

# The Image of the Real World and the World Beyond in the Slovene Folk Tradition

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*In the Slovene folk tradition descriptions of the "world axis" in the form of the world mountain and the cosmic tree were preserved. This vertical axis linked the spheres of the underworld, the earth and the sky, representing the communicational channel among them. The world of people, deities, demons and souls of the deceased was installed in such "coordinate system". Christianity gave the vertical axis another meaning, while the concept of human "earthly world" preserved a large number of its old traits.*

People's notions of distant landscapes may be named "the space of wishes", since the hopes and fears of many generations have been projected into it. We should, however, distinguish between visions of existing geographical locations - which we denote as "profano-utopian" (e.g. countries "at the back of beyond") - and entirely imaginary "cult-utopian" landscapes (e.g. paradise, the Heavenly Jerusalem). The motifs of both these spaces are similar in many ways<sup>1</sup>. The important difference between the two is, however, that the "profano-utopian" world extended only in two dimensions, length and width (in accordance with the onetime idea of the world as a plain), while the "cult-utopian" was three-dimensional, as it comprised, apart from the "earthly" sphere, also the celestial and the underworld ones. All the three spheres were linked together by the vertical "axis mundi" in the shape of a cosmic mountain or a tree. The existence of such "tripartite, trimorph, triad, trilogistic, triperiodic divisions of the world" has been proved - apart from the Indo-European folklore tradition - by archaeological finds originating from the pre-Slavic and Slavic periods in the Slovene territory<sup>2</sup>. Christianity took over the basic scheme, but added different accents. In the Slovene folk ballad "The Saint and the Devil", St. Ulrich has to solve three (the most difficult) riddles:

" Ta prva vgnalca je le-ta:  
Kje je pa narviši svet?"  
"Tist je pa narviši svet,  
kjer Jezus je na križ razpet."  
"Ta druga vgnalca je le-ta:  
Kje je pa narširi svet?"  
"Tist je pa narširi svet,

<sup>1</sup> Bodo Gätz, Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen, Spudasmata 16 (1967), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Andrej Valič, Triglav : arheološki problem in vprašanja njegovih predstav, Kranj 1997, pp. 18-22.

kjer sonce zjutraj gori gre,  
zvečer pa za božjo gnado gre.”  
“Ta tretja vgnalca je le-ta:  
Kolk je od nebes do dna pekla?”  
“Papežova žena dobro ve,  
ona je že doli bla,  
ker jo je Bog pahnil dol z nebes,  
letela je do dna pekla.”

“The first riddle goes like this:  
Where is the highest world?”  
“There is the highest world  
Where Christ is crucified.”  
“The second riddle goes like this:  
Where is the widest world?”  
“There is the widest world  
Where the sun rises in the morning  
And sets after God’s glory in the evening.”  
“The third riddle goes like this:  
How far is Heaven from Hell?”  
“The Pope’s wife knows that well,  
She has been down in Hell,  
As God threw her from the sky,  
To Hell’s bottom she had to fly.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Underworld**

“The Underworld” could be reached through deep subterranean abysses or caves; according to some Slovene tales, a visitor could be led there by a deceased person, through his/her grave. The world beneath us was supposed to be similar to ours, or even more beautiful. There “the sun shone, trees were green and a brook murmured through a silent valley.”<sup>4</sup> Or “there, the sun shines just as it shines here in the springtime. The landscape is even lovelier than here. I’ve seen beautiful green meadows there, willows grow along a river that flows in a smooth, winding riverbed. It is just like a small heaven. Handsome young mowers were mowing. When they noticed me, they gave me a scythe and asked me to cut some three swathes...”<sup>5</sup> The world of the dead, adapted to our environment, indicates the human wish that the dead might find “beyond” a suitable home, and would not be coming back. Enigmatic is the role of mowers; perhaps it is not superfluous to hint that “mowers” are also present in the constellation of Orion, not only in Slovenia, but also in the vast territory stretching from Finland to the Alpine part of Italy<sup>6</sup>. Even more significant in this description is the mention of water, as according to Slovene notions the world of the dead was situated beyond the waters. The transcendental meadow

<sup>3</sup> Slovenske ljudske pesmi, Vol.1, Ljubljana 1970, p. 193 (no. 37/3); further on: SLP.

<sup>4</sup> Pavle Rožnik, Lepa Mankica in druge prekmurske pravljice, Pomurska založba 1978, p.124 (Zlato mesto).

<sup>5</sup> Josip Jurčič (J. Zavojšček), Spomini na deda (Jama, po kateri se pride na drugi svet), Novice 1863, p. 331; Kelemina, p. 313 (228.I) - with minor changes of the text.

<sup>6</sup> Milko Matičetov, Zvezdna imena in izročila o zvezdah med Slovenci, Zbornik za zgodovino naravoslovja in tehnike 2 (1974), p. 67.

also appears as a sheep pasture. This idea indicates the stockbreeders' mentality, and can already be found in *Rig veda*, where Yama's way, the way of mortals, is named "the pasture" or *gavyuti* (10.14.2). In *Avesta*, the cognate word *gaoyaoiti* denoted Mithra's "vast pastures". In the Slovene tradition, sheep represent the souls of the deceased; their situation is either good or bad, depending on their behaviour during their lifetime: they are well-fed or emaciated, depending upon their former generosity or avarice<sup>7</sup>. The idea of good or bad payment for past actions finds a more detailed presentation in the Carinthian tale of "bewitched souls": in the world of the dead, a flock of thin and fat sheep can be seen, together with reapers and mowers who struggle with the labours of Sisyphus, and two duelling rams butting each other<sup>8</sup>.

The motif of two combatting rams (goats, rock goats, etc.) is linked in folk tales with the protection of a sacred place (subterranean cave, tree of life, source of living water, crossroads...)<sup>9</sup>. As we will see, the path to the Holy of holies is full of obstacles, and one of them can be the passage between two duelling animals. This reminds one of the Greek Scylla and Charybdis, two menacing cliffs, or two lions guarding the bridge leading to the world beyond. The folk tradition of duelling rams is spread mostly in Carinthia, partly in Tyrol, and in some places of Upper Austria and the surroundings of Salzburg<sup>10</sup>. Plastic art depictions show that this is a very ancient motif, reaching all the way back to Stone Age Europe (the relief in Roc de Sers, France), while two horned beasts beside the tree of life appear in Sumerian art before the 3rd millennium B.C. Since for Christians the tree of life represented Christ or his cross, the two rams - guardians of the tree - became ruling attributes of the Christian God.

The two animals therefore mark the line between the profane and the sacral. Only those who are worthy and skilful enough manage to get through. This idea of the borderline is contained in the Slovene popular belief that the butting rams are the souls of two peasants who, during their lifetime, fought over the borders dividing their properties. In the Slovene Carinthian tale the interpretation of this motif is more didactic and moralizing; in this case, the underworld is the very scene of posthumous award or punishment: "In the middle of the fourth river there was a small island on which two skinny rams were butting each other with such force that sparks flashed around them. Their horns were broken, blood was pouring from their heads, they were running short of breath, but still they kept butting against each other with ever increasing force... These butting rams were two peasants who had spent their entire lives litigating for an old apple-tree, thus losing their land so that their children were left without any dowry, and had to earn their bread as bailiffs and maids to their neighbours"<sup>11</sup>. In the quoted text, biblical symbolism might be found: according to Daniel's vision of "the final times", the fight between a ram and a goat (rock goat?) represents the war between Persia and Syria. In this case also, the meaning of the vision is explained by the companion - archangel Gabriel (Dan 8.3-8; 8.20).

The ethical element of posthumous existence (interdependence of sin, guilt, and penitence) came into value rather late, probably only with Christianity. In Slovene folk

<sup>7</sup> Josip Šašel - Franc Ramovš, *Narodno blago iz Roža*, Arhiv za zgodovino in narodopisje 2, Maribor 1936-37, pp. 14-15 (Na húnam svēt); France Kotnik, *Storije II. Koroške narodne pripovedke in pravljice*, Celovec 1958, pp. 22-25 (Dana beseda).

<sup>8</sup> Vinko Möderndorfer, *Koroške narodne pripovedke*, Celje 1946, pp. 120-122 (Zaklete duše); 123-125 (Trpljenje na onem svetu).

<sup>9</sup> Helmut Fielhauer, *Das Motiv der kämpfenden Böcke*, Festschrift für Otto Höfler, Bd. 1, Wien 1968, pp. 69-106.

<sup>10</sup> Fielhauer, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Möderndorfer, pp. 120-122.

songs about a fiddler in front of hell's gate, which are a continuation of the antique tradition of Orpheus, there is a description of the hero's saving his mother from hell. In some variants, however, his mother is angry with him: she had a good time in hell, she poured wine and was in possession of the keys, while her time at home would be spent in poverty. In these cases, "hell" ("pekcl") is not yet equated with a place of penitence and torments<sup>12</sup>. Its name does indeed originate from the ancient Slavic word for "pitch", but it already contains the Christian notion of damned souls being tortured in hot, molten pitch<sup>13</sup>. In the same way, the old names of subterranean demons, Vrag, Črt, Bes, do not indicate the moral inferiority of their bearers, as is later the case with Hudič, Hudir, Hudobec, Hudi duh, Zlodej, Zlomek (all variants of the devil)<sup>14</sup>. The Christian Old Testament knows only one devil by the name of Satan, while the New Testament describes a larger number of devils who are subordinate to their leader. All this had a detailed explanation in patristic literature, but the image of the devil as we know him today was only created in the late Middle Ages. From the 12th century on, he has horns, a tail, and claws, and from the 15th century, horse hoofs (before that, he had the feet of a bird of prey)<sup>15</sup>. Contrary to "hell" is "heaven" ("raj"): it is not clear whether it originates from the ancient Slavic word for the water current which divided the real world from the world beyond, or from the Indo-European and ancient Slavic word for wealth, property, place of joy<sup>16</sup>.

Christian influence can be recognized in two of Slovene descriptions of the paradise landscape, which does not appear to be much different from the underworld: the Lamb of God, with a halo around its head, leads the shepherd across the water over a roughly hewn wooden footbridge, and then along a narrow, overgrown, thorny path towards the sky<sup>17</sup>. Or the hero becomes the shepherd of sheep pasturing in a silken, silver or golden meadow. Behind it, there flows a wide river crossed by a weak, rotting footbridge. Sheep cross the water, the shepherd was supposed to wait for them on his side of the river, but is helped across by the Lamb, and thus reaches the meadow with a little chapel. There the sheep turn into angels, eat wafer bread and drink consecrated water<sup>18</sup>. In the upper two cases, the guide is again a being from the world beyond. The crossing of the water indicates that "despite the typically Christian idea of the other world as being heaven, some relic of older notions is still preserved..."<sup>19</sup>.

Early Christian theology described earthly heaven as a garden where souls of all the dead, or only of the redeemed ones, await eternal bliss<sup>20</sup>. This is an old idea: the Greek poet

<sup>12</sup> SLP 1, p. 258, No.48/2, p. 268, No. 48/13-14; Alenka Goljevšček, *Kult mrtvih v slovenski ljudski pesmi, Traditiones 7-9 (1978-80)*, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> Marko Snoj, *Slovenski etimološki slovar*, Ljubljana 1997, p. 434 (entry Pekel/ Hell).

<sup>14</sup> Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Germanische Mythen in der epischen Volksdichtung der Slowenen. Ein Beitrag zu einer Kulturgestaltung im deutschen Grenzraum*, Das Joanneum, Schriften des südostdeutschen Institutes Graz, No. 3, Graz 1941, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Lutz Röhrich, *Teufelsmärchen und Teufelssagen*, v : Max Lüthi, Lutz Röhrich und Georg Fohrer, *Sagen und ihre Deutung*, Evangelisches Forum, Heft 5, Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, Göttingen 1965, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Snoj, p. 521 (entry Raj/Heaven).

<sup>17</sup> Jože Tomažič, *Pohorske pravljice*, Celje 1990, pp. 79-84 (Pastirčkova nebesa).

<sup>18</sup> (Julij) Kontler and Kompoljski (Anton Hren), *Narodne pravljice iz Prekmurja*, Vol. 1, Maribor 1923, pp. 100-108 (Mali jagnjec).

<sup>19</sup> Mirjana Mencej, *Pomen vode v predstavah starih Slovanov o posmrtnem življenju in šegah ob smrti*, Magistrska naloga, Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo, Ljubljana 1996, p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhold R.Grimm, *Paradisus coelestis, Paradisus terrestris. Zur Auslegungsgeschichte des Paradieses im Abendland bis um 1200*, *Medium aevum, Philologische Studien*, Bd. 33, München 1977, p. 17.

Pindar (5th century B.C.) already described paradise as a meadow covered with flowers and fruit trees, crisscrossed with brooks, a place where spring reigns eternally. According to Plutarch (1st - 2nd century) and Lucian (2nd century), the heavenly Elysium is a meadow on the Islands of the Blessed. These islands were supposed to be situated at the extreme western border of the world, near the pillars of Hercules; according to Hesiodus they were supposed to be found on the banks of the river Oceanus in the country of the Hyperboreans or (later still) on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia* 4.27.93) mentions the island/islands as “insula Achillea, eadem Leuce et Macaron appellata”. The parallel to the Greek “white island” Leuce was the Indian island Svetadvipa which, all white and shiny, lay to the north of the Milky Sea (*Mahabharata* 12.322-335). Its inhabitants shone like the moon, required no food, and spread a pleasant perfume all around them<sup>21</sup>. The white colour, therefore, represented the world beyond in the noble sense.

In Greece, the idea of Elysium located in the underworld was also widespread (Plato). Apart from the Elysian fields, which were meant for the chosen, the world of the dead also comprised the plain of Asphodel. Other details were added by the Roman poet Virgil (1st century B.C.) in his description of Aeneas' visit to the world beyond: a neutral area for the souls of children, suicides and the falsely sentenced, plains of mourning for victims of love and for soldiers killed in battles. Hades was separated from our world by the rivers Styx (river of hate) and Acheron (river of suffering), both affluents of the Oceanus. Other rivers there were the Cocytus (river of mourning), the Phlegethon (river of fire), and the Lethe (river of oblivion). The gates to Hades were guarded by Cerberus, a dog with several heads, while Charon the boatman took souls across the Styx or Acheron for a coin. The world of the dead was under the earth for the Romans as well, and generally in accordance with Greek notions, but it distinguished between Elysium as the dwelling of the dead, and the Islands of the Blessed as a profano-utopian locality<sup>22</sup>.

After the notions of the Slovene ancestors, willow trees grew along the subterranean river which separated the world of the living from the world of the dead. Upon them, souls of unbaptized children rested in the shape of black birds. A youngster from the Carinthian tale about the “world beyond” tried to cross this river. The powerful current made him fall, and he barely managed to cling to a tree. He thus shook the tree, and some of the birds fell into the water and flew happily away<sup>23</sup>. By sprinkling such birds with water, he baptized them and so redeemed them<sup>24</sup>. This tale reveals the idea of the infinite power of the subterranean river, already described in the *Odyssey* (11.173-178):

Child, how could you cross alive into this gloom  
at the world's end? - No sight for living eyes,  
great currents run between, desolate waters,  
the Ocean first, where no man goes a journey  
without ship's timber under him<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> V. Pisani, Von fabelhaften Glücksländern, *Studia Indologica*, Festschrift für Willibald Kirfel, Hrsg. von Otto Spies, Bonner orientalistische Studien, N.S., Bd. 3, Bonn 1955, pp. 243-253.

<sup>22</sup> Gatz, pp. 180-181, 187.

<sup>23</sup> Šašel - Ramovš, op. cit.; Kotnik, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Jožef Pajek, p. 108 ( Sv. Jurij ob Ščavnici ); Kelemina, pp. 140-141 (No. 89.I.,IV.,V).

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald, Everyman's Library, Vol. 94, London 1992, p. 190.

In the motif of birds, falling from the tree into the water, we encounter the syncretism of two traditions: the older, certainly pre-Christian about birds (human souls), and the later, Christian, about the baptizing of souls in the river on the border of the world beyond. The first motif can be compared to the Irish poem *Imram Mailduin*, describing a distant island where birds - souls of the deceased - sit on the branches of trees<sup>26</sup>. In one of the letters by St. Boniface, a monk's vision is described: a burning brook or fountain appeared before his eyes; souls of the wretched, embodied in black birds, kept sitting on its edge and falling back into it<sup>27</sup>. Ephraim of Syria (4th century) wrote about baptism in the river on the border of the Underworld; he named one of the two bridges or crossings over the river of the dead, as "the bridge of suffering"; it was dedicated to the baptizing of all who crossed it<sup>28</sup>.

In the Slovene lands, the souls of unbaptized children used to be called "navje", "mavje", "movje" or "morje" (sea) (the latter probably bearing in mind the crossing of the World Sea). In Eastern Slovenia, it was believed that they fly around at night in the shape of large black birds, cawing and looking for help. Whoever grabs such a bird and takes it to be baptized, saves its soul; the black bird then changes into a white pigeon<sup>29</sup>. Belief in birds/children's souls was also widespread in Serbia<sup>30</sup>. Willow trees, upon which souls of the dead were supposed to sit, were a kind of connection with the world beyond, one of the reasons being that they grew along river banks. Apart from this, the willow is an evergreen tree, which was considered to be eternal already among the Hittites<sup>31</sup>. Germanic peoples used to plant willow trees in graveyards, willow rods had a special meaning in Slavic and Slovene magical ceremonies and at celebrations of St. George's Day<sup>32</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that the willow appears in early Christian literature as a symbol of the Son of God<sup>33</sup>.

As mentioned before, onetime Slovene searchers of the path towards the world beyond had an unreliable narrow footbridge at their disposal; it is, however, difficult to classify as to whether it belonged to the old pagan tradition, or to the more recent Christian one. It is only certain that the idea of a bridge leading to the world beyond the grave was not known in Europe before the end of the 6th century; at least not among the Greeks and the Romans, who believed that passengers were carried across the river by Charon. From the end of the 6th and up to the 13th century, nearly all European testimonies about the bridge were based upon visionary experiences of individuals, who as a rule were (already) Christians. Despite this fact, we should allow for the possibility of the origin of these notions in the autochthonous pre-Christian tradition, primarily in the Irish case<sup>34</sup>. Another possibility includes Iranian influences (possibly through the Byzantine Constantinople), where the idea of such a bridge was perfected<sup>35</sup>. The bridge *Chinvat* in Iranian

<sup>26</sup> Franz Kampers, *Mittelalterliche Sagen vom Paradiese und vom Holze des Kreuzes Christi*, Goerres Gesellschaft, Erste Vereinsschrift, Koeln 1897, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Dinzlbacher, *Die Jenseitsbrücke im Mittelalter*, Dissertationen der Universität Wien 104, Wien 1973, p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> M. Valjavec, *Glasnik* 1866, p. 228; Pajek, p. 107; Kelemina, pp. 140-141 (No. 89.I,III-VII).

<sup>30</sup> Milenko S. Filipović, *Die Navi bei den Balkan-Slaven*, in: *Das heidnische und christliche Slaventum*, Acta 2. *Congressus internationalis historiae Slavicæ Salisburgo-Ratisbonensis* 1967, *Annales instituti Slavici* 5 (1969), pp. 105-113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, James B. Pritchard (ed.), Princeton University Press 1955, p. 348.

<sup>32</sup> Mirjam Mencej, *Vrba - posrednik izmedju ovog i onog sveta*, *Kodovi slovenskih kultura* 1996, no. 1, pp. 31-35.

<sup>33</sup> E. O. James, *The Tree of Life*. *Studies in the History of Religions* 11 (Supplement to *Numen*), Leiden 1966, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> Dinzlbacher, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, p. 25.

tradition linked the emptiness between the earth and the world beyond (*Yasna* 46.10-11; 51.13). Its characteristic was that it spread wider when good souls crossed it, but narrowed when sinners did, so that they fell headlong into hell (*Bundahishn* 30). It was guarded by dogs. According to some variants, the judgement took place before the crossing of the bridge (*Vendidad* 19.29). Earlier Persian texts mention that a soul was all alone on the bridge, and could be blown off into the precipice by a strong wind.

After the old-Indian Vedic interpretation, souls of the deceased travelled, according to their merits, either to the dark underground world along the path of *Pitryana* (*Rig veda* 7.104.3.11) or to the heavenly world of gods along the path of *Devayana*. Sinners had to cross a river and a sea, where many were drowned (*Kausitaki Upanishad*). A bridge led across the water (*Rig veda* 9.41.2), which was in later Indian texts described, after the Persian model, as similar to a sword or razor blade<sup>36</sup>. A golden bridge, crossing the gap between heaven (the mountain Meru) and the earthly world is described in *Mahabharata*. A ladder or a bridge are also mentioned in other Indian texts (*Yajur veda*, *Kathakam* 28.4; *Maitrayani Samhita* 4.8.3; *Taittiriya Samhita* 6.5.3.3, 7.5.8.5; *Shatapatha Brahmana* 13.2.10.1).

The bridge to the world beyond was also known in the Jewish and Islamic traditions, but they had no visible influence upon Europe. The north-Germanic mythology also contained a description of a bridge crossing the border river to the land of the deceased, although it only appeared sporadically: it was a wide, gold-encrusted bridge *Gjallarbru*, mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* 48). This suffices to allow for the conclusion that the notion of a bridge also existed among some other Indo-European peoples. In Slovene fairy tales descriptions can be found of a hero who, on his way to the Glass Mountain, is embroiled in a combat with demons on the bridge leading across the river towards the mansion<sup>37</sup>. In other cases, the bridge is "made as a trap"<sup>38</sup>, or two lions are tied in front of the castle as a reminder of the onetime bridge<sup>39</sup>. In view of the international character of these tales, it is of course possible that the motif of the bridge was brought to Slovene territory from elsewhere. The fact is that in Bela krajina, as late as the beginning of the 20th century, the custom was preserved of placing a coin under a deceased person's tongue (which in the antique tradition was meant as payment for the crossing of the river), so as to prevent the dead from rising from their grave and hurting the living<sup>40</sup>.

Just as Christian allegories linked the bridge, leading from death to eternal life, with Christ (Ephraim of Syria)<sup>41</sup> or with the cross, they also created the figure of the devil lurking beneath the bridge. In some European legends, the devil appears in the role of the builder of the bridge in order to gain human souls<sup>42</sup>. In the Slovene lands, the bridge was

<sup>36</sup> Geo Widengren, *Life after Death. Eschatological Ideas in Indian and Iranian Religion*, The Expository Times, Vol. 76, no. 12 (Sept. 1965), p. 364.

<sup>37</sup> Od kuzle rojen sin, zapis Gašperja Križnika, Motnik, okoli 1860, Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje pri Znanstvenoraziskovalnem centru Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (further ISN, ZRC SAZU), Štrekljeva zapuščina 3/76; M. Kroje, 201 s.

<sup>38</sup> Od glaževnate gore. Zapisal Gašper Križnik, pripovedoval Janez Brvar, ISN, ZRC SAZU, Štrekljeva zapuščina 3/35.

<sup>39</sup> Karel Krajcar, *Slovenske pravljice iz Porabja*, Budimpešta - Murska Sobota 1990, p. 94 (Trgovčev sin in njegova mati).

<sup>40</sup> Ivan Šašel, *Bisernice iz belokranjskega narodnega zaklada*, Vol. I., Ljubljana 1906, pp. 215-216; Kelemina, p. 148 (No. 97.V).

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Beck, O.S.B., *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben*, Studia Anselmiana, fasc. 33, Romae 1953, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> Dinzlbacher, p. 172.

also regarded as the devil's work, "as the skilful building of a bridge across a torrent is a demon's art, similar to mysterious witchcraft...In the Primorska (Coastal) region of Slovenia, there is the well-known legend of the Čedad/Cividale bridge which was built without any pillars by the 'black master'... Popular belief furthermore says that bridges are the refuge of various ghosts of whom one must beware. Beneath a bridge, there is the dwelling of a water sprite, the fairy tale image of the onetime mythical deity... Ghosts lurk under a bridge and on a bridge, frightening and stopping travellers, haunting them and often appearing in the image of light awaiting redemption, or as a reminder of a treasure hidden on the bridge. A bridge is the dwelling of witches. If a bewitched witch stands beneath a bridge when a godchild is carried across it, she is saved, but after 14 years the godchild will become a witch or a wizard. To all bridges crossed by funeral processions, or members of weddings with newlyweds, people ascribe special magic power... At some places, on Good Friday they ladle out water beneath a bridge which during that year was crossed by a funeral procession carrying the dead body; that water is supposed to have healing power"<sup>43</sup>.

### The Sky/Heaven

The rainbow and the Milky Way were regarded as a kind of bridge leading souls towards heaven. In the classical antique period, the rainbow in the function of a bridge to heaven was not yet known, with the exception of only two literary mentions (in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). The rainbow and the Milky Way are more distinctly mentioned as paths along which souls travel to *Walhalla* in the Germanic *Edda*. The New Testament (Apocalypse 4.3) contains the eschatological myth of Christ, seated on a rainbow<sup>44</sup>. Hence the Slovene expression for a rainbow as "God's Throne"<sup>45</sup>. On such a throne Christ is supposed to be sitting on Judgement Day<sup>46</sup>. Where a rainbow reaches the ground, a miraculous "rainbow root" grows<sup>47</sup>. The Milky Way was known to the Slovenes as "God's Way" or "Eternal Way", probably in connection with the belief about the souls' journey to God<sup>48</sup>. Fairy tales of Germanic peoples also mention a "leather bridge", which elder German mythologists (Panzer, Rochholz) regarded as the bridge of the Gods, while others (e.g. Mannhardt) explained it as a myth of fog and clouds<sup>49</sup>. It is to the latter that the Carinthian tradition probably refers, about the water sprite bearing water from the Uršlja gora to the Pohorje along a bridge made of fog<sup>50</sup>.

The idea of a bridge was closely intertwined with the idea of a ladder leading into the sky. Like the bridge, such a ladder plays, in certain cases, the role of a selective trial for deserving and sinful souls. Europe adopted such suggestions from the Orient: the ladder

<sup>43</sup> Boris Orel, Mitos o mostu, in : France Marolt, Slovenske narodoslovne študije, Vol. 2, Tri obredja iz Bele krajine, Ljubljana 1936, p. 82; J. Majciger, Voda in njene moči v domišljiji štajerskih Slovencev, Kres 1883, p. 502, 601; cf. also: France Kotnik, Storijske I. Koroške narodne pripovedke in pravljice, Mohorjeva knjižnica 3, Prevalje 1924, pp.32-34 (no. 31, Zlodejev most), 34 (no. 32, Skala na polju pri Globasnici), 34-36 (no. 33, Še ena o zlodejevem mostu).

<sup>44</sup> Dinzelbacher, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> Milko Matičetov, Folklorne drobtine iz Svetja (Svetine), Traditiones 13 (1984), p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> Janko Barle, Prinosi slovenskim nazivima bilja, Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena 31 (1937), No. 1, pp. 241-242.

<sup>47</sup> Kelemina, p. 319 (No. 232.I-II).

<sup>48</sup> Matičetov 1974, pp. 60, 65.

<sup>49</sup> Orel, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> France Kotnik, Storijske I., Koroške narodne pripovedke in pravljice, Mohorjeva knjižnica 3, Prevalje 1924, p. 4 (No.5).



as a link between the real world and the world beyond was already known in ancient Egypt, India, in Mithraic mysteries, in the Jewish cabala, and thus by inertia also in Islam and Christianity<sup>51</sup>. The first book of Moses describes how Jacob the shepherd, asleep in the desert at Harran, near the present-day Urfa, dreamed about a ladder reaching all the way from the earth to the sky, and angels climbing up and down the ladder. Above them God stood, and foretold that Jacob would have numerous descendants (*Genesis* 28.11-16). The first Christian hagiographic work, dedicated to this topic, was written in the first half of the 7th century at Sinai by a monk named John, nicknamed *Klimakos* ("John of the Ladder"). He divided the ladder into three stages, following the three-part scheme of ascetic improvement devised by Evagrius Pontikos in the 4th century. The thirty rungs of the ladder were explained as the thirty years which Christ spent before he started teaching, so the ladder represented his spiritual progress. Later, other numeric combinations and explanations appeared, e.g. the fifteen-stage ladder, as so many were supposed to be the steps leading to the temple of Solomon.

In European art, this iconographic motif is known from the 12th century. In an image from the famous codex *Hortus deliciarum* by the nun Herrad from Landsberg in Alsace (about 1200), a dragon (devil) is depicted at the bottom of the ladder, while its upper part rises towards God. Persons climbing up the ladder are defended by protecting angels from attacks of winged devils, but despite this many a climber is precipitated into the depths<sup>52</sup>. Jacob's ladder gained an important position in East European sacral art; the old Russian tradition (and through it also the Lithuanian and Latvian) knew small models of ladders as grave goods which were intended to help a soul on its way into heaven<sup>53</sup>.

In the Slovene folk tradition, an interesting variant of Jacob's ladder, "equipped" with knife and sword blades, can be traced. The tale of the Carthaginian saint Perpetua, who was the first to have a vision of such a ladder, was taken over from Tertullian by Jacobus de Voragine and incorporated in his work *Legenda Aurea*. His collection of legends of saints was created during the part of the 13th century which was marked by the Mongolian invasions of Europe.

Knowing these circumstances and taking into account the medieval art expression, as e.g. the one in *Hortus deliciarum*, we may explain some enigmatic details in the Slovene folk tradition.

In the tales of dogheads, these were supposed to force Christians to jump from pulpits upon knives, or to throw themselves into fountains edged with sharp blades, or they would lower harrows upon them from heights<sup>54</sup>. All these variants are based upon one and the same image: the metaphoric re-modelling of Jacob's ladder; the closest is the one with the pulpit, with its steps and its religious symbolism. The fountain, too, is vertical, just as the ladder, and at the bottom of both there is the devil's dwelling, that is Hell. The

<sup>51</sup> Dintelbacher, pp. 141, 144.

<sup>52</sup> Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Bilder und Legenden. Erwandertes und erlebtes Bilder-Denken und Bild-Erzählen zwischen Byzanz und dem Abendlande*, Buchreihe: Aus Forschung und Kunst, Bd. 13, Klagenfurt-Bonn 1971, pp. 16-42; idem, *Die "Himmelsleiter" zur Sozialismus-Sonne*, v: L. Kretzenbacher, *Volkskunde im Mehrvölkerraum. Beiträge zur Kenntnis Südosteuropas und des nahen Orients*, Bd. 41, München 1989, pp. 329-349.

<sup>53</sup> Kretzenbacher 1971, p. 33; V.J. Mansikka, *Die Religion der Ostslaven*, FFC 43, Helsinki, 1922, p. 295; O. Loorits, *Eine altrussische Tradition bei den Liven und Letten*, *Commentationes Balticae* 4/5 (1958), No. 5, p. 37.

<sup>54</sup> Kelemina, p. 334 (No. 241).

harrow, with its shape and “teeth”, is a fairly good illustration of a ladder equipped with knives. There is also a fourth allegory: a wooden trough, which of course does not lack knives, and was used by the doghead for drinking human blood<sup>55</sup>. Although the martyrdom of the Christian saint Perpetua took place centuries before Mongolian invasions, her vision of a ladder was in later popular memory linked to dogheads, similar to devils (in this case the Mongols), to their tortured Christian victims, to ladder-like symbols and knives, and to the precipitations of many souls into hell. In the extremely dense popular presentation of this dramatic situation there was no room for the moral which was elsewhere apparent in depictions of Jacob’s ladder: that the fall of Everyman is brought about by his own sinful nature and his weak faith. The purpose of a legend as a literary creation was to instruct and to strengthen religious faith; its nucleus was usually a miracle, which happened in only one case: a man who, captured by a doghead, prayed to the Virgin Mary, was saved at night from the “harrow” and from prison by a White Lady<sup>56</sup>.

According to the ancient Greek popular belief, the “Islands of the Blessed” were bright stars in the “Heavenly Ocean”<sup>57</sup>. The human soul thus found its resting place in the sky in the form of a shiny star, or it settled on one of the stars<sup>58</sup>. In his work *Somnium Scipionis*, the Roman writer and statesman Cicero placed in the sky only people of noble origin and heroic bearing.

Such attitudes were also characteristic for the old Germanic peoples and the Indians (*Rig veda* 10.14.8). According to the Slovene popular belief “each man has his own star in the sky from his birth; when this star falls, the man dies”<sup>59</sup>. Such a star is lighted at a child’s birth by an angel, and extinguished after his/her death<sup>60</sup>. When a star falls, one of the souls moves from purgatory to heaven<sup>61</sup>. In the Tolminska region people believed that at that moment “heaven opens”, and it is possible to die a happy death. That is why they often carried the dying to a window where they could see the (night) sky<sup>62</sup>.

Connected with this was the conviction that one must not count stars, much less point one’s finger at them: “if a person pointed at his life star, he would chase it away; it would drop from the sky immediately, and he would have to die”<sup>63</sup>. The soul of an unbaptized child could appear in the sky in the shape of a comet, “Brezglavec” (“The Headless One”)<sup>64</sup>. To the ancient Slovenes (and not only them), comets were the foretellers of great misfortunes: plague, war, famine prices, hunger, etc.<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Kelemina, p. 250 (No. 186).

<sup>56</sup> Kelemina, p. 334 (No. 241).

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, cit. after: Robert Eisler, *Orphisch - dionysische Mysterien-Gedanken in der christlicher Antike, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 2 (1922-23)*, 2. Teil, Leipzig - Berlin 1925, no. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Julius Stenzel, *Über Platos Lehre von der Seele, Festschrift zur Jahrhundertfeier der Universität Breslau, Breslau 1911*, no. 85-91.

<sup>59</sup> Šašel - Ramovš, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Pavle Zablatic, *Od zibelke do groba. Ljudska verovanja, šege in navade na Koroškem, Mohorjeva založba, Celovec 1990*, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> D. Martelanc (D.M.Obalovič), *Vraže v tržaški okolici, Ljubljanski Zvon 1891*, p. 177.

<sup>62</sup> Odgovori na nekoja vprašanja društva za jugoslovensko povestnico od Tomaša Ruttara, *Arkiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku, Vol. 3, Zagreb 1854*, p. 313 (No. 8).

<sup>63</sup> Zablatic, p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Kelemina, pp. 143-144 (No. 93).

<sup>65</sup> Odgovori na vprašanja društva na jugoslovensko povestnico od Stepana Kociančiča, *Arkiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku, Vol. 3, Zagreb 1854*, p. 284 (No. 22).

### The Earth

The notion of a difficult and impassable way into transcendence was to a certain degree connected with the belief that it is only possible to get to the world beyond by crossing high and inhospitable mountain slopes. The way to the country of the dead was supposed to lead through the landscape where mountain ridges were intertwined with rivers, seas or lakes: "He who travels to the world beyond has to cross many waters, as they separate this world from that one"<sup>66</sup>. A soul arrives to the Virgin Mary in heaven across "rocky mountains, deep waters"<sup>67</sup> or "across a high mountain, a green meadow; across a deep water, through hell's gates"<sup>68</sup>. An old Carinthian prayer from the Zilja valley wishes that the deceased may have a (favourable) wind at sea.<sup>69</sup> With continental peoples, a substitute for the sea was a wood (with Slavic peoples, there appears the trinity of 'mountain - wood - field').

In the Slovene folk tradition, a "Sea of Blood" is mentioned as a kind of margin of the world. Thus, for example, Vidovin caught the bird that had stolen three grains from his field only above "the Sea of Blood"<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, Zeleni Jurij every year arrived from "behind a green wood, behind a sea of blood"<sup>71</sup>. This mysterious name is hard to explain in any other way than that it is the Red Sea, which in the biblical exegesis played an important role because of its having been crossed by the Jews during their migration from Egypt. Egypt was, according to the gnostic belief and Jewish speculations, a symbol of the decadent material world. Leaving it was, in the symbolic sense, equal to the departure of a soul from its body<sup>72</sup>. The Crossing of the Red Sea ("Sea of Blood?") is also a parable of the Christian baptism which ensures access to eternal life, thus representing the line of separation between the human world and the world beyond.

Among the Slovene notions about the worlds, a "Rotten Sea" can be found in a similar role, a parallel of which can also be traced back to early Christianity. The Carinthian Kralj Matjaž (King Matthias) was swamped by the soil somewhere beneath the "Rotten Sea" for having defied God<sup>73</sup>. A Syrian legend about the journeys of Alexander the Great from the beginning of the 6th century describes our earthly world as being divided into segments by twelve bright seas which are navigable, while its farthest edge is an uncrossable "putrescent" ocean, the water of which is similar to liquid manure, and which is separated from the other seas by a narrow piece of land. This ocean bars the access to heaven, which in principle lies in the middle of the world, but to the east from us, between the sky and earth, encircled by a foggy cloud (the idea of a mountain!)<sup>74</sup>. Aethicus also maintained that sailing to heaven was prevented by terrible heat in the East Ocean, while the land passage

<sup>66</sup> Vinko Möderndorfer, *Verovanja, uvere in običaji Slovencev*, Vol. 5, Celje 1946, p. 268.

<sup>67</sup> Vilko Novak, *Slovenske ljudske molitve*, Ljubljana 1983, p. 239 (No. 181).

<sup>68</sup> SNP, Vol. 1, p. 422 (No. 391).

<sup>69</sup> Zmaga Kumer, *Od Dolan do Šmohora. Iz življenja Ziljanov po pripovedovanju domačinov*, Celje 1981, p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Šašel, p. 215.

<sup>71</sup> SNP, Vol. 3, pp. 139-139 (No. 4993).

<sup>72</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, Beacon Hill - Boston 1958, pp. 98, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Šašel - Ramovš, pp. 10-11 (Prerokvanje ud vojšče); Ivan Grafenauer, *Slovenske pripovedke o kralju Matjažu*, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za filološke in literarne vede, Dela 4, Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje 1, Ljubljana 1951, p. 186.

<sup>74</sup> Kampers, p.44; Theodor Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philol.-hist. Classe*, Bd. 38 (1890), pp. 27-33.

was closed by ranges of high mountains<sup>75</sup>. The name of "Rotten Sea" leads to the conclusion that Slovene ancestors were acquainted with such a geographical model of the world which was identical to the Ptolemaic one. The ring-shaped sea, encompassing the world's land, acquired the more realistic contours of the Indian Ocean only on the maps by Antonino de Virgo in 1415; in Europe, the new concept of the world was generally accepted only at the end of the 15th century<sup>76</sup>.

A mountain or an island (since every continent is, according to this scheme, a kind of island, and every island just a mountain rising from the sea) can be found in different Christian legends: a mountain in the legend of Prester John, and an island/islands in the descriptions of journeys of the Irish saints Brendan and Barinthus.

The early Christian art used to illustrate heaven as separated from the earth by a sharp fractured line which symbolized the impassable mountains<sup>77</sup>. This archetype, which does not exclude a more extensive geography with seas/woods as a border line, can be found in a note by Janez Trdina describing the Bela krajina region Cvetnik (Flower Garden):

"Somewhere high upon the Gorjanci, there rise black cliffs. Among them lies Cvetnik, a little garden full of the most beautiful and sweet-scented flowers. These cliffs are hard to find, and even more difficult to cross in order to enter this wonderful garden... Anyone who chanced to enter this garden was so infinitely charmed and enchanted by its beauty and fragrance that he forgot about food and drink, about sleep and also about his return, and he died there without feeling any pain for the lack of sleep or for starvation. Blessed was the one who...by luck or chance obtained a blossom of these noble flowers!"<sup>78</sup>.

The idea of the garden of Eden in the midst of an inaccessible mountain wilderness is also present in the Gorenjsko-Tolminsko region tradition about Zlatorog (Goldhorn). In both cases flowers with miraculous power grow in this garden. The flower garden was the dwelling of the deceased: in ancient Athens, the day of the dead was called "Flower Day"; it was the same in Rome (*dies rosae, rosaria, rosalia*).

The natural obstacle preventing access to Heaven could be different still. In the tale from the Vipavsko region about the "three pounds of devil's wool", the hero reaches the gates of hell across the water and across the desert<sup>79</sup>; somebody else finds a spring of "water of life" in wonderland, in a hot desert where the sun rises<sup>80</sup>. That the idea behind this description is also an ancient one can be proved by the work by Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, according to which paradise is separated from the rest of the world by a desert and a sea. According to Plato's *Republic* (4th century B.C.) the dry, hot plain without any vegetation which lies on the border with the world beyond is called "the Plain of Oblivion". According to Plato, a soul only reaches the river after it has crossed the desert. The river is called Lethe, "the River of Oblivion", because it washes away memories and annihilates the past for those who drink from it<sup>81</sup>. Such a brook of oblivion is also men-

<sup>75</sup> Grimm, p. 103.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London 1982, p. 190.

<sup>77</sup> Josef Strzygowski, *Das indogermanische Ahnenerbe des deutschen Volkes und die Kunstgeschichte der Zukunft*, Wien 1941, pp. 66-67.

<sup>78</sup> Janez Trdina, *Cvetnik*, Ljubljanski Zvon 1882, p. 38; Kelemina, pp. 308-310 (No. 226).

<sup>79</sup> *Tri funte hudičeve volne*, zapisal A. Pegan na Vipavskem leta 1868, ISN, ZRC SAZU, Štrekljeva zapuščina, *Narodno blago*, Vol. 5., p. 139 s.; Vol. 6., p. 145 sq.

<sup>80</sup> Majciger, p. 604.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Waters of Memory, Waters of Forgetfulness*, *Fabula* 23 (1982), No. 1-2, pp. 20-21.

tioned in a Greek inscription on a golden plate from Petelia, Southern Italy, probably dating back to the 3rd or 4th century B.C. This plate was among the grave goods dedicated to a deceased member of some Orphic-Pythagorean fraternity. The inscription admonishes the traveller not to drink the water of oblivion immediately after his entry to Hades, but instead request the cool and clear water from the “ Spring of Remembrance” a little further on<sup>82</sup>. It is interesting that a similar instruction can be found in the recorded lamentation for a dead mother from the Bela krajina village Drašiči:

“... Oh mother, sweet mother, where are you going away from me  
a long way without return,  
from the black mountain to the flat field, where three wells you will find.  
Do not drink from the first well, its water gives you a headache.  
Do not drink from the second well, its water gives you a heartache.  
*Do not drink from the third well, its water is the water without return...*”<sup>83</sup>.

In the Bela krajina example, therefore, the three wells are also situated somewhere on the border of the world of the dead, where the landscape passes from “black mountain to flat field”. One should not drink from any of them, just as one should not drink from Plato’s River of Oblivion or from the brook of Petelia. A travelling soul can only do so later on, when it has reached another spring, probably the one beneath the roots of the Tree of Paradise<sup>84</sup>. After being re-born into the human world, such a soul will remember its previous life<sup>85</sup>.

The same pattern from Bela krajina includes another warning which a soul should take into account on its way: it must not stop with any of the three groups (in which it also recognizes its children and acquaintances) which invite it to join in their dance. This prohibition indicates the negative Christian attitude towards dance, which at the turn of the 3rd century Joannes Chrysostomus expressed in his saying: “Where there is dancing, there is the devil”. This association has survived until more recent times, and is preserved in a very widespread folklore motif of a devil or water sprite dancing away with a girl towards hell or a river pool<sup>86</sup>.

How closely dancing was connected with the idea of travelling to the world beyond will later on be seen in other cases, e.g. in the fairy tale of Cinderella. Let us here mention the existence of ritual dances in the Slovene territory. Such dances were linked regionally to Dolenjska and Štajerska, and were at some places preserved up to the beginning of the Second World War. They were performed at the July and August evening pilgrimages that took place in the meadows beside cemeteries and churches, mostly the ones dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A procession of singing pilgrims, dancing in couples, was moving in spirals, winding and unwinding, creating a kind of snail-like form, in the way their leader chose to lead them<sup>87</sup>. At the end of the 19th century an eyewitness, Janez Volčič, described

<sup>82</sup> Idem, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> SNP, Vol. 3, pp. 611-612 (No. 6346).

<sup>84</sup> See comparisons with Scandinavian mythology (Lincoln, p. 26 sq.).

<sup>85</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Die Mythologie des Erinnerns und des Vergessens*, *Antaios* 5 (1963), No. 1, pp. 34-35.

<sup>86</sup> Lutz Röhrich, *Teufelsmärchen und Teufelssagen*, in: Max Lüthi, Lutz Röhrich and Georg Fohrer (ed.), *Sagen und ihre Deutung*, *Evangelisches Forum*, Heft 5, Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, Göttingen 1965, p. 35. Some Slovene examples are mentioned in Majciger, pp. 457, 504.

<sup>87</sup> Mirko Ramovš, *Romarski vrtec*, *Traditiones* 4 (1975), pp. 47-78.

such a procession at Žalostna gora near Mokronog: “A stranger beholds something special in the evening preceding this (pilgrimage) Sunday, when dusk is approaching. A long procession moves down from the church. Every pilgrim holds a burning candle in his hand, men are bare-headed, girls have wreaths upon their heads. Thus they move towards the vicarage and the meadow beneath the mountain. Acquaintances from the same village gather together, and each group sings various pious songs, moving forward in many turns, as their head leads them. In the dusk and the quiet of the night it is truly an attractive sight and sound. They say that they are dancing the “little garden” (vrtec igrajo)<sup>88</sup>. The fact that combinations of serpentine windings and spirals already appear in pre-historic rock engravings leads to some conclusions about the age of this ritual. This was the origin of a spiral labyrinth which had several, mutually intertwined meanings. It was no coincidence that the “vrtec” (little garden) took place in the evening, since the labyrinth was usually connected with the underworld and darkness, with funerals, but also with fertility. In the above description, the important information is that the ceremony took place “in the meadow beneath the mountain”, near the church in the role of the archetypal “World Axis”. The centre of the labyrinth represented the “sacred” or “the highest”, a mysterious place where life and death were linked, as were light and darkness, the male and the female principle. Circling around the labyrinth was comparable to dancing, climbing a holy mountain, ascending to the sky, or descending to the underworld. The tale of prince Artulja (Attila ?) from the surroundings of Stična thus mentions that funeral barrows had small round gardens (“vrtiči”) around them. In the surrounding meadows an old ritual dance called “ovrtenica” was danced<sup>89</sup>. Usually the spiral in the direction of the sun’s motion (to the right, as in Slovene examples) signified the road upwards, while the contrary direction signified the road to the underworld. Such circling could also have defensive (apotropeic) purposes, since the labyrinth could serve as a trap for any enemy intruder. For those who knew the path, the labyrinth was the way to initiation or deliverance<sup>90</sup>. In any case, the “dancing around the little garden” (igranje vrta) had a powerful psychological effect: according to testimonies, some participants experienced ecstasy while doing it. Boris Orel wrote that “in this romantic night procession, which in its basic figures reminds one of the Metlika ritual “kolo” dance (in a ring), ... the last remnants are preserved of the old-Slavic ritual dance which was once danced around pagan shrines or upon graves of the dead”<sup>91</sup>. Mirko Ramovš basically agrees with him when he ascertains that the “vrtec” was “a unique example of collective dancing, which may have its roots in an ancient, nowadays unknown religious ritual to which Christianity gave a new meaning”<sup>92</sup>.

According to the conviction, shared by many ethnic groups in Europe and elsewhere, death signified a journey to a faraway land; not in the allegoric, but in the literal, geographical sense. As we have already seen in the example of the shepherd whom a lamb guides along the path to heaven, this path was narrow, barely visible and almost impassable. That is why village women in the surroundings of Trst/Trieste told the mother of a

<sup>88</sup> Janez Volčič, Življenje preblažene Device in Matere Marije 3, Božja Pota 5, Žalostna gora pri Mokronogu, Celovec 1887, p. 214.

<sup>89</sup> Josip Jurčič, Zbrani spisi, Vol. 1., pp. 98-99; Kelemina, p. 337 (No. 243.IV).

<sup>90</sup> Lima de Freitas, Labyrinth, in: The Encyclopedia of Religion, Mircea Eliade (ed.), Vol. 8, New York - London 1987, pp. 411-419.

<sup>91</sup> Boris Orel, Slovenska božja pot in izvori njene ljudske umetnosti, Umetnost 7 (1942/43), No. 4-6, p. 80.

<sup>92</sup> Ramovš 1975, p. 73.

deceased child to put its shoes on his feet, so it would not hurt him on stones and thorns<sup>93</sup>. On the other side of the Slovene territory, in Bela krajina, it was believed that Zeleni Jurij (“the Green George”) came from the world beyond:

Po grdemu putu,  
po debelem grudju.  
Voda mi je do ramenca,  
blato mi je do kolenca,  
opanci su vutli,  
blato ide nutri...

Across bad road,  
across thick stones.  
Water reaching to my shoulders,  
mud reaching to my knees,  
my open shoes  
full of mud...<sup>94</sup>

Some Slovene fairy-tale variants, however, know of quicker and easier ways to perform such a journey: thus the hero flies from the underworld to our world on a birch broom, given him by a witch<sup>95</sup>, or is carried across the sea by a dragon or a bird<sup>96</sup>. Those who must nevertheless take the road on the ground - that is, all those who have no supernatural abilities - are helped across the fatal river by a “soul” for which it is obviously an act of penitence<sup>97</sup>. Even when there is a boatman, he only transfers passengers under constraint (“is bewitched”), and wishes to get rid of his work as soon as possible<sup>98</sup>. Or an ordinary boatman is ordered, in the middle of the night, by a stranger to cross the river; he finds out that his passengers are a flock of rats or mice, led by the devil<sup>99</sup>. This is also the background of a well-known tale of the devil’s tending fleas and transferring them across the river Kolpa, or of his leading animals (souls of the dead) to his underwater kingdom<sup>100</sup>. A mouse or an ant, crawling through a rift in the ground, remind us of the shamanistic tradition about the entry into the subterranean world beyond, therefore it is no coincidence that the mouse was a symbol of the deceased’s soul as early as the pre-Christian cult of Apollo, as well as later on under the patronage of the Christian saint St. Gertrude<sup>101</sup>. The devil therefore was the guide of souls across the river to the world beyond.

<sup>93</sup> D. Martelanc (D.M. Obalovič), *Vraže v tržaški okolici*, Ljubljanski Zvon 1891, p. 175; similar in German tradition: Hans Siuts, *Jenseitsmotive im deutschen Volksmärchen*, Teutonia, Arbeiten zur germanischem Philologie, No. 19, Leipzig 1911, p. 237 sq.

<sup>94</sup> SNP, Vol. 3, pp. 138-139 (No. 4993). On the presentation of the long and thorny road to the world beyond with Germanic and some other peoples see: Julius von Negelein, *Die Reise der Seele ins Jenseits*, Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 11 (1901), pp. 150-151.

<sup>95</sup> Rožnik, p. 142 (Zlato mesto).

<sup>96</sup> Krajcar, pp. 79-82 (Hruška na kraljevem dvorišču).

<sup>97</sup> Alojzij Bolhar, *Peklenški boter in druge slovenske pravljice*, Celovec 1972, pp. 52-57 (O vražji volni).

<sup>98</sup> Krajcar, pp. 50-55 (Kralj, ki se mu eno oko joče, drugo pa smeji); *Od fogel Fyneza*, rokopisno gradivo/manuscript Gašperja Križnika, Arhiv Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk, pp. 207-214; *Od glaževnate gore*, rokopisno gradivo/manuscript Gašperja Križnika, Št. Ožbolt 1877, ISN, ZRC SAZU, Štrekljeva zapuščina I/20.

<sup>99</sup> Šašel - Ramovš, p. 29 (No. 30); compare also Šašelj, p. 224 (Hudič - polhar).

<sup>100</sup> Valvasor, *Book 3*, p. 437; Kelemina, p. 82 (No. 28.I.), pp. 83-85 (No. 29.IV).

<sup>101</sup> Kropej, p. 158.

### The World Axis

The central axis of the universe was represented by the world mountain or the cosmic tree. This is an archetypal idea, present in myths and fairy tales of numerous ethnic groups. Eurasian traditions often call it the crystal, diamond, golden, silver, glittering or marble mountain. It is supposed to rise from the earthly sphere high up towards the sky with its steep, smooth slopes. That is why it is believed to be inaccessible for man. The name "glass mountain" (in Slovene "steklena gora" or "glaževnata gora" - from the German word for glass) appeared comparatively late, and replaced the older "crystal mountain"<sup>102</sup>. Mountain-crystal ("thunderstone") could be found in places where lightning, the typical weapon of the god Thunderer, had struck the ground.

In view of this association, the "crystal mountain" was the dwelling of the gods. There are a number of similar examples: the Germanic mythology knows crystal plains, *Glaesivellir*, where the judge of the dead, King Gudmund, reigned. In front of the hall of the dead, the *Walhalla*, a crystal wood grew. In Celtic tradition, a glass bridge appears, while fairy-tales of different European nations describe a glass city, a glass tower or castle, and a glass tomb (compare Sleeping Beauty)<sup>103</sup>. Somewhere in the North Sea a crystal island was supposed to lie, named *Glesia* or *Glesaria*, known also as "royal island" (*Basileia*) or "apple island" (*Abalus*), which is close to the Celtic islands of the blessed, *Avalon*. Lithuanian folk poems mention the mountain of silver, copper, crystal or ice; the expressions using metals are supposedly of a later date<sup>104</sup>.

Owing to different notions about the abode of the dead (either under the ground or in the "Land of the Blessed" upon a mountain/island), the descriptions of the Glass Mountain differ, too: its master may dwell in a palace on the top of the mountain, his castle may be hidden in a cave inside the mountain or beneath it. The cave is the heart of the mountain, the symbol of what the mountain represents, just as the heart cavity symbolizes the essence of man<sup>105</sup>. In Sanskrit the word *guha* means a cave, but also a heart. It has a microcosmic as well as a macrocosmic meaning. The heart is the seat of a person's soul, while a mountain cave is a spiritual centre accessible to earthly man. A diagram of the heart is an inverted triangle, and the same form symbolizes a cave, while a triangle with its top turned upwards symbolizes a mountain or a pyramid. The two forms are therefore contrary, but also complementary; they are two manifestations of the same principle<sup>106</sup>.

Since the subterranean cave is a symbol of the Sacred or the Absolute, it is often full of treasures. In the mountain cave, a lake was also imagined. The connection between mountain and water is visible in the inter-relatedness of the Indo-European word roots \*gwor, "gora" (mountain) and \*gwer, "goltati", "žrelo", "grlo" (gulp, throat)<sup>107</sup>. Mountains regarded as hollow and full of water were the Boč, Sv.Još, and Konjiška gora<sup>108</sup>. In such

<sup>102</sup>O. Huth, *Der Glasberg*, *Symbolon*, Jahrbuch für Symbolforschung, Vol. 2 (1955), p. 15; compare also V.J.Propp, *Historijski korijeni bajke*, Sarajevo 1990, pp. 426-427.

<sup>103</sup>Huth, pp. 27-28.

<sup>104</sup>Haralds Biezais, *Der steinerne Himmel*, *Annales Academiae Regiae Scientiarum Upsaliensis* 1960, No. 4, pp. 9-10, 13.

<sup>105</sup>Vlado Dekleva, *Commentary to the book René Guénon, Kralj sveta (King of the World)*, Ljubljana 1991, p. 122.

<sup>106</sup>René Guénon, *Le coeur et la caverne*, *Études traditionnelles*, Décembre 1937, no. 216, pp. 430-435.

<sup>107</sup>*Etimologičeskij slovar' slavjanskih jazykov*. Praslavjanskij leksičeskij fond, vyp. 7, Moskva 1980, pp. 30-31.

<sup>108</sup>Majciger, p. 603; Kelemina, pp. 241-242 (no. 173); the same also Paul Schlosser, *Bachern Sagen*. *Volksüberlieferungen aus der alten Untersteiermark*, *Veröffentlichungen des Österreichischen Museums für Volkskunde*, Vol. 9, Wien 1956, p. 31 (*Der See im Berg*).



subterranean lakes, a water sprite was supposed to dwell in a glass palace. The spring in the middle of his castle was “*the source of all the rivers of the world*”<sup>109</sup>. This is in complete accordance with the image of the paradise at the top of the world mountain, with the spring that waters all the sides of the world. One of the Slovene fairy-tales describes how the hero saves all his brothers who had been turned into stones with the help of a magic egg which he steals from a duck swimming in the lake in the Glass Mountain<sup>110</sup>. In this case, the egg has the same revitalizing power as the “water of life”, which in other variants springs from the top of the mountain<sup>111</sup>. And more than that: with its shell and its liquid contents, it symbolizes the centre of the world, *omphalos*. It is a symbol of the original unity, but also of life potential.

The idea of a cosmic egg is old and appears in the Egyptian and Indian cosmogonic myths. Chinese and Oceanian traditions relate the birth of the first man to the mythical egg. The Easter egg is a symbol of Christ’s Resurrection from the grave<sup>112</sup>. As the cosmic egg was, according to some explanations, the first firm centre of the universe (like a grain of sand from the original ocean or the world mountain), inside it - as inside the mountain - infinite supplies of original waters were hidden. Elsewhere, we have dealt with the Slovene tale of the egg laid by “god’s cockerel” on waste and rocky ground. Its contents watered the earth and created the earthly paradise. When prankish people broke the egg, so much water spilled out of it that it reached the highest peaks. Only one man was saved from the deluge<sup>113</sup>.

In the Slovene folk tales there was a better known flood which was caused by the water from the inside of the mountain<sup>114</sup>. According to popular belief, the cause of such floods was the dragon dwelling in the mountain cave which had gnawed its way into the open<sup>115</sup>. The dragon, a symbol of chaos, water, and the underground world, could - in the Slovene popular imagination - be hatched from an egg laid by a cock or a black hen: “*When a cock - white, black or mottled - is seven years old, it lays an egg which is unlike other eggs. It is namely hard, and creeps by itself into the ground. When it is ready, a dragon or devil is hatched ...*”<sup>116</sup>. A cock’s egg, either as a symbol of prosperity or a prophecy of a flood catastrophe, indicates a certain relation to “god’s cockerel”, the falcon from the top of the world tree, the “duck” from the subterranean lake, and the “golden bird” from the Glass Mountain. The golden bird can bring the golden key to the gates of paradise from the bottom of the paradise lake inside the world mountain. But the human who obtains it is prevented from looking into the world beyond by lightning and thunder sent upon him by divine powers<sup>117</sup>. Davorin Trstenjak concluded, under the influence of A. Kuhn, that the “golden bird” (like the “white ladies” and fairies) represents the “goddess of fertile rain”

<sup>109</sup>Majciger, pp. 502, 559.

<sup>110</sup>Od dvanajst bratov in sester. Zapisal Lovre Sajovic na Vranskem, Rokopisno gradivo/manuscript G. Križnik, Arhiv Akad. nauk etc., pp. 192-197; Gašper Križnik, O dvanajstih bratih in sestrah, Ljubljanski Zvon 1891, p. 298.

<sup>111</sup>About the mountain-top lake or spring see Kelemina, p. 293 (No. 214.I); 295 (214.II).

<sup>112</sup>Venetia Newall, Egg, in : The Encyclopedia of Religion, Mircea Eliade (ed.), pp. 36-37.

<sup>113</sup>Janez Trdina, Vesoljni potop, Neven 7 (1858), p. 61; Kelemina, pp. 282-284 (No. 207). Compare also Simon Rutar, Slovenske pripovedi o jezerih, Ljubljanski Zvon 1881, p. 684.

<sup>114</sup>Kelemina, p. 315 (No. 230.I,II).

<sup>115</sup>Ivan Grafenauer, Zmaj iz petelinjega jajca, Razprave SAZU 2 (1956), pp. 314-322.

<sup>116</sup>Kelemina, p. 242 (No. 174).

<sup>117</sup>Davorin Trstenjak, Mythologične starice: 6. O reci utvi, Slovenski glasnik 9 (1863), p.56.

and of “moist-bearing fog”<sup>118</sup>. Ivan Grafenauer attempted to prove that “god’s cockerel” was essentially “the totemistic falcon which was in agricultural communities replaced by a cock”<sup>119</sup>. To the Slovene tale about the cock’s egg as a source of prosperity, he found a parallel in the myth of the African tribe Massai, where the god Ngai kills a dragon in order to feed its blood to the desert and make it fertile<sup>120</sup>. As a kind of egg embryo of life, patiently awaiting the right moment, other mythological and fairy-tale figures appear, sleeping in the hollow insides of the mountains.

Various north-European traditions about dwellings of the dead inside hills and mountains have been published by K. Straubergs, and they are connected with an old and very wide-spread belief that the dead sleep or live inside their grave barrows<sup>121</sup>. The old deities of vegetation (Zeleni Jurij, Freyr, Zalmoxis...) used to lie down in a grave every year, to be reborn after the winter period was over. Plutarch (*De defectu oraculorum* XVIII) describes an island off Britain, apparently in the land of the dead, where the god Chronos is kept, asleep among the accompanying gods. Similar components are to be found in the Christianized story about the seven sleeping youths of Ephesus. Following these patterns, tales about the posthumous life and rebirth of Charlemagne were probably also created<sup>122</sup>. The legend of King Arthur, who after his death was supposed to live in the hollow Mount Etna, is merely one of the variations of the same theme. It was first written down in 1211 by Gervaise of Tilbury in his *Otia imperialia*. It relates to the period around 1190. The legend probably arrived in Sicily with the Normans; it is also to be found in different parts of Great Britain, most frequently in Wales. One of these stories narrates about the cave Craig-y-Dinas in Glamorganshire: in it, a crowned leader is asleep with a group of soldiers. It is Arthur, waiting for the bell hung in the cave to start ringing. When it does, he and his army will come out of the cave. In northern England, Arthur is asleep beneath his castle together with his servants, waiting for someone to blow the horn lying on the table, and to cut the ribbon with his sword of stone. A visitor did that once, and Arthur woke up, but when the visitor sheathed the sword the king fell asleep again. Similar tales were known among the Irish; the Serbs had stories about kraljevič Marko (Prince Marko); the Czech about King Vaclav; the Swiss about the founders of the Swiss federation and about Grütli; the Portuguese about King Sebastian. German tales describe how Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa sleeps at a stone table in the hollow mountain of Kyffhäuser. His beard has wound around the table twice; when it winds around it for the third time, he will wake up. He will hang his shield upon a dry tree which will grow green again, and better times will follow. When a shepherd once visited him, Friedrich asked him if black birds were still flying around the mountain. After receiving an affirmative answer he responded that in that case he would have to sleep for another hundred years<sup>123</sup>. We mention the German tradition in more detail because it is close to the Slovene tales of the sleeping kralj Matjaž (King Matthias). Just as Friedrich or the ruler Otto dream in Kyffhäuser, or Charlemagne and Charles V in Unterberg, or Charlemagne or Odin in Odenberg, the Slovene kralj Matjaž

<sup>118</sup>See note cited above.

<sup>119</sup>Grafenauer 1956, p. 329.

<sup>120</sup>Idem, p. 330.

<sup>121</sup>Karlis Straubergs, *Zur Jenseitstopographie*, *Arv* 13 (1957), pp. 57-58, 80-81; Elisabeth Hartmann, *Der Ahnenberg*, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 34 (1937), pp. 201-217.

<sup>122</sup>Franz Kampers, *Kaiserprophetien und Kaisersagen im Mittelalter*, *Historische Abhandlungen*, No. 8, München 1895, pp. 78-79.

<sup>123</sup>E.K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, London 1966, pp. 222-226.

dwells in the rocky insides of the Peca, Čaven, Budinska gora, Dobrač, Krim, Homec, Donačka gora...<sup>124</sup>. That all these mountains also have a cosmologic character is proved by the variants describing Matjaž's cave "under Sveta gora (Holy Mountain)" or "under Deveta gora (Ninth/Fairy Mountain)"<sup>125</sup>.

Here, for example, is the description of Matjaž's subterranean dwelling from the surroundings of Podsreda: *"A student wished to enter Matjaž's cave. He found a guard in the woods and told him of his wish. The guard complied with his request. The mountain opened in front of them. The student saw many sleeping soldiers. Kralj Matjaž was asleep leaning on a stone table, around which his beard had wound three times. 'When it has wound around the table seven times, ' the soldier said, ' a hero will arrive who will unsheathe Matjaž's sword.' The student gave the sword a tentative pull and the entire army began to wake up. But the sword fell back into the sheath, and the army went back to sleep"*<sup>126</sup>.

Related to the tradition of the sleeping ruler, there are also the Sibylline prophecies about a great ruler who was to appear at the end of the world; in an apocalyptic combat he would conquer the evil and begin the "golden age". Messianic expectations of this kind were widely spread in Europe at the time of the crusades, and were strengthened in the 16th century, when they became linked to heretical movements (for instance with the sect of flagellants, also known in Slovenia). The "mystical anarchism" and "revolutionary millenarianism" at that time manifested itself in peasant risings<sup>127</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that the Slovene kralj Matjaž also fights for "the old faith and the (old) rights"<sup>128</sup>.

The common core of fairy-tales about the Glass Mountain is the description of a brave man's journey to its top, in order to obtain - either for himself or for others - something precious ("water of life", wise advice, etc.). The hero must conquer numerous obstacles: *"climb the mountains, cross the marshes, swim the rivers and struggle through the woods and bushes"*<sup>129</sup>, and finally outwit the almighty master of the mountain (in our cases the Vedomec /jack-o'-lantern/ or the devil). His rewards are fame, riches, and the beautiful princess. For the successful mastering of all the difficult tasks, the help of his human or animal friends, possessing supernatural abilities, is decisive. They make it possible for him to change into different animal figures. The ability of such changes is characteristic for the Lord of the Mountain, the Vedomec, who, according to the Slovene popular belief, *"can change into various animals"*<sup>130</sup> with the purpose of *"learning about more hidden things and knowing everything"*<sup>131</sup>.

<sup>124</sup>Grafenauer 1951, pp. 190, 193, 203, 219, 225, 232; E. Kukovčeva, Zgodovina domačega kraja, Popotnik 44 (1923), p. 168.

<sup>125</sup>Grafenauer 1951, pp. 188, 226.

<sup>126</sup>J. Lekše in S. Terčak, Nekaj ljudskih bajk in pripovedk iz okolice Podsrede, Kotnikov zbornik, Celje 1956, p. 142 (No. 7a); Milko Matičetov, Kralj Matjaž v luči novegaslovenskega gradiva in novih raziskavanj, Razprave SAZU 4 (1958), p. 112 (No. 52).

<sup>127</sup>Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages, London 1970.

<sup>128</sup>Grafenauer 1951, p. 85.

<sup>129</sup>Rožnik, p. 100 (Lepa Mankica).

<sup>130</sup>Maks Pleteršnik, Slovensko-nemški slovar, Drugi del, Ljubljana 1895, p. 754 (entry Vedomec).

<sup>131</sup>Marija Stanonik - Niko Jež, Nekaj folklornih zapiskov iz zapuščine Emila Korytka v NUK, Traditiones 14 (1985), p. 113.

According to the Slovene fairy-tales, the Glass Mountain can be reached  
- through three kingdoms: in the first one, an apple-tree grows with golden fruits; in the second, the fountain of the water of life stands; and in the third one, all inhabitants have been turned into stones<sup>132</sup>,

- across the Red Sea, driven by a boatman<sup>133</sup>,

- across the great lake which the hero swims in the form of a sheatfish. In order to reach the top of the smooth and high mountain, he transforms into a bird, and then finds his way into the palace in the shape of a mouse<sup>134</sup>.

The mythological mountains of the Indians, the Meru or Sumeru, and of the Iranians, Hara Berezaiti (Av. Haraiti, mid. Pers. Harburz, new Pers. Alburz), reached high up to dizzy heights, to the spheres of the stars (Venus), the Moon and the Sun. The mountain Berezaiti grew, by the will of God, for eight hundred years (other mountains only eighteen years): two hundred years to the star sphere, as many to the Moon sphere, as many again to the Sun sphere, and a further two hundred years to the highest sky (*Gr. Bundahishn* 12.1.3-6). In the Indian tradition, the mountain Vindhya wanted to outgrow the highest mountain Meru and to lure towards itself the Sun, the Moon and the stars (*Mahabharata* 3.103.4; *Skanda Purana* 4.1-5, 6.33; *Vamana Purana* 18.21-27; *Bhagavata Purana* 6.3.35; *Agni Purana* 206; *Matsya Purana* 61; *Brahmanda Purana* 3.56.53; *Devi Bhagavatam* 10.3-6, etc.). It had already grown so high that it obstructed the course of the Sun, so at the request of the deities, the sage Agastya intervened. He asked the mountain to diminish so he could cross it to the southern side, and so it was. He then told the mountain to remain that way until he returned from his pilgrimage. It is possible that this well known episode comprises the historic memory of the Aryan migrations southwards, to the interior of Dravidian India. A similar story is known in Slovenia's Bohinj: "Once upon a time, each mountain had its own ghost and dragon. Fighting between themselves, they demolished the fertile land around the mountains by throwing rocks and sand upon it, which can still be seen all over Bohinj. In that prehistoric time, a mountain behind Bohinj lake desired to outgrow the Triglav. Its ghost was blowing it up, its dragon was pushing blocks of rocks upwards, the mountain was growing and it became as high as the Triglav. But God did not allow it. The earth shook, the mountain burst and fell apart. On the southern side of the Bogatin you can see the punished mountain.. To this day it is called the Podrta gora (Fallen Mountain)"<sup>135</sup>.

According to the ancient Greek myth about Apollo and the Muses, the mountain Helicon also grew high up into the sky until, by Poseidon's order, the winged horse Pegasus lowered it by a stroke of its hoof, and created on its top a spring of water (*Hippocrene*). This motif is also known in the Macedonian, Serbian, and Montenegrin folklore, but differs considerably in details from the Slovene variant<sup>136</sup>.

The tripartite character of the world mountain is contained also in the descriptions in *Avesta*, where Aməsha Spənta reaches paradise in three steps. The Indians know the

<sup>132</sup>Pravljica o ptiču Vedomcu, zapisal M. Šnuderl, Rimske toplice in Sv. Marjeta 1913, ISN, ZRC SAZU, Štrekljeva zapuščina II/72. About enchanted petrified city see also Möderndorfer, p. 166 (Zdano mesto).

<sup>133</sup>Od fogel Fyneza..., pp. 207-214.

<sup>134</sup>Od glaževnate gvore, manuscript of G. Križnik, Arhiv Akad. nauk, found of B. de Courtenay, transcription, ISN, ZRC SAZU, pp. 15-20.

<sup>135</sup>Janez Mencinger, Zbrano delo, Vol. 3, p. 77; Marija Cvetek, Janez Mencinger in bohinjsko ljudsko pripovedništvo, Glasnik Slovenskega etnološkega društva 36 (1996), No. 1, p. 17.

<sup>136</sup>Aleksandar Loma, Dva slovenska naziva za crnu topolu i Apolon kao božanski oganj, Kodovi slovenskih kultura 1 (1996), pp. 24-25.

famous three steps of Vishnu by which he ascended across the star and Moon sphere to the vicinity of the Sun, the highest paradise, where the source of immortality, the fountain of honey is to be found (*Rig veda* 1.154.5; *Aitareya Brahmana* 6.15.10). This was in accordance with the idea about the existence of three paradises, two of which belong to Savitri (Vivasvat, Surya), and the third to Yama (*Rig veda* 1.35.6). That was why, according to the Indian belief, the souls of the honourable dead were settled upon the stars, the Moon and the Sun<sup>137</sup>. Slovene fairy tales explain this tripartite character either by describing the mountain as being “three hours high and wide”<sup>138</sup>, or by telling about the hero’s riding upon it through the countries of the wind, the Moon and the Sun<sup>139</sup>, and most often by the colours and characteristics of three metals - copper, silver and gold. Thus a flock of sheep crosses a silk, silver and golden meadow before reaching the border river and the paradise beyond it<sup>140</sup>.

In the well-known and widely spread tale of Cinderella, the heroine sets out to attend a dance in the castle hall by way of a staircase on which she later loses her golden slipper. The staircase has an important symbolic role, as originally it connected three ballrooms situated one above another, thus establishing the tripartite structure of the world mountain. The walk up or down the staircase therefore represented the ascent to the world beyond or the descent to the world of men. In the fairy-tales about “Shoes worn out by dancing” (*Zertanzte Schuhen*), the night dancer travels into the world below across the copper (also diamond), silver and golden garden, covered with trees<sup>141</sup>. According to a Russian tale, the heroine finds “a sea of fire” behind these three gardens<sup>142</sup>. A youngster from a Prekmurje region fairy-tale encounters a wide burning river in the world beyond<sup>143</sup>. That in this case also a sea is involved is revealed by the information that, on the other side of the river, the “overseas kingdom” begins. Virgil’s Aeneas found a river of fire on his way to Hades (*Aeneid*, Book 6). Something similar (a judgement in a river of melted metal) is described in Persian Pahlavian texts (*Bundahishn* 30.20), and the sea of fire is known in Indian cosmology as the utmost border of the world. It is typical that Cinderella receives the clothes to wear at the dance (the sun, moon and star dress) from her dead mother, therefore from the land of the dead<sup>144</sup>, and in Grimm’s German variant even from the tree on her mother’s grave. It is less known, however, that there also exist male variants of the story of Cinderella which are no less wide-spread, and are probably still older (the first one was written down in Egypt in the second millennium B.C.). Their central motif is riding, and earlier still, flying or climbing up the world mountain<sup>145</sup>. The hero in these tales is the youngest brother who is regarded as a bit slow-witted, but is given instructions for his actions by the deceased, while he guards his grave at night. Riding a copper, silver and golden horse, wearing the same clothes and equipped with arms of the same metals, he wins at a competition and gains the princess’ hand in marriage<sup>146</sup>. Not only his contact with the deceased, but also the proximity of death - which threatens him frequently - always bring him new awards<sup>147</sup>.

<sup>137</sup> Güntert, pp. 402-403.

<sup>138</sup> U glaževnat gvor, manuscript of G. Križnik, Vransko 1876, ISN, ZRC SAZU, ŠZ 2/14 and 3/72.

<sup>139</sup> Krajcar, pp. 92-111 (Lepa Mankica).

<sup>140</sup> Kontler and Kompoljski, pp. 100-108 (Mali jagnjec).

<sup>141</sup> Huth, pp. 19-20.

<sup>142</sup> August von Löwis of Menar, *Russische Volksmärchen*, Jena 1927, p. 212.

<sup>143</sup> Rožnik, p. 156 (Ognjena roža).

<sup>144</sup> Slovene examples: Kropej, No. 8 and 29 (written down by A. Pegan from Ročinj and R. Poznik from the surroundings of Kropa in 1868).

<sup>145</sup> Huth, p. 21.

<sup>146</sup> Krajcar, pp. 36-45 (Lepi Miklavž); idem, pp. 74-77 (Trije kmečki sinovi); Rožnik, pp. 74-91 (Pepelko).

<sup>147</sup> Max Lüthi, *So leben sie noch heute. Betrachtungen zum Volksmärchen*, Göttingen 1969, pp. 70-84.

In 12th century Western Christianity, the prevailing image of heaven was of its being situated on top of a high mountain. This mountain has a silver lower part and a golden upper part. Around the garden of paradise and all its abundance rises a high, smooth wall, decorated with jewels and glittering more brightly than the snow<sup>148</sup>. The ancient idea of the world mountain thus lived further on in Christian disguise. In the Stična manuscript from the second half of the 12th century a conjuration against toothache can be found which mentions St. Peter's sitting upon a marble rock<sup>149</sup>. A golden mountain is present in Slovene conjurations against snakebite: "*I chase poison from you in the name of God and St. George; I chase poison from you in the name of God and St. Margaret; I chase poison from you in the name of God and St. Basso/Šenpas. There is a golden mountain, and on this mountain the Virgin Mary herself and all the Holy Trinity. And there is a heavy rock and this harmful worm.*" Or: "*There stands a golden mountain, behind the mountain a golden table, behind the table St. Paul/Šenpav is asleep*". Comparable to this is the conjuration from *Kolomonov žegen (Kolomon's blessing)* (probably of Carinthian origin):

Tam stoji ena zlata gora,  
na tej gori stoji en zlat stol,  
na tem stolu sedi sveti Šenpas  
in zlati meč v rokah drži...<sup>150</sup>

On the golden mountain,  
there is a golden chair  
on which St. Basso is sitting,  
holding a golden sword.

Another example:

Bog daj lek in prelek,  
preljuba devica Marija  
ino sveti Šenpas!  
on stoji na silnej gori,  
silnej gori, silnej skali...<sup>151</sup>

God, give us medicine,  
sweet Virgin Mary  
and St. Basso!  
He stands upon a mighty mountain,  
upon a mighty rock...

Upon the mountain stands a golden church, in it are three chairs<sup>152</sup>, and this is the Christian substitute for the onetime trees, or for the tree with a table and chairs, meant for the world ruler and his guests.

Characteristic is the Slovene fondness for erecting churches on hilltops and slopes, often high above settlements. Some of them originate from the pre-Romanesque period. Apart from other things, the names of their saintly patrons testify to their age. From our point of view, two of them are especially interesting, Vid and Tomaž (Guy and Thomas). Franc Bezljaj, as Jan Peisker before him, drew attention to the fact that St. Vid's churches in

<sup>148</sup>Grimm, p. 109.

<sup>149</sup>Balduin Saria, *Srednjeveški zagovor iz Stične in njegove paralele*, *Etnolog* 10-11 (1937-39), pp. 245, 247.

<sup>150</sup>Colemone Shegen..., Joža Glonar (ed.), *Ljubljana 1920*, chapter 53; a number of similar examples given by Vinko Möderndorfer, *Ljudska medicina pri Slovencih*, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za filološke in literarne vede, Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje, *Gradiivo za narodopisje Slovencev* 1, Ljubljana 1964, pp. 288-295, 297. See also: Milko Matičetov, *Zagovarjanje pri dveh slovenskih književnikih*, *Slovenski etnograf* 3-4 (1951), pp. 335, 341.

<sup>151</sup>Fran Erjavec, *Iz potne torbe*, *Letopis Slovenske Matice* 1882/83, pp. 337-339. Compare also: Anton Mrkun, *Ljudska medicina v dobrepoljski dolini*, *Etnolog* 10-11 (1937-39), p. 5; J. Lokar, *Nekaj zagovorov iz borovniške okolice*, *Etnolog* 15 (1942), p. 96.

<sup>152</sup>Möderndorfer 1964, p. 289.

Slovenia and Austria are often connected with toponyms Pekel/Hoelle (Hell), Hudičev jarek/Teufelsgraben (Devil's Ditch), Devin skok/Jungfernsprung (Maiden's Jump), Himmelsreich, etc.<sup>153</sup>. Besides the Mother of God, important old patron saints also include sv. Jurij (St. George), Peter, Mihael, Lovrenc, Marjeta (Margaret), and some others. Many of these hilltop churches were undoubtedly built on pre-Christian (Slavic or indigenous) cult sites. According to legends they were built by "ajdi" (giants). Let us mention only a few important locations: Svete gore above Bizeljsko, Stare svete gore near Podsreda, Sveti Primož above Kamnik, Sveta gora near Litija and a mountain of the same name near Gorica, Stara gora/Castelmonte on the border with Friuli, Štalenski vrh/Magdalensberg and Šenturška gora or Šenturhov vrh/Ulrichberg in Carinthia... St. Joseph's church at Dolenji Logatec was built above a water spring near a Roman burial place. In the opinion of some experts this is an inheritance of the indigenous, Mediterranean-influenced tradition<sup>154</sup>. For others this was the proof of a "deeply rooted worship of the Sun deity on mountain tops, which survived in the habit of building shrines in the Christian period"<sup>155</sup>. Patron saints of churches upon some mountain tops were supposed to be linked to the cult of the Sun and fire, as were the bonfires and the throwing of burning pieces of wood - *šajbe* - on certain occasions. The offering of wheat, which is a component of the Carinthian "leteče procesije"/running processions, was explained as a remnant of the belief that souls of the deceased dwell in the mountains<sup>156</sup>.

Apart from a mountain, a tree could also represent the centre of the universe and the world axis. The answer to a Carinthian riddle about the centre of the world was: "*In Ljubljana, there grows a lime tree which is hollow within, and there is the centre of the world*"<sup>157</sup>. Over the trunk of such a tree one could climb from the earthly sphere into the sky, or descend into the underworld. In one of the Slovene fairy tales, the hero "*climbs upon a high fir tree which has branches all the way to the ground. When he reaches the middle of the tree, he finds an eagle's nest, looks into it and finds (in it) a beautiful large city*"<sup>158</sup>. If we may believe Trdina's literary variant, the trunk is "*without any branches to the very top, with only seven resting places. These resting places are so wide apart that you cannot see from one to another...*" Therefore the hero brings along seven axes and seven pairs of shoes<sup>159</sup>. Elsewhere, the tree is described as "*miraculously high..., such as the world had never seen, nor would ever see. It rose towards the sky like smoke from the burning soil. Only the trunk could be seen, but no leaves or branches. If you looked up into this tree in search of its branches, you could see the sun, but not the branches*"<sup>160</sup>. A shepherd, to whom an eagle brought food up to the heights, undertook the climbing of this tree. After seven years he reached the first

<sup>153</sup> Franc Bezlaj, Slovensko \*iraj, \*vyrāj in sorodno. Onomastica jugoslavica 6 (1976), pp. 66-67. The Slavic origin of toponyms of this kind was disputed by Hans Pirchegger, stating that folk tradition was in connection with them better preserved in the Austrian than the Slovene surroundings (Hans Pirchegger, Der Jungfernsprung, Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 7 (1936), pp. 112-119); this statement, however, requires further checking.

<sup>154</sup> Emilijan Cevc, Das Problem der Kontinuität im Kult und in der bildenden Kunst in Slowenien, Alpes orientales 5 (1969), pp. 106-109.

<sup>155</sup> Josip Mal, Pripombe k slovenskemu bajeslovju, Slovenski etnograf 5 (1952), p. 255.

<sup>156</sup> Josip Šašel, Leteče procesije ob Gosposvetskem polju, Slovenski etnograf 5 (1952), pp. 148-149.

<sup>157</sup> Möderndorfer 1946, pp. 260-261 (Skrb).

<sup>158</sup> Gašper Križnik, O zakletih bratih in o izdanih gospodičnah, Ljubljanski Zvon 1891, p. 559.

<sup>159</sup> Janez Trdina, Zbrano delo, Vol. 4, Ljubljana 1952, pp. 119-145 (Pripovedka od zlate hruške).

<sup>160</sup> Möderndorfer 1946, p. 152 (Na drevesu brez imena).

branch, and when he reached the top of the tree, he found himself standing on firm ground, and the tree was gone. All around him there spread a large plain without a tree or a hill. In this landscape he found a castle, and was employed as a farmhand. The further course of the story shows similarities with what has been said and written about the Glass Mountain, proving that the world tree and the world mountain are merely two materialized forms of the same idea. This is confirmed by the Slovene tradition stating that a youth climbed a high tree, the top of which could not be seen, by using "iron claws" which he fastened to his feet<sup>161</sup>. This solution is very close to the ideas of the old Baltic peoples, who as late as the 13th and 14th centuries used to put bear paws and lynx claws into graves of their dead, or burnt them with the dead, so that they could climb the smooth walls of the Glass Mountain to reach their paradise<sup>162</sup>. Fairy tales about the climbing of the world tree originate, according to Vilmos Diószegi, from the Hungarian shamanistic rituals<sup>163</sup>. In the opinion of Linda Dégh, it was the Hungarians who brought to Europe, and above all to their neighbours, the Uralo-Altai conception of the world tree, which in the demythologized form appears as a fairy tale. This conclusion is considered to be based upon the analysis of 70 Hungarian and foreign fairy tales about the world tree (AaTh 468)<sup>164</sup>. Our comment: the world tree undoubtedly holds an important position in Eurasian shamanism. However, with regard to our knowledge about shamanistic elements and the meaning of the tree among Indo-Europeans - from Indians, Iranians and Greeks to Romans, Germanic peoples and Slavs - we cannot agree with the exclusively Hungarian origin of these notions.

The traditions of other Slavic peoples phantasize that the top of the tree shines with jewels (as does in other variants the top of the mountain!), or that among the branches there is a "frightful" high mountain<sup>165</sup>. On the dry or on the golden branch of the world tree a city lies (originally a garden). A bride strolls round the city, to the wedding of whom arrives a vegetation deity after a long and difficult journey from across the sea (from the land of the dead)<sup>166</sup>. R. Katičić reconstructed, from fragments of old Slavic ritual folklore which were preserved in folk tradition, an image of such a world tree: by its roots, a dragon or snake is supposed to lie near a water source, a bird is imagined to nest in its top (a nightingale, eagle or falcon), in the middle of the trunk, bees are dwelling, linking the sphere of earth to the sphere of heaven/sky. The bird on top of the tree is supposed to be the bride's father. The treetop is decorated with golden fringes, golden cones and golden apples which fall upon the ground<sup>167</sup>. The throwing or rolling of golden apples from the world tree signifies the introductory pre-phase of the matrimony between the godly groom and bride. Such apples also imply fertility guaranteed by the celestial wedding: if they fall

<sup>161</sup> Andrej Gabršček, *Narodne pripovedke v Soških planinah*, V Gorici 1910, pp. 365-366 (Čudno drevo).

<sup>162</sup> W. Caland, *Die vorchristlichen baltischen Totengebräuche*, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 17 (1914), p. 487.

<sup>163</sup> Vilmos Diószegi, *Die Überreste des Schamanismus in der ungarischen Volkskultur*, *Acta ethnographica* 7 (1958), Vol. 1-2, pp. 112-115. This hypothesis was tackled critically also by Maja Bošković-Stulli, *Drvo nasred svijeta. Jedna narodna bajka iz Vukove ostavštine*, *Vukov zbornik*, Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Posebna izdanja, Book 400, Beograd 1966, p. 670.

<sup>164</sup> Linda Dégh, *Über den ungarischen Märchenschatz*, *Europa et Hungaria*, *Congressus Ethnographicus in Hungaria*, (eds. Ortutay and Bodrogi), Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1965, pp. 279-289.

<sup>165</sup> Bošković-Stulli, pp. 681-682.

<sup>166</sup> Vitomir Belaj, *Der mythologische Hintergrund eines kroatischen Hochzeitsbrauches*, *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch* 41 (1995), pp. 43-50.

<sup>167</sup> Radoslav Katičić, *Weiteres zur Rekonstruktion der Texte eines urslawischen Fruchtbarkeitsritus*, *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch* 35 (1989), pp. 77-97.



upon a field, they bring good crops<sup>168</sup>. At this stage, the magical part of the tradition was formed which cultivated ideas about the tree of life and fertility.

With these notions a considerable number of customs were linked which we cannot deal with here in more detail; let us merely mention a few from Slovenia and from the near neighbourhood. In the Vinica parish, a boy dressed as Zeleni Jurij carried a golden apple on top of a rod decorated with flowers and ribbons<sup>169</sup>. In Carinthia the shaking of trees to arouse higher fertility at Midsummer Eve celebrations had the same roots<sup>170</sup>. In Bela krajina a suitor received a red ("golden") apple from his girl as a sign of her consent to marry him.<sup>171</sup> Such an apple was also set at the top of the flag which accompanied the bride to her wedding. A few feathers of cock or peacock were stuck into the apple to symbolize a bird in a treetop<sup>172</sup>. In place of "golden apples" the elder also presented the newlyweds with gilded nuts which were to bring them happiness in marriage<sup>173</sup>. About 1830, in Črnomelj they still carried in St. George's procession a tree decorated with greenery, flower wreaths and gaily coloured pieces of cloth. It is significant that, according to popular belief, the tree and the anthropomorphic figure of Zeleni Jurij were *identical*; they were the one and only two-form deity<sup>174</sup>. Zeleni Jurij rode to Adlešiči and Vinica on a white horse, carrying a birch tree across his shoulder<sup>175</sup>. In Porabje (the Raba region), too, on St. George's day a young, green birch tree was planted<sup>176</sup>. In Laško, Zeleni Jurij, clad in greenery, held a young fir tree in one hand, and a horn made of willow bark in the other<sup>177</sup>. A dry branch of the (world) tree appears in Croatian poems in the "kaj" dialect: a cuckoo is heard from it (the bride), and at the time of nuptial ceremonies a green bell is hung upon such a branch in the vicinity of the home farm<sup>178</sup>. Like all other deities of growth, Zeleni Jurij must die in order to (be able to) be reborn. Nowadays only his green mantle, made of branches, is thrown into the water. After the ceremony, his phytomorphic figure (a young tree) is "stripped of its leaves, its branches are broken, leaves crushed, and the tree destroyed by girls"<sup>179</sup>.

The central part of the Pomurje "Georgian" ritual ceremony was the duel between Zeleni Jurij or Vesnik, clad in ivy or flowers, and Rabolj, clad in straw or fur<sup>180</sup>. Jurij, as the representative of spring, always triumphed over his adversary who embodied winter. A

<sup>168</sup>Idem, Weitere baltische Ausblicke zur Rekonstruktion der Texte eines urslawischen Fruchtbarkeitsritus, Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch 39 (1993), p. 36. About the tree in the religion and magic of the Slavs see also: Ljubinko Radenković, Simbolika sveta u narodnoj magiji južnih Slovena, Balkanološki institut SANU, Posebna izdanja, Book 67, Niš 1996, pp. 72-73.

<sup>169</sup>France Marolt, Slovenske narodnoslovne študije. Drugi zvezek : Tri obredja iz Bele krajine, Ljubljana 1936, p. 9.

<sup>170</sup>Pavle Zablatic, Čar letnih časov v ljudskih šegah na Koroškem, Celovec 1984, p. 192.

<sup>171</sup>Janko Barle, Ženitovanjski običaji Belih Kranjcev, Letopis Slovenske matice 1889, p. 70.

<sup>172</sup>Valvasor, Book VI, p. 302.

<sup>173</sup>Davorin Trstenjak, Mythologične starice : 5. O orehu, Slovenski glasnik 9 (1863), p. 55.

<sup>174</sup>Joh. Kapelle, Das Frühlingsfest in Tschernembl, Carniolia 1839, No. 1.

<sup>175</sup>Niko Kuret, Praznično leto Slovencev I, Ljubljana 1989, p. 260.

<sup>176</sup>Idem, p. 255.

<sup>177</sup>Idem, p. 266.

<sup>178</sup>Belaj, pp. 43-50. See also the treatise by the same author: Mladenkin vijenac na suhoj grani. Mitska pozadina jednoga svadbenog običaja u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj, Studia Ethnologica Croatica 4 (1992), pp. 81-91.

<sup>179</sup>Niko Kuret, K Meuljevi teoriji o maskah, Opuscula selecta, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za filološke in literarne vede, Dela 43, Ljubljana 1997, p. 49.

<sup>180</sup>Kuret 1989, p. 254.

similar ceremony was known in Carinthian Rožek<sup>181</sup>. The "lavfarji" custom of Cerčno also illustrates the combat between winter and spring, but it belongs to the group of vegetational rituals which are common in the wider Alpine territory: Shrovetide (originally a Wild man, clad in moss) holds in his hands a felled fir tree which, after Shrovetide is destroyed, and is taken by his adversary, "Ta mršlanast" (clad in ivy). Similar folk plays, featuring the Wild man (winter) and his bride (spring), were known in Switzerland and in the Tyrol<sup>182</sup>.

In the Slovene territory, the Slavic Zeleni Jurij became blended with similar indigenous vegetational cults: for example, the worship of the fertility goddess Cybele, which in the Roman empire became officially accepted in 204 B.C., her cult having been preserved at least until the end of the 4th century A.D. The traces of the Cybele cult are still to be found in archaeological sites on the present Slovene territory: consacrational inscriptions, statues and reliefs in urban settlements such as Emona, Celeia, Poetovio, and also in some rural places.

It is important that the originally Asia Minor - and later on Greek and Roman - cult of Cybele, "the Great Mother of Gods", was linked to the symbol of a tree, beneath which her unfaithful lover Attis died. On Cybele's request, Zeus turned Attis' dead body into a pine tree, later resuscitated him and reunited him with his mediatrix. In the ritual procession, which took place in March, there participated attenders *koribanti* and *kureti*, who used to strike their swords against their shields, making a loud noise. With this noise and their ecstatic dance they were chasing winter away. The central event of these March celebrations was on March 22, when a pine tree was felled and taken decorated to Cybele's sanctuary, while women chanted elegies for the dead Attis. Three days later, Attis' rebirth was celebrated. Archaeologist Slavko Ciglenečki was the first to draw attention to the similarity between the Slovene *kurenti/koranti* and the Greek-Roman *kureti/koribanti*, between the traditional Prekmurje ceremony of "borovo gostüvanje" and the pine/fir tree of Attis' procession, and even between names and attires of participants of the "borovo gostüvanje" and Cybele's priests<sup>183</sup>. With his function of chasing enemy demons and awakening the sleeping natural forces, the Korant/Kurent takes his place in the gallery of similar figures known throughout Europe, while at the same time preserving a tie with antiquity and with the indigenous cultural heritage<sup>184</sup>.

According to some fairy tale interpretations, golden apples grew upon a tree at the top of the world mountain. The Slovene tradition mentions them as Kresnik's property, which a chthonian demon is unsuccessfully trying to steal<sup>185</sup>. Similar motifs are to be found elsewhere in Europe. Such apples have lured - owing to their miraculous characteristics - the mythological Heracles into the garden of Hesperides, and have later on become a destination of the bold journeys of various fairy tale heroes: "*Behind a wood, there is a large castle; beautiful apples grow there. Send him to bring you those apples, you will eat them and become completely cured*"<sup>186</sup>. In Slovene fairy tales<sup>187</sup> and folk songs, a pear tree with golden fruits frequently appears instead of an apple tree:

<sup>181</sup>Kuret 1989, p. 261.

<sup>182</sup>Niko Kuret, Ein Wildemann-Spiel in Slowenien, *Alpes orientales* 1 (1956), pp. 127-134.

<sup>183</sup>Slavko Ciglenečki, Nekoč so bili spremljevalci boginje Kibebe, danes preganjajo zimo kot pustne maske, *Delo* 25.2.1998, p. 10.

<sup>184</sup>Niko Kuret, Domači in tuji delež v obrednih obhodih Slovencev, *Traditiones* 20 (1991), pp. 74-75.

<sup>185</sup>Kelemina, pp. 36-37 (No. I.IV.).

<sup>186</sup>Krajcar, p. 94 (Trgovčev sin in njegova mati).

<sup>187</sup>Od glaževnate gore, G. Križnik's manuscript (Od treh bratov), Štrekelj's collection II., ISN, ZRC SAZU, ŠZ 3/35.

Izraslo je runjka 'ruška	A fine pear tree grew
na sred sela širokega.	in the middle of a wide village.
Pod njom su mi lipi stoli,	Beneath it are fine chairs,
pod njom su mi lipi gosti,	beneath it are fine guests,
lipi gosti Bog, Marija,	fine guests, God, Mary,
Sveti Petar, ključar božji... <sup>188</sup>	St. Peter, holder of the keys...

It is important that this Bela krajina song was sung at Midsummer time, which additionally confirms its cosmological symbolism. The "wide village" represented the paradise plain with the settlement and the ruler's palace, the same as we have already encountered in the fairy tales about climbing the world tree. The pear treetop also has a sense of its own in this context: the biblical *Genesis* (2.9-10) records that the garden of Eden was flourishing with different kinds of fruit trees. Among them were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Fruits of the Tree of Life brought immortality to those who ate them. The source at the roots of the tree of paradise filled four rivers which flowed to all the sides of the world. They represented the four gospels and the four limbs of the cross. The landscape is therefore well known from different sources. In our song only the "chairs" around the tree where the celestial guests are gathered are less usual. From some other variants we may conclude that Christ and his companions did not only sit in these chairs, but that they sat in the shade at the common table. Was it a round table, which would give it a zodiacal character? The enigmatic character of these verses led Vlado Nartnik to write a hypothesis according to which the tree, reaching from hell to heaven, was "the tree-like Milky Way, with the constellation of the Chair high upon the pole"<sup>189</sup>. The contents of this and similar songs would therefore illustrate the night sky and the lunar calendar cycle<sup>190</sup>. In the opinion of some other researchers, however, the circle of celestial beings sitting around the table represents a magical frame encompassing the "sacred" and dividing it from the external, the "profane". It has the same defence function as making rounds, running or dancing in circles<sup>191</sup>. In the centre of such a circle was the place of the divine manifestation. As the ceremony of encircling (*opasanje/opasilo*) was well known in the Slovene lands, we may assume that our paradise table had the shape of a ring, with the trunk of the holy tree in the middle.

In the Christian tradition, the mysteries of salvation and of Christ's cross were often presented metaphorically as the paradise tree of life. The latter frequently has cosmic dimensions: according to a 3rd century text it was supposed to grow from the Calvary to infinite heights, encompassing the whole world with its branches. From the spring at its roots all peoples were supposed to drink, and then ascend to heaven by its branches<sup>192</sup>. Thus they would regain their lost paradise. In the Hebrew mythology, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge were originally identical, represented by a vine. This symbolism has even older roots in the Sumerian and Egyptian culture. The vine had a central role in the Greek Dionysian cults, also known in ancient Rome<sup>193</sup>. That is why the Christian tree of

<sup>188</sup>Ivan Šašelj, *Bisernice iz belokranjskega narodnega zaklada*, Vol.1, Ljubljana 1906, pp. 192-193.

<sup>189</sup>Vlado Nartnik, *Šest ljudskih legend ob eni romanci*, *Slava* 3 (1988), No. 1, pp. 65-66.

<sup>190</sup>Idem, pp. 66-67.

<sup>191</sup>Hedwig von Beit, *Symbolik des Märchens*, Bern 1952, pp. 182-183.

<sup>192</sup>Pseudo-Cyprian, *Carmen de Pascha vel de Ligno Vitae*, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticum Latinorum* 3, pp. 305-308; James 1966, pp. 161-162.

<sup>193</sup>Eisler, pp. 147-149; 325-327.

life was also depicted as a vine. In a Slovene myth a man saved himself from the Flood by climbing a vine which grew upon a high hill, its top touching the sky<sup>194</sup>.

The Slovene tradition does not only describe climbing up the world tree, but also descending by rope through a hollow oak trunk to the underworld<sup>195</sup>. Danger always lurked from such a passage towards the world beyond. This explains why various mythological creatures hide in old hollow tree trunks. With all the knowledge that we already have about the willow tree as a mediator between the human world and the chthonic/demonic world beyond, the Slovene superstition that "*the devil grins from a willow tree*" becomes more understandable<sup>196</sup>. In one of his treatises, F. Bezljaj mentioned his own youthful experience that "we were strictly forbidden to approach, or cut rods for whistles from an old hollow willow tree by the bank of the river..."<sup>197</sup>. Entry to such a shaft was not permitted to everyone, as the entrance was - in the fairy tale language - closed with an iron door and nine locks<sup>198</sup>.

Descriptions of the world tree with the source of water of life at its roots, and the deity in the shape of a bird at its top, are so similar in different traditions of European, Iranian and North Indian ethnic groups that we can undoubtedly characterize them as part of the ancient Indo-European patrimony. Iranian mythology knows two trees of paradise, growing at the top of the Elbrus. The first one is the tree of immortality, the white *Haoma*, situated at the source of Ardwisura and having healing and rejuvenating characteristics, the second one is the tree on which the bird Shinamru is seated, and the seeds of which fall upon the ground (*Bundahishn* 27.4). The source of all world rivers is supposed to be on the mountain Hukairja...

In more remote parts of the Slovene territory remnants of pagan beliefs lingered long after the formal Christianization, among which was undoubtedly the cult of trees and water springs. In the first half of the 13th century, the population of Bela krajina was "tied up in the errors of blindness, and in some ways imitated pagan rites"<sup>199</sup>. Similar circumstances can be understood from the document (from 1236) mentioning "improvement...of the Slovene population" in the territory to the East from Ptuj<sup>200</sup>. For the neighbourhood of Gornji grad it was in 1237 believed that "many people die there owing to the lack of divine service without the holy confirmation, and on the whole the inhabitants of those parts suffer great damage where their souls are concerned; it is therefore feared that they might soon succumb to errors from which it would be difficult to save them"<sup>201</sup>. It is thus easy to understand that as late as 1300 a certain Vid from Bresternica, at the foot of the Pohorje, worshipped a tree<sup>202</sup>. In 1331 a Franciscan, Franciscus de Clugia (Francesco di Ch(i)oggia) in his "solemn sermon" in Čedad/Cividale invited the faithful to help suppress the popular worship of a tree near Kobarid, from beneath which a brook was springing. Volunteers, among whom the canon of Aquileia Ulrico Boiani, pulled the tree out and filled the spring

<sup>194</sup>Kelemina, p. 285 (No. 208).

<sup>195</sup>Krajcar, p.29 (Vojak in kraljična).

<sup>196</sup>Davorin Trstenjak, *Mythologične drobtine. O verbi*, Slovenski glasnik 1862, p. 175.

<sup>197</sup>Bezljaj 1976, p. 64.

<sup>198</sup>Rožnik, p. 122 (Zlato mesto).

<sup>199</sup>Franc Kos, *Gradivo za zgodovino Slovencev v srednjem veku*, ed. Milko Kos, Vol. 5, V Ljubljani 1928, p. 242 (No.486).

<sup>200</sup>Idem, p.306 (No.647).

<sup>201</sup>Idem, p.316 (No.668).

<sup>202</sup>Bogo Grafenauer, *Zgodovina slovenskega naroda*, Vol. 2, Ljubljana 1965, p. 210.

up with stones<sup>203</sup>. In the middle of the 19th century a number of pilgrimages to the “holy” fir tree near Vitanje took place, which were finally prohibited by the Church. At some places in Carinthia a conviction was preserved long into more recent times that it is better to pray beneath a green tree than to go to church<sup>204</sup>. The setting up of maypoles (“mlaji”) was merely another presentation of the same idea. In Carniola this custom was described by Valvasor at the end of the 17th century. Especially interesting is his testimony on the setting up of maypoles beside mountain abysses, which was supposed to have an exorcismal effect, but which essentially resumed the prehistoric mythical scene with the mountain, the tree, the water and the underworld.

Some healing sources were “Christianized” by building churches or chapels in their vicinity. People went on pilgrimages to such places in order to cure different diseases, and water from these sources was given to the dying as a restorative. On the slopes of Svete gore above the Sotla, where five churches and chapels stand, a holy brook “Božja noga” (God’s foot) was supposed to flow over the wounded feet of the Crucified, and have healing powers<sup>205</sup>. Other sources with a similar reputation were to be found in Kotelj near Turjak, in Pečarovci, near Bakonci (whereto they used to go on St. Vid’s day), near Kuzma, near Svibno, Lesno brdo, Mala Nedelja (where christenings supposedly once took place), and at Sv. Lucija na Doleh<sup>206</sup>.

The Scandinavian mythical tree *Yggdrasil* touched the sky with its top : its three roots reached to the underworld of the dead, the dwelling of giants, where the spring of wisdom rose, and to the kingdom of the gods where, at the foot of the tree, by the “well of fate”, gods used to gather for their daily consultation (*Voluspa* 19; *G. Grimnismal* 31). The three Fates, *Nornas*, decided on people’s fates at the same place. In the treetop lived an eagle, a falcon, and a squirrel, beneath it deer and snakes, and in the underworld a dragon: according to present-day explanations, these were supposed to symbolise (in the same order) the spheres of air and ether, clouds (hail), winds, and vulcanic forces<sup>207</sup>. Honey dew dripped from its branches. The Saxon *Irmingsul*, “the great pillar”, was originally probably only a trunk of such a holy tree which gradually acquired the meaning of the world axis. The cult of pillars in the old India and the emergence of *stylistism* in Byzantine Christianity had their origins in the trunk of the holy tree; in these cases wood was substituted by a more lasting stone form<sup>208</sup>.

The cult of the tree was also brought to Northern India by Indo-European immigrants. Holy places were originally dedicated to the spirits of nature and fertility, *yaksa*, which they imagined in a feminine form, as “brides” of the tree and its protectors. The eternal tree (*ashvattha*) upon which all the worlds rest is also mentioned in Indian religious texts, and is identified with the *Brahman*, the lasting foundation of all existence

<sup>203</sup>Ivo Juvančič, Križarska vojska proti Kobaridcem 1331, *Zgodovinski časopis* 38 (1984), No. 1-2, pp. 49-55; Franc Rupnik, Kraj in župnija Kobarid od začetka drugega tisočletja do leta 1848, Kobarid, Kobarški muzej 1997, pp. 33-35; P.S. Leicht, Tracce di paganesimo fra gli Slavi dell’ Isonzo nel secolo XIV, in: *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 1 (1925), pp. 247-250.

<sup>204</sup>Mal, p. 253.

<sup>205</sup>Emilijan Cevc, p. 107.

<sup>206</sup>France Kotnik, *Iz ljudske medicine*, Narodopisje Slovencev, Vol. 2, Ljubljana 1952, p. 128.

<sup>207</sup>James 1966, pp. 160-161.

<sup>208</sup>John C. Irwin, *Origins of Form and Structure in Monumental Art*, in: *Symbols in Art and Religion. The Indian and the Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by K. Werner, Durham indological series No. 2, London - Glenn Dale 1990, pp. 56-57.

(*Katha Upanishad* 6.1), or with the cosmic soul, *Purusha* (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 3.8.-9). The Brahman is also compared to a forest, and the tree to the source and support of the universe (*Taittiriya Brahmana* 2.8.9.6). "The Lord of the primeval forest" is the tree *vanaspati* with its thousand branches; earth and heaven were created from its wood (*Rig veda* 10.81.4; 7.33.9). The world tree was supposed to grow in paradise or in the third - the highest - heavenly sphere (*Rig veda* 10.135.1; *Atharva veda* 5.4.3) by a lake and a golden celestial palace (*Chandogya Upanishad* 8.5.3). According to *Kaushitaki Upanishad* (1.3; 1.5) a spring of the "water of life" is found by such a tree. On the tree two birds nest feeding on its honey; one of them (the one connected to the Highest) may also enjoy the sweet fruits from the top of the tree (*Rig veda* 1.164.20-22). In *Bhagavadgita* (15.1-3), the world tree is described, the characteristic of which is that it grows with its treetop downwards, and has roots in the sphere of paradise :

With roots aloft and branches below,  
The eternal peepal tree, they say -  
Whose leaves are the (Vedic) hymns,  
Who knows it, he knows the Veda.<sup>209</sup>

Such an upside-down world tree - also mentioned in *Rig veda* 1.24.7 and *Katha Upanishad* 3.2.1; 6.1 - became the symbol of material and sensual world, the *samsara*. Its treetop reaches into the human world, since its shoots - *Vedas* - and their rituals are the result of human activities. The tree's branches encircle our world also because there is a place within the *samsara* that belongs to man: the branches above him are the spheres of the lower gods (*devas*), while those below him symbolize the lower living beings.<sup>210</sup> According to some explanations, the God of Fire, Agni, in the shape of a horse, dwells within the tree (*Taittiriya Brahmana* 3.8.12.2). Some commentators derive the name *ashvattha* from *ashva - stha*, "tree beneath which horses stand". Horses pull the sun cart, thus keeping the universe moving; in this way the world, too, symbolized by the tree, is constantly changing (211). This "earth" tree is subject to time, but also immortal, since it is perpetually reborn: it is either the *karma* or merely an illusionary reflection of the true and eternal "spiritual" tree. Those who understand this must - with the power of wisdom or non-attachment - cut down the "earth" tree and become acquainted with its real form in the world beyond<sup>212</sup>. This act enables one to withdraw from the material world and its laws.

The honey dew from the world tree represents, according to Buddhistic interpretations, a sinful profane temptation which leads man directly into hell. After the Buddhist text *Lalitavistara* (1st century) honey was supposed to drip from a beehive in the treetop. This idea was brought from the Orient to ancient Greeks and Romans, and hence to Western culture. In his text on *Barlaam and Ioasaph* the Syrian Christian St. John Damascene (Joannes Damascenus, 8th century) described a tree dripping honey juice, with a white

<sup>209</sup>The *Bhagavad gī.Ōta* >, Translated and interpreted by Franklin Edgerton, Second ed., New York 1964, p. 73.

<sup>210</sup>The *Bhagavadgita*, An English Translation and Commentary by W.Douglas P. Hill, Second ed., Oxford University Press 1953, p. 185.

<sup>211</sup>V.S. Agrawala, *Vedic Lectures*, Banaras Hindu University 1963, pp. 104-105.

<sup>212</sup>*Bhagavad-gita kakva jeste*, A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Vaduz 1982, pp. 628-629; *Śrīmad Bhagavadgita Rahasya or Karma-Yoga-Śāstra*, by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, tr. by. Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol. 2, Poona 1936, pp. 1139-1140.

and a black mouse gnawing at its roots, and a dragon and snakes. Similar stereotypes are to be found in the collection of “a thousand and one nights” *Kalila and Dimna*, in the *Gesta Romanorum* and the *Legenda Aurea*<sup>213</sup>. In all these cases the tree that appears is growing upwards. The “upside-down” world tree is known in the Iranian, Jewish, Near Eastern sources, the Eastern Christian legends, and even in Dante’s *Paradiso*, (18.29-30) where he describes an evergreen tree receiving food from above, that is from God. Dante may have found the example for his poetic figure in the Bible (the rootedness of man in love/Christ, Eph. 3.17), or in the “tree of happiness” which, according to the tradition of Islamic mysticism, grew in paradise. The image of such a tree was also known to medieval Christian mystics. In the *Elucidarium* of French provenance, from the second half of the 15th century, a comparison between a tree and a man is to be found. According to it, a human body is a “tree turned upside down”: the body is the trunk, the hair represents roots, and the arms and legs are branches, which means that we must strive to reach the sky for the love of God<sup>214</sup>. After another European interpretation from the 15th century, a tree grows downwards from a single root (God the Father), while in its lower part it has innumerable roots (saints, apostles). It has nine branches (nine heavens), upon which birds (the souls of the righteous) are seated<sup>215</sup>. The fact that the “upside-down” tree is an old Euro-Asian idea which does not belong merely to “high” cultures is confirmed by the example of the Udegeian shamans who, in their rituals, used a model of a tree with six roots jutting upwards. Such trees, which had a human face cut into their trunks, used to stand in the vicinity of shamans’ dwellings. The idea of such a tree was not unknown in Finnish folk songs and Russian conjurations<sup>216</sup>. Niko Kuret, who was the first in Slovenia to identify the motif of a stylized world tree (or “Tree of Life”), saw its origin in the Iranian Sassanid tradition. In our folk art, however, the primary variant is very reduced and stylized; it has taken over the shape of a palmette and a “heraldic lily”. Perhaps this was also due to the influence of Oriental decorative fabrics. It is only preserved because of its ornamental attractiveness, while having undergone all kinds of modifications<sup>217</sup>.

In the Prekmurje region, as a traditional decoration of Easter eggs archaic stylized images were preserved of such a tree with three roots, growing from ground to heaven and from heaven to ground in such a manner that the two treetops intertwine<sup>218</sup>. This symbol, with its triple roots and the position of its treetop, implies the triple scheme of the universe and man’s central position within it. The tree draws strength from the sky and from the underground simultaneously, in other words, it is nourished from spiritual as well as material sources. In the European environment, the presence of such views that are close to the Indian ones - although they do not reach the same degree of sensibility - may be proved by the text from the Orphic plate from Petelia, which we have already mentioned, and by Plato’s *Timaeus* (90A), which both emphasize the dual, physical/earthly and spiritual/heavenly nature of man<sup>219</sup>. It is also possible that the Prekmurje “dual” tree of life is merely a decorative motif without any mythological contents, which arrived rather late in Slovenian lands.

<sup>213</sup> Karl Spiess, Die zweifache Herkunft des Lebensbaummotives in der europäischen Volkskunst, in : Drei Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiet der Überlieferungsgebundenen Kunst, Veröffentlichungen des österreichischen Museums für Volkskunde 7, Wien 1955, p. 122.

<sup>214</sup> Ung tres singulier et profitable livre appellé Le Lucidaire, Texte et étude par J. Nachbin, Paris 1938, p. XXVII.

<sup>215</sup> R. Thurneysen, Der mystische Baum, Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 14 (1923), pp. 16-17.

<sup>216</sup> Eugen Kagarow, Der umgekehrte Schamanenbaum, Archiv für Religionswissenschaft 27 (1929), pp. 183-185.

<sup>217</sup> Niko Kuret, Reménke, remenice, in : Etnografija Pomurja, Vol. 1, Vlasta Koren (ed.), Murska Sobota 1967, p. 166.

<sup>218</sup> Kuret 1967, pp. 163, 166-168.

Around the holy tree on the holy mountain a wood grew: anyone who dared to fell any of its trees would be punished by God. This is the theme of a one-hundred-year-old written record from the surroundings of Ormož: kralj Matjaž (King Matthias) once ordered his soldiers to cut down forests in Styria because terrible wild beasts were living in them. They thus “arrived to Sveta gora (Holy Mountain) in order to fell its woods as well. Beneath the mountain was a brook, surrounded by dense woods. The soldiers stopped there, but none of them dared to cut down a single tree. Kralj Matjaž asked them: ‘Why don’t you cut down these trees?’ They answered: ‘There are fairies on this mountain, and woe to those who dare cut a single tree.’ The king laughed at this, seized an axe from a soldier’s hands and walked over to the brook. A beautiful, slender alder tree grew there. The king slashed at it with his axe. He wanted to swing back the axe and strike again, but could not. A terrible thunder was heard from the mountain, and a voice cried: ‘Woe to you, kralj Matjaž!’ At that same moment, Sveta gora encompassed the king and all his soldiers. It did not kill them, just made a cave above them, and in that cave they are now all asleep, kralj Matjaž and his army”<sup>220</sup>.

The object representing the central point or the world axis was actually or symbolically separated from the rest of the world. A Slovene example of this can be found in the Primorska (Coastal) region *opasilo* (encircling): the setting of lit candles around the church on the parish saint’s day, which is a cult action of “enclosing”<sup>221</sup>.

This custom was once also known in other Slovene regions, as is proved by folk songs from the Zilja/Gail valley (Carinthia) and from Styria, telling about churches ‘belted’ by “a yellow candle” or “a golden belt”. According to the Gorenjska (Upper Carniola) tradition, the church of St. Tomaž (Thomas) at Rateče was surrounded by a “strong, blessed chain” to protect it against the Turks. Usually, though, only St. Lenart’s (Leonard’s) churches were ‘belted’ by chains, St. Lenart being the saviour of prisoners<sup>222</sup>. Recollections of encircling churches by ropes at the time of parish holidays reach back to the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th century<sup>223</sup>. Ritual encircling of churches and other cult sites was known in the wider Mediterranean territory, and has its sources in the periods before Christianity and Islam began to spread: in the Hellenistic period the “hub of the universe”, *omphalos*, was depicted as bound by chains or knotted ribbons; the same applied to the cult of holy trees. Later on pillars in temples were also ‘wrapped’ in ribbons or chains: such an example is the stonemason’s decoration of capitals in the Renaissance portal of the Minorite monastery in Piran<sup>224</sup>. On important holidays people were belted by a rope, too, in order to become tightly connected with the “holy”: that is why it is still said nowadays that people go to “bind” (*vezati*) someone when they go to congratulate him on his name day<sup>225</sup>. A ring is a diminished “belt”; in the Slovene tradition it is always an object of magical power and protection.

<sup>219</sup>This comparison was made already by S. Radhakrishnan in his commentary to *Bhagavadgita* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1958), p. 326.

<sup>220</sup>Jos. Freuensfeld, *Narodno blago s Štajerskega II.*, Pravljičice o kralji Matjaži, *Kres* 4 (1884), p. 141.

<sup>221</sup>Sergij Vilfan, Vprašanje “opasila”, *Slovenski etnograf* 9 (1956), pp. 253-260.

<sup>222</sup>Niko Kuret, *Praznično leto Slovencev*, Vol. 2, Ljubljana 1989, pp. 106-107.

<sup>223</sup>Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Kettenkirchen in Bayern und in Österreich*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, *Abhandlungen, Neue Folge, Heft 76*, München 1973, pp. 40-42.

<sup>224</sup>Idem, pp. 89-90.

<sup>225</sup>Janez Bilc, *Šege, navade in narodne pripovedke Slovencev v bistriški okolici na Notranjskem*, *Novice* 1857, no. 61, p.247.



The worlds beyond our earthly world may only be reached in a special state: apart from death, also in one's sleep, through meditation or ecstasy. These are all circumstances in which man's perception of space and time becomes relative, and everyday criteria lose their meaning<sup>226</sup>. If in the "normal" world the three-dimensional space is linked to the triad structure of time (the past, the present, the future), and if this triple division of space/time is taken into consideration in e.g. ritual conjurations, in fairy tales time is abstracted or ignored, unless it is necessary for the sequence of narration. After a short visit to the world beyond the hero returns home to find that decades, even centuries have gone by. Since the fairy tale event is timeless, it can be repeated. Thus episodes may follow each other with minor variations, and such a series may, in the symbolical sense, spread on till eternity. Fairy tales therefore persevere in their descriptions of unchangeable worlds; that is why the indestructible sceneries of stone, crystal, or metal among which their tales unwind are so popular.

From the above text it may be concluded that part of our old ideas about the structure of the world and the world beyond is based upon the Indo-European and ancient Slavic patrimony, and part upon the antique and old-Christian poetical and apocalyptic tradition. In Christianity the vertical cosmic model obtained a new and different meaning, but the horizontal one did not change much, preserving many of its old traits. The proof of this are fairy tale motifs which have kept alive the traditions about giants, dwarfs, and other mythological beings from man's surroundings right up to the present day<sup>227</sup>.

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<sup>226</sup>Von Beit, p. 36.

<sup>227</sup>Kirsten Hastrup, *Cosmology and Society in Medieval Iceland*, *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1981, p. 69.

## Podoba sveta in onstranstva v slovenskem ljudskem izročilu

Zmago Šmitek

Slovenske ljudske predstave o ustroju stvarstva so temeljile na modelu treh horizontalnih sfer, neba, zemlje in podzemlja, ki jih je povezovala vertikalna svetovna os. Arhaični slovenski svet je bil strukturiran okoli te osi po nekakšnem koordinatnem sistemu, podobno kot je po C. G. Jungu in M. Eliadeju veljalo tudi za druge kulture v Evropi in zunaj nje. Človeški svet je obsegal le del zemeljske plošče, njeno obrobje pa so naseljevala ljudstva, ki so bila le na pol človeška, podobna živalim ali deformirana. Nadzemna in podzemna sfera sta pripadali bogovom, demonom in dušam umrlih.

Slovensko ljudsko izročilo je bivališče umrlih umeščalo na visoko goro, na nebo (v zvezdno sfero), ali v podzemlje. Tem predstavam je mogoče najti vzporednice bodisi med Slovani, pa tudi v antični grško-rimski kulturi in v zgodnjem krščanstvu. Kot je razvidno iz slovenskih pravljic, ljudskih pesmi in molitev, magičnih zagovorov ipd., je človeška duša romala v svoje zadnje bivališče po brezpotju prek visokih gor, gozdov ali puščav ter vmesnih jezer ali morij ("Gnilo morje", "Krvavo morje"). V nekaterih primerih je svet mrtvih in živih ločevala podzemna reka, obrasla z vrbami. Na njihovih vejah so sedele črne ptice - duše nekrščenih otrok. Pogostokrat pa je bila pokrajina onstranstva tudi travnik z ovcami ali kosci (povezava z ozvezdjem Oriona?) in s parom rogatih živali, ki sta se nenehno zaletavali ena v drugo. Tja je prek reke vodila ozka majava brv, ali pa most, ki je deloval kot past in prek katerega so dosegli drugi breg le izbranci. Nekakšen most v onstranstvo je bila tudi lestev, vodeča v nebo (svetopisemska Jakobova leastev, opremljena z noži iz legende o sveti Perpetui). Ta je v slovenskem ljudskem pripovedništvu povezana s pričakovanjem konca sveta in z vpadi Mongolov v Evropo v 13. stoletju. Na "planjavi pozabljenja" so bili trije vodnjaki, iz katerih pa duša pokojnika ni smela piti (glej paralelo z orfično-pitagorejsko doktrino, npr. z napisom iz Petelie). Ni se smela pridružiti tudi krogu plesalcev, čeprav so bili med njimi bližnji sorodniki in prijatelji.

V slovenskem ljudskem izročilu je svetovna os (axis mundi) predstavljena v obliki gorskega vrha, votline v gori in kozmičnega drevesa. Iz teh opisov lahko razberemo neke univerzalne vzorce pa tudi lokalne posebnosti. V tem kontekstu nastopajo arhetipi steklene (kristalne) gore, jezera v njeni notranjosti in bivališča spečega kralja Matjaža v gorski votlini. V slovenskih pravljicah je pogost motiv (znan širom Evrope in zunaj nje) o potovanju pogumnega človeka prek jezera ali prek morja ali prek treh kraljestev (treh sfer stvarstva) na gorski vrh in o njegovem srečanju z gospodarjem svetovne gore. Temu je soroden motiv plezanja po svetovnem drevesu v nebo ali spuščanja po njegovem votlem deblu v podzemlje. Ideja o svetovnem drevesu je prepoznavna tudi v nekdanjem slovenskem čaščenju dreves o čemer govore zgodovinski viri, ter v ljudskih šegah, kjer so "zlata jabolka" tega drevesa simbol plodnosti. Posamezne ljudske šege so povezane s fitomorfni likom Zelenega Jurija, nekatere pa spominjajo na antične obrede čaščenja Kibe in Atisa. Star je tudi običaj postavljanja mlajev in cerkvic na vrhovih hribov. Svetovno drevo je (tako kot svetovna gora) segalo v sfero zvezd, lune in sonca, ki jih v pravljicah pogosto simbolizirajo kovine baker, srebro in zlato. Stilizirano svetovno drevo nastopa v slovenski ljudski umetnosti kot krasilni element. Posebnost pa je upodobitev drevesa, ki raste hkrati iz zemlje in iz neba tako, da se njuni krošnji stikata; najdemo jo na velikonočnih pirhih v Prekmurju. Vrh svetovne gore je bil mnogim evrazijskim ljudstvom rajsko bivališče bogov in tistih izbranih pokojnikov,

ki so jih bogovi poklicali k sebi. Po drugih variantah je rajsko mesto ležalo na eni od vej svetovnega drevesa (tudi v slovenskih pravljicah). Kjer je bilo to mogoče, so ob slovenskih primerih omenjene paralele v indoevropskem izročilu: grškem, rimskem, germanskem, slovanskem, iranskem in indijskem. S prihodom krščanstva je dobila vertikalna kozmična os nov in drugačen pomen, horizontalni "zemeljski svet" pa se je sorazmerno malo spremenil in je obdržal veliko starih potez.