extent of compiling a suitable method for the analysis of mythical creatures in the Bulgarian, Czech and Russian linguistic cultures, presenting one of the many possible approaches to classification, description, analysis, and comparison of the mythical Slavic creatures found in the folk culture of the Bulgarians, Czechs, and Russians.

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