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Animal Real-Unreal in Traditional Conceptions of the World in Croatian Areas*

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Trying to interpret oneself and the other in the world, the traditional Man has established a real world and an otherworld. Specific herbal and animal attributes were ascribed to particular people who allegedly had the power to communicate between worldliness and transcendence. Also some human characteristics were linked with herbal and animal mediators. These attributes were folklorized as miraculous powers. Such supernatural beings from South Slavic traditional conceptions of the world have been largely associated with the pre-Christian deities and their degradations, based on the observed real attributes of the vegetal and animal species. The interdisciplinary comparative way of treating South Slavic folklore real-unreal motifs through time and space in this article is its ethnological, animalistic and anthropological contribution.

KEYWORDS: psychopomp; supernaturals; Croatian folklore motifs; real-unreal

1. Introduction

Anthropological research of the interaction between nature and culture have been spreading ever since the research work of Franz Boas (1858–1942), a pioneer of American and world modern anthropology. At the beginning of the 21st century, multispecies ethnologists and anthropologists started focusing their attention on **herbal and animal organisms** directly intertwined with those of humans. Their emerging interdisciplinary research includes ethnographic and environmental studies, biological and technology studies

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Il. 1. Bride with characteristics of the Sun goddess, Pokuplje (central Croatia), phot. H. Serdar

Source: Vitez, Z. et al. (1996). *Mladenka u hrvatskim svadbenim tradicijama*. Zagreb: Etnografski muzej–Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, p. 34.

of living organisms, bioscientific artefacts, ethnobiological subjects and connecting biopolitical actions.

Trying to interpret the world, oneself and the other, the traditional Man, faced with transience and death, developed perceptions of a real world and an otherworld. Those individuals strived to reconcile the realities of their microcosm with those of the surrounding macrocosm without alienating themselves from their natural environment. The endeavour inevitably transformed individuals, as well as whole societies into cultural and eccentric entities with the result that the non-herbal world became herbalized and the non-animal world became animalized in the psyche of both individuals and societies.

Intentional selection played, and it continues to play, an essential role in the process of the development of the anthropomorphised **perceptions of herbal and animal worlds**; it is, for all intents and purposes, an evolutionary



Il. 2. Heikegani Crab and Heike Samurai, Japan, phot. Lonmelo – Flickr

Source: <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2017/06/heikegani-crab-with-human-face.html>, 1.11.2020.

process. In this particular sense we see the evolution of the Japanese crab *Heikegani* (*Heikeopsis japonica*), which imprinted its importance on the collective psyche of people in Japan firstly by the agency of discernible human shapes on its extravagant armour resembling the samurais of the Heike clan, and later by the establishment of the Heike clan cult after the members of the clan had been massacred in the 12th century (Sagan, 1983, 24–26).

The trend has always been to ascribe certain **animal or plant characteristics** to those who alleged have the ability to interact with the spirit world. By the same token, **plant or animal intermediaries** between the real world and the otherworld have been ascribed some human features. It's commonly known that New Years' and wedding disguises encompass apotropaic, homeopathic, contagious and repetitive magic of totemistic, manistic, animistic and demonistic perceptibilities (Kulišić, 1979, 59). Those traditions have deep roots in the mechanism of the anthropomorphization of plants and animals and vice versa. Participants wear **floral or animal masks** and use numerous **plant or animal props** – for example a decorated wedding young tree *majga* (mother) implanted in the bride's yard (Međimurje) (Bajuk, 2020, 207) and St. George's horns (Gavazzi, 1991, 53), sometimes also trained **real animals** – for example a Carnival dancing bear dressed in clothes (throughout Croatia). Dances that accompany them “often imitate the motions of animals, while music sometimes mimics their sounds” (Sax, 2001, xii), for example in the South Slavic wedding dance *Paun i kolo* (peacock and circle-dance) (Kuhač, 1880, no. 1004–1008). Until relatively recently, these characters, their carriers, puppets or parts were seen as possessed of miraculous powers (Lozica, 2007, 204–205). This perception had many manifestations in every-day life; for example, newborn babies in Istria were sheltered from evil by wrapping animal hides around their bodies (Facchinetti, 2005, 51) or by attaching red threads of plant or animal origin around their wrists and ivy branches on the chest in Dalmatia (Furčić, 1988, 503). **Known plants and animals** were worshipped and involved in Croatian annual and life rites of passage (Grbić, 2007, 221, 234–235), for example a decorated young tree (Gavazzi, 1991, 42) included in St. George's processions and a rooster included in wedding customs (Bajuk, 2020, 209).

Since the traditional Man distinguishes in visibility, corporeality, symmetry, clothing, girding, hair coverage and “speaking of everything that is



II. 3. Traditional procession *đurdari* on St. George Day, Bilogora (central Croatia), phot. K. Lukec, 2018



II. 4. Carnival Gipsy couple with a trained dancing bear, Bilogora (central Croatia)

Source: <http://old.zvono.eu/portal/kulturno-zvono/povijest/9525-bjelovarski-medvjed-pijanac>, 1.11.2020.

not human, but may have a human shape” (Раденковић, 1996, 354–355), this article presents the gradually reshaped Croatian **animal fragments of traditional understanding** and **symbolic images** which are based on the concepts of the Man assuming the animal attributes, “becoming animal” (cf. Deleuze, Guattari, 1987), and Animal gradually acquiring human features.

2. Phytomorphic, zoomorphic, antropomorphic, hybrid

Special innate, inherited and acquired abilities and powers were seen as the necessary precondition to personal involvement in magic activities connected to controlling the annual weather and life conditions, mythically correlated with archaic cults of divine female healers, self-fertile virgins and animal mistresses, who were in an incestuous (mother – son) or jealous (mother – daughter) relationship with their own children and who were phytomorphized and/or animalized by their worshipers within hunting, livestock breeding and agrarian beliefs, and gradually demonized in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, Croatian echoes of ancient female cults existed in the traditional women’s headgear *rogi* (Čulinović-Konstantinović, 1998, 162–163), as well as in the concept of self-centred young women, who were traditionally identified with bloodthirsty *more* (Mares) (Kipre, 2014, 40), evoking the ancient Greek identification of Egyptian sphinxes with wild female cannibals (Everton, 2018) and cognition of nightmares caused by feelings of anxiety, paralysis and breathlessness (Davies, 2003, 182). Also they were seen as coming from contacts between local healing women and capable matrons with skilful women *vještice* (witches) who look, it was believed, old, ugly, crooked, tousel, squint, nosy, toothless and sometimes three-personal, who are also sloppy, self-contained, adventurous, ecstatic, rumbustious, lustful, shrewd, meanness, enchanting and bloodthirsty holders of inherited secret knowledge and supernatural abilities about guided meteorology, natural elements, hallucinogenic substances, transformation into all living beings and inanimate objects,¹ communication with dead ancestors,

¹ They possessed special abilities – to shape-shift during the night (nictomorph), shamanic psychonavigation technique in an animal soul form (zoopsychonavigation) (Marjanić, 2005, 111) and transmigrate of a witch soul into animal bodies (zoometempsychosis) (Barešin, 2013, 55).



Il. 5. Traditional female headstall with *rogi* (horns), Pokuplje (central Croatia)
Source: Gušić, M. (ur.) (1977). *Jastrebarsko – narodna nošnja*. “Kaj” no. 6–8, front page.

lethal exhaustion, life-saving healing and to speed up or retard the growth of plants and animals (if they were conceived on Christmas, Easter or Ember Days, if they were born on Ember days or in an amniotic placenta, or as a result of being in connected to dark forces) (Marjanić, 1999, 62; Šešo, 2007, 253–255, 258).

By mythical healers and fighters against evil forces born in the placenta named *krsnici* (baptized beings), were believed in northern Adriatic narratives, to have acquired supernatural powers and the ability to shape-shift into animals with white or multi-coloured furs (cats, dogs, boar, goat, ox mare) (Grbić, 2001,



Il. 6. Old Carnival masks *mukači* (cows) and *copernice* (witches), Medimurje (northern Croatia), phot. L. Bajuk, 2013

478). Examples of their equivalents are *zduhači* (blowers) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and *vjedogonje* (wind chasers) in Montenegro's Bay of Kotor, who blow into hail-bearing clouds (Dronjić, Šimunović, 2010, 306). Dubrovnik *legromanti/negromanti* (negromants), who fight each other, attain their supernatural powers by being born with a tail which must not be seen, otherwise they lose that powers (Šešo, 2016, 87). Supernatural abilities were also ascribed to the *zmija-mladoženja* (snake-groom) (Bošković-Stulli, 1962, 28–30; Romić, 2019), who is at the same time a man trapped in an animal and a snake trapped in a human body, as well as to the spirit of an infant born in the placenta or of an unbaptised young boy, manifested as a lucky snake, leporine, canine or cat-faced *macić*, who could also arise as a particular being from a black hen's egg or from a nine-year-old rooster (Grbić, 2001, 474–475). The still-born spirit of the central Croatian Tropolje, whose mother conceived by swallowing an oak nut and died at childbirth, allegedly appears as a fish, pig or dragon-like thunderous *mogut* (Car, 2020) and might be connected to an aborted fetus or a dysmature (hypoxic, malnourished, wrinkled, scaly, hairy, long-nailed) infant who was born after 42 weeks of pregnancy². The widespread Croatian folklore dog-headed being – called *psoglavac* – allegedly is the child of a woman who swore on her unborn baby, or was born of promiscuous parents (Šešo, 2007, 260–261; 265–270, 271), or whose father was a member of the Asian-steppe Tatars that had ravaged Croatian areas in the 13th century. Maybe it's connected to



Il. 7. Mythical dog-headed *pesjanek*, Medimurje (northern Croatia), child's draft, Leonardo Ekart, 2015

Source: Collection of Knjižnica i čitaonica grada Preloga.

²I owe a debt of gratitude to doctor Rebeka Ribičić from the Clinical Hospital Centre *Sveti Duh* in Zagreb for her expert advice and help with medical aspects of my research.

roots, ferns, mushrooms or huge animals were personified with supreme deities; a rainbow, sprigs, flowers or little beasts with the divine bride; boulders or packs with divine wedding guests; seeds, tubers, sprouts or whelps with (the) divine infant(s); observable celestial bodies, crops, pack or flock with young deities. In South Slavic mythology: the dragon, bee, peacock, bear, deer and ox were folklorized Perun's and Veles' animals; the snake, peahen, she-bear, doe and cow were Mokoš's animals; the cuckoo, marten/weasel or she-wolf and mare were Morana's animals; the hawk, wolf and horse were Jarilo's animals.

Some of Croatian **onomatopoeic zoonyms**, such as *bumbar* (bumblebee), *ćuk* (scops owl), *kukavica* (cuckoo), *kokot* (rooster), *pupavac* (hoopoe), *mačka* (cat) etc., which were derived from animal sounds (Visković, 2007, 358), exist in vivid folklore stories, as well as appearances named by Croatian **dialectal mythonyms**: **phytonyms** like the iris *leliva* (new Moon, iris) and mistletoe *više/vještičja metla* (witch/witch's broom), **zoonyms** like the carnival *baukač* (bugaboo; *bau-bau* means 'barking, toothed vulva' in Greek), **toponyms** like uplifts *Lelija* (iris) and *Zmijino brdo* (snake hill), **astronyms** like the galaxy *Mliječna staza* (Milky Way) and the rainbow *babin lub* (grandmother's mould) – on the trails of Thracian goddess Bauto, who was a companion of the Greek goddess Demeter (Devereux, 1990, 79, 86–87) connected to the Slavic folklore *baba*, apropos **phytonyms** like the folklore *švaržić* (sprig) (Vrkić, 1995, 441–442) and **antroponyms** like the personal name *Bogdan* (god-given) and common name *širvonja* (iris-man) of a particular dancer, connected to the Slavic divine son. Also could be some **dialectal zoonyms** which named animals in a mythical connotative correlation – *galija* (galleass) for the Pelješac stinking centipede (*Schizophyllum sabulosum*), which inhabits under a rock of the same name on the Viganj hill Sv. Ivan (St. John) and where is allegedly located a lost ancient treasure, available to a man who slays a girl on that rock, from which some man and one newborn³ are seen in a galleass (Filipi, 2009, 180; Vidović, 2019, 76); on the trail of notions of the moisture-carried, skilful and enchanting *baba* (witch), who echoes to the pagan milk-carried **mother of god**, divine spinner and female treasurer, perhaps are the following

³The legend about a girl's asexual conception by drinking a centipede in muddy water was recorded in the Erlagen Manuscript no. 165 (Stojković, 1939, 74).

names: *huda baba* (evil grandma) or *zlo oko* (evil eye) for the praying mantis (*Mantis religiosa*); *baba* (old woman) for various pisces (*Blennius ocellaris*, *Gaidropsarus mediterraneus*, *Lipophrys*, *Parablennius*, *Spicara flexuosa*, *Uranoscopus scaber*) and *pagan* (pagan) for the greater weaver (*Trachinus draco*); *blagara* (treasurer) or *kravosis* (cow-suckler) for the four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*) and *zmaja* (she-dragon) for the nose-horned viper (*Vipera ammodytes*); *babin kokot* (grandmother's rooster) for the hoopoe (*Upupa epops*); *kozemuza* (goat-suckler), *pizdoklek* (vagina on a hill) or *veštica* (witch) for the European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*); *štortikolo*, *vijoglavka* (she-headturner) or *zavijač* (twister) for the Eurasian wryneck (*Junx torquilla*). The correlation also exists between *kralj* (king) or *štrigun* (warlock) for the common sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*) and *ciganin* (Gypsy man), *kovač* (blacksmith) or *sveti petar/šampjer* (St. Peter) for the John dory/Peter's fish (*Zeus faber*), *deždenik* (rain-carrier), *piskavac* (whistle-blower) or *znebač* (celestial being) for the fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) and *božji kokotić* (divine little rooster) or *dedek* (grandfather) for the Eurasian hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), probably denoting a warlock-blacksmith in the sign of the **thunder god**. A decorated mythical bride-to-be in the sign of the **divine prophetess** could be connected to *božja bubamara* (divine bug Mara) for the ten-spotted ladybird/beetle (*Adalia decempunctata*), *gospica* (young lady) for the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), *frajlica* (young lady), *gad* (bitch), *kanica* or *vrpca crljenka* (red ribbon) for the red bandfish (*Cepola rubescens*) and *dundica* (beater), *gospođica* or *knjeginjica* (princess) for the Mediterranean rainbow wrasse (*Coris julis*), *božja nevjesta* (divine bride) for the Jerusalem haddock/kingfish/moonfish/opah (*Lampris guttatus*), *bogina* (goddess), *božja žabica* (divine frog), *kraljevčica* (princess) or *gatalinka/vračara* (fortune-teller) for the European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*), *kukavica* for the common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) and *pastirica* (wagtail), *šmigalica* (jilt) or *zlatoperka* (golden bird) for the Eurasian golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), *gospica* (young lady) for the common weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) and *nevjestica* (bride-to-be) for the European pine marten (*Martes martes*). Last but not least, *crnoguz(ac)* (black-ass being) or *fratar* (friar) for the two-banded sea bream (*Diplodus vulgaris*), *božjak* (god) for the sea-horse (*Hippocampus*), *divji peteršić* (wild little Peter) or *kovač* (blacksmith) for the black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), *slaviček* (little celebrant) for



Il. 9. Mediterranean rainbow wrasse – Greek goddess Iris, ilustr. Joséphine Wall, UK, 2011
Sources: DiveAdvisor. <https://diveadvisor.com/marine-animals/mediterranean-rainbow-wrasse> – 6.04.2011. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/408772103658094903/>, 1.11.2020.

the common nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*), *kovač* (blacksmith) or *vodomar* (aquatic Moro) for the common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and *kraljek* (prince) for the goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), could be echoes of

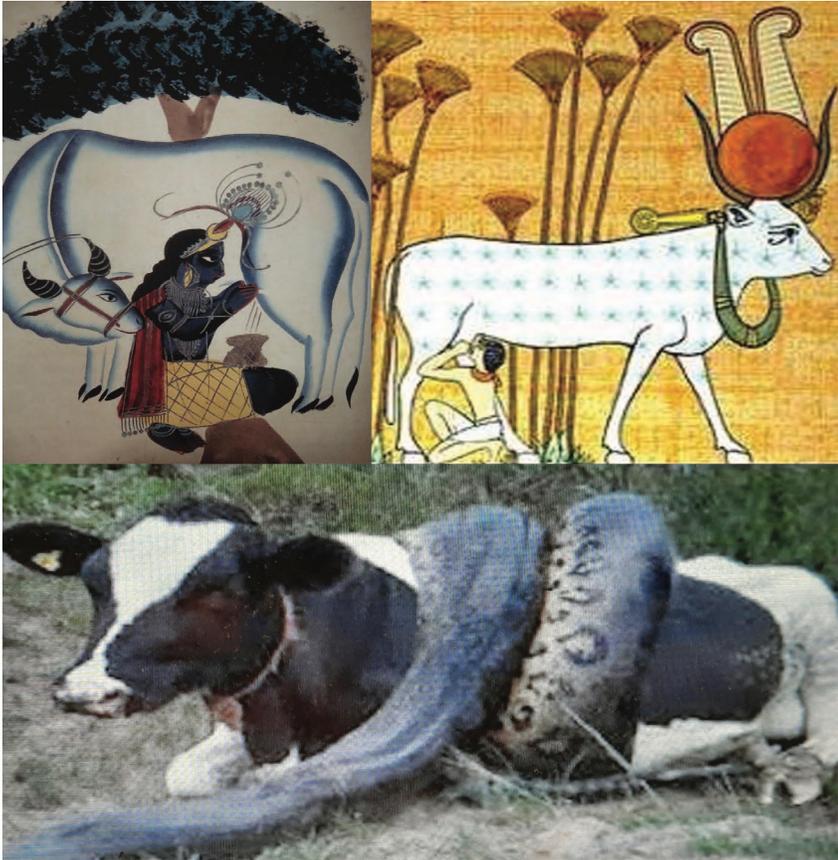


Il. 10. Eurasian wryneck, phot. R. Ardlim – Spinning wheel, Međimurje (northern Croatia)
phot. Lidija Bajuk, 2015 – L. Bajuk, 2015

Sources: <https://sheabirdno1.blogspot.com/2013/03/old-world-woodpecker-uses-unique.html>, 1.11.2020 – Etnografska zbirka *Od zipke do groba* dr. Jurja Kolarica.

the young nobleman and mythical groom-to-be in the sign of the furious **divine blacksmith** (Filipi, 1996, 18, 26; Grbić, 2007, 232; Hirc, 1896, 1, 2–7, 10, 18, 19, 24; Kišpatić, 2010, 30, 32–33, 72; Milišić, 2007a, 2, 62, 95, 113, 162, 173, 185, 204, 217, 224; 2007b, 9, 20, 27, 31, 63, 66, 141, 143, 213; Šešo, 2007, 259; Vela, 2003, 15; Vnuk, 1987, 117, 118; Vuković, 2002, 499).

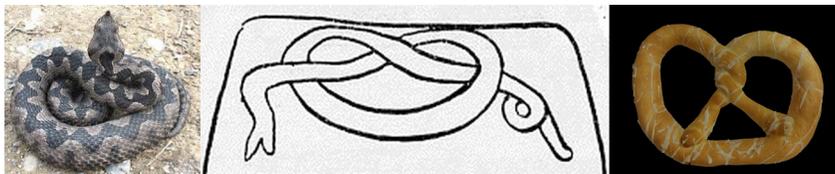
In a gradual way, a cultural resistance (Le Goff, 1993, 41) develops as response to the concept of cultures in which the Man is perceived as more precious than animals. This is confirmed by many **zoomorphisms** in the form of metaphors, curses, phrasemes, eroticism, vulgarisms and speciesism (Leach, 1988, 83–105; Visković, 2007, 362–365; 2009, 54–55; Dunayer, 2009, 41). In many of them, it's recognizable linguistic traces of the historical Indo-European migration, conquest of territories and establishment of martial deities at the expense of the suppressed pre-Indo-European Earth Goddess, Great Mother. It has to be noted that the frequent use of **zoonymic diminutives**, as a characteristic of the sung traditional poetry of Međimurje (the northernmost Croatian county) which is intangible cultural property under UNESCO protection (since 2018) called *međimurska popevka*, denoting caring parental relationship with one's own child or love relationship with a loved one. It's also confirmation of the driving force and interconnectedness of biodiversity much earlier than the Jean-Jacques Rousseau's shout "Return to nature!". Novel beliefs sprouted along the confine between the old religious dogmas and newer influential ideas of philosophy, about the secret **animal language** spoken by animals and sinless humans at certain times of the day and year. These were perceived as particular creatures thanks to divine favour (Zorica, 1999, 25). Allegedly speaking this spirit language in its dream, the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian endemic cyprinid fish (*Delminichthys adspersus*) which survived a number of ice ages, called *dalmatinska ribica*, encouraged the enchanted prince to persuade their Mother-River to flood the grove so as to stay safe from the evil old woman and loggers (Delić Peršen, 2009, 109–110). Maybe on the trail of that primordial-mythical language are fragments of unintelligible ceremonial verses from indigenous antiquity, partly preserved in pre-Christian Slavic holy texts, which were folklorized in some incomprehensible refrains of traditional ceremonial dance songs, incantations, casting spells and prayers (Katičić, 2008, 8) and in the primordial fairy language



II. 11. Hindu and Egyptian devine child suckling his God's Mother. Unknown Indian artist (19 CE) – Cow in a deadly snake embrace. Unknown Egyptian artist

Sources: Indian (Kalighata, 19 CE) and Egyptian artists. Storm 2002, p. 134,
<http://www.everythingselectric.com/suckling/>. 4.11.2020 – <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/854980310495003584/>. 4.11.2020.

identified with the buzzing of the bees (Ivančan, 1982, 114). This may also be connected to a legend from the Croatian Dalmatian Hinterland about fairies – tall and pale-skinned women with animal hooves which leave triangles instead of hoof prints. The prehistoric vulvoid triangle motif co-refers to the folkloric supernatural *krivopete* (crooked-feet women) with feet turned



II. 12. Real snake (Bosnia), phot. A. A. – Snake motif on a medieval tomb (Bosnia). Draft: M. Wenzel – Folk pretzel (central Croatia), phot. Pekom

Sources: <http://m.pogled.ba/clanak/zmije-nikada-ne-napadaju-prve-mnogo-vise-ljudi-na-balkanu-umre-od-ujeda-pcela/71164>, 5.11.2020 – Wenzel, M. (1965). *Ukrasni motivi na stećcima / Ornamental Motifs on Tombstones from Medieval Bosnia and Surrounding Regions*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, p. 285 – Pekom, <https://pekomp.hr/?p=2137>. 4.11.2020.

inwards at a 180° angle as God's punishment⁴, found in narratives from the Slovenian-Italian border area. Sometimes this female principle is represented by wild, incestuous and wise women – primordial shepherdesses, farmers, guardians of treasure, washerwomen, spinners, healers and teachers, but also by child kidnappers, adulterers and sinners – as a reinterpretation of the teriomorphic, sometimes three-faced Terra Magna, represented by three matrons in ancient times (Kropej, 2008, 106–111; Golež Kaučič, 2018, 236–240; Ivančić Kutin, 2018, 24–25, 35–46, 48, 51, 107–122).

Certain **unusual** and **real endemic creatures** are also possible starting points for certain deities and supernatural beings – for example, seen remains of the Aprotoceratops dinosaur for the ancient mythical *griffin*; survived prehistoric Latimeria fish, some giant fish (sturgeon or hellfish) or a strayed seal for the Scottish folklore *Nessy* (Everton, 2018); the North African and middle eastern horned viper (*Cerastes cerastes*) called *kerast* for ancient goddesses, such as the Semitic Astoreth/Ishtar and Egyptian Isis, folklorized in the Illyrian cattle-goddess Tur/Tir who was worshiped as Bosnian saint Tirinica since the last century (Anzotika); the rough-scaled viper (*Atheris hispida*) called *vlasasta zmija* (hairy snake); the Southasian Paradise flying/tree snake (*Chrysopelea paradisi*) called *leteća zmija* (flying snake) and various lizards for dragons. **Mythical**

⁴The feet of similar supernatural beings in Dominican Republic are interpreted as symbols of deceiving the hunters who hunt these creatures, and in Nepal as symbols of the impossibility of woman who died at childbirth to return to real from the otherworld (Ivančić Kutin, 2018, 35).

hybrids, composed of parts of two or multiple living beings (Visković, 1996, 132) with their own symbolic meanings (Kuvač Levačić, 2012, 774), developed from the historical presentations of powerful, unknown and mysterious nature. Were these wondrous floral hybrid, animal hybrid, floral-animal, floral-anthropomorphic, animal-anthropomorphic and floral-animal-anthropomorphic entities just an illusion of human imagination, reinterpreting nature through myths? Or were these entities, at certain points in time, representations of a given transitional species? With gene splicing of present **scientific hybrids**,

it is now possible to cross divisions not only of species and genus but even between plants and animals. Contemporary genetic theory views animals, including human beings, less as individuals or representatives of species than as repositories of hereditary information. As we examine new ways of thinking about animals, it is best not to forget the older ones. These traditional perspectives are intimately linked to cultural values and practices that we have developed over millennia (Sax, 2001, x).

In the Croatian mythical imaginarium still vibrates a vivid memory of the phyto-animal *ljeljen* (deer), animal hybrid *baziliškuš* (basilisk), *rogati konj* (unicorn) and *morska dekla* (mermaid), phyto-animal-anthropomorphic *topljenik* (newt) and *pojzija* (dragons) etc. A cunning woman, who deceived the devil by putting a tail on her head, the Moon on her chest and a bush between her legs in one folklore narrative from the Dalmatian Hinterland (s. a., 1966, no. 9), somehow is connected to the Dalmatian folklore image of a snake infant born with a star on its forehead, moonlight on its chest, a snake painted on its arm and a saber on its belt (Bošković-Stulli, 1962, 30). This might be a preserved older image of the mythical unicorn, the most popular European medieval fantastic animal shown as a horse with a narwhal horn.



II. 13. Dinosaur, reconstruction R. C. McKellar – Hairy bush viper (Indonesia),
phot. Glen B. – Mythical newt. Child draft Anamarija, 2.06.2008

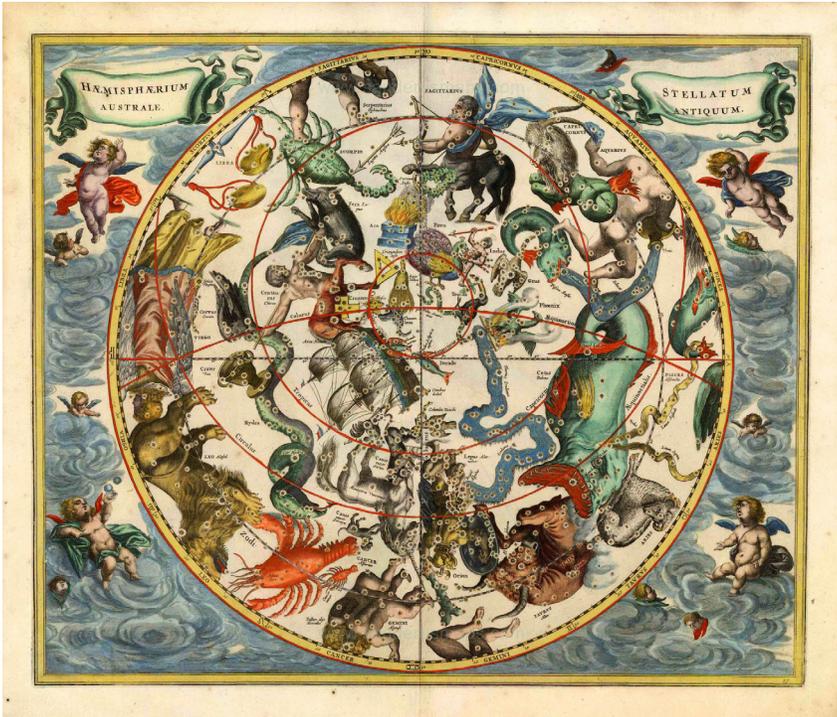
Sources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vG-IELpsvCI>. 5.11.2020 – <http://lihsblogger.blogspot.com/2014/03/indonesian-autumn-adder.html>. 5.11.2020 – L. Bajuk collection.



Il. 14. Southasian paradise flying snake (Singapore), phot. J. Socha, 1997 – Illumination of the *Jaculus* (France). French bestiary, 13th CE (Bibliothèque Nationale de France lat. 6838B)

Source: <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2014/01/29/how-snakes-fly-ufo-style/>. 20.01.2020. – <https://nydamprintsblackandwhite.blogspot.com/2016/03/mythical-j.html>. 20.11.2020.

South Slavic narratives contain some **zoomorphisms** in a possible correlation with folklorized ancient and pre-Christian South Slavic deities: the hermaphroditic Mediterranean rainbow wrasse (*Coris julis*) – called *dundica* (little rainbow) in Dalmatian, *donzella* in Italian, *Meerjunker* and *Regenbogenfisch* in German, *kněžík duhový* in Czech and Slovak – for the Croatian Eastern Pannonian folklore *riba Reza* (fish Reza) which brings good luck, could be correlated with the Thracian river god Rhesos and the river of the same name in Asia Minor (Kišpatić, 2010, 30, 32–33, 72; Riba–Knez, 2007; Milišić, 2007a, 162, 173, 185, 204, 217, 224; Milišić,



II. 15. Antique chart of the southern sky with Zodiac signs. Draftsman Andreas Cellarius, 1661

2007b, 9); the snakefly (*Dichrostigma flavipes*) called *dugovratka* (she-necklonger) and the Aesculapian sorcerer-snake (*Elaphe longissima*, *Zamenis longissimus*) called *hižna kača* (house snake) (Balog, 2011, 50) or *kravosis* (cow-suckler) (Hirc, 1896, 10, 22) for the fly-faced or snake-faced witch; the European horned viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) called *poskok* for the folklore Snake-Queen with a rose, crest or crown on her head (Vrkić, 1995, 266–267) and for South Slavic brides with floral headstalls who hop at the center of circle-dances; the Eurasian wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*) called *zmajica vijoglav(k)a* (she-dragon headturner) for the Russian mythical bird *Vreteno* (spindle) at the top of the world tree (Иванов, Топоров, 1974, 203; Belaj, 2007, 230) and for the Dalmatian Hinterland's fairy *Vijoglava* (she-headturner) (Kutleša, 1997, 390).

3. Conclusion

By jettisoning the old and embracing the new belief systems, the Man consigned the mythical world of uncultivated nature to wild, dangerous, female and therefore alien areas, taken by male heroes, demigods and saints. The **supernatural beings** from Croatian and other South Slavic folklore narratives are remarkably connected to ancient and pre-Christian Slavic deities, as well as their folklore modifications. Archaic and also popular conceptions about them were mostly built on observable natural features of some real species which frightened pre-scientific people. The **mythical animals** therefore became dual-natured agents of Satan (Le Goff, 1998, 429), separating people from God. The process closes full circle when the **apocalyptic animals** – symbols of chaos, cosmic evil and dehumanization – turned into symbols of divine justice on account of punishing sinners (Kuvač-Levačić, 2012, 777, 785, 788), such as the image of actually useful bats stigmatized into causative agents of the COVID-19 pandemic virus.

Traditions develop in an organic way, which is a bit like the evolution of living organisms. Like many species of animals and plants, traditions are vanishing. To define a kind of animal strictly in terms of biology is too narrow, too technical, and too restrictive [...]. If we define each sort of animal as a tradition, our definition includes all of these and more [...]. To preserve an animal as a tradition, we must know it intimately, we must be familiar with the lore that has grown up around the creature since time immemorial (Sax, 2001, xi).

Due to evolution, but also the unreasonable attitude of the Man towards nature, it is a fact that more **plant and animal species** have been extinct than actually exist today. It is crucial to bring them back in our memory through the agency of multispecies anthropology and ethnology (Kirksey, 2014, 2), as precondition for redemption, for the sustainability of vital biodiversity.

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