



ACTA HISTRIAE
30, 2022, 3



UDK/UDC 94(05)

ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767



Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper
Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria

ACTA HISTRIAE
30, 2022, 3

KOPER 2022

ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767

UDK/UDC 94(05)

Letnik 30, leto 2022, številka 3

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Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper / Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria[®] / Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja / Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment / Istituto IRRIS di ricerca, sviluppo e strategie della società, cultura e ambiente[®]

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Tisk/Stampa/Print:

Založništvo PADRE d.o.o.

Naklada/Tiratura/Copies:

300 izvodov/copie/copies

**Finančna podpora/
Supporto finanziario/
Financially supported by:**

Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije / Slovenian Research Agency, Mestna občina Koper

**Slika na naslovnici/
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Picture on the cover:**

Ilustracija Zvonka Čoha k pravljici Ad lintverna, izrez / Illustration by Zvonko Čoh for the fairy tale Ad lintverna [About the Dragon], cutout / Illustrazione di Zvonko Čoh per la fiaba Ad lintverna [Del drago], ritaglio. Tratar, Lojze (2007): Tista od lintverna: slovenska ljudska pravljica. Zapisal Matičetov, Milko, priredila Štefan, Anja. Ciciban, 8, 6–7.

Redakcija te številke je bila zaključena 30. septembra 2022.

Revija Acta Histriae je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze / Gli articoli pubblicati in questa rivista sono inclusi nei seguenti indici di citazione / Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in: CLARIVATE ANALYTICS (USA): Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Social Scisearch, Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Journal Citation Reports / Social Sciences Edition (USA); IBZ, Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur (GER); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (UK); Referativnyi Zhurnal Viniti (RUS); European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS); Elsevier B. V.: SCOPUS (NL); DOAJ.

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JAVNA AGENCIJA ZA RAZISKOVALNO DEJAVNOST
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Članki, objavljeni v tej številki Acta Histriae, so nastali v okviru raziskovalnega projekta *Družbene funkcije pravljic*. Raziskavo je finančno podprla Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARRS, J6-1807).



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SLOVENIAN RESEARCH AGENCY

The articles published in this issue of Acta Histriae were arised from the research project: *Social functions of fairy tales*. This research was supported by Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS, J6-1807).

FORMATION OF THE FAIRY TALE MATRIX OF A DRAGON SLAYER

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ABSTRACT

In the article the author examines how the matrix of the dragon killer appeared in different social contexts and its formation as a fairy tale matrix. She traces the genealogy of the dragon slayer matrix back to ancient mythologies, paying regard to Babylonian, Greek, Celtic, and Slavic mythologies, as well as to the Christian codes and appearances in (particularly Slovenian) folklore, and discusses the variations that occur with different uses of the matrix, in different historical moments and epistemes. Special attention is devoted to studying the social and political functions the tales about the dragon killer had in the contexts in which they appeared.

Keywords: fairy tale, folktale, dragon, myth, mythology, Slavic mythology, Saint George, Zeleni Jurij, Kresnik, tithe

FORMAZIONE DELLA MATRICE FIABESCA DELL'UCCISORE DI DRAGHI

SINTESI

Il contributo esamina la comparsa della matrice dell'uccisore di draghi in diversi contesti sociali e il suo sviluppo in una matrice fiabesca, facendone risalire la genealogia alle mitologie antiche. Nel percorso si sofferma sulle mitologie babilonese, greca, celtica e slava, nonché su codici cristiani e le manifestazioni della matrice dell'uccisore di draghi nel folclore (in particolare quello sloveno), indagando le variazioni che nascono dai suoi vari usi, nei diversi momenti della storia ed epistemi. Particolare attenzione è rivolta allo studio delle funzioni sociali e politiche che le varianti rivestivano nei diversi contesti in cui si manifestavano.

Parole chiave: fiaba, racconto popolare, drago, mito, mitologia, mitologia slava, San Giorgio, Zeleni Jurij, Kresnik, decima

The genealogy of the dragon slayer matrix leads to the ancient Indo-European mythologies. Mythological imagination was complex and did not picture the dragon slayer and the dragon in a black and white fashion. However, a matrix gradually developed in which the dragon begins to represent the absolute otherness of man and the good, thus becoming what must be eliminated in order to establish proper order in society.

GENEOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY OF THE DRAGON¹

The etymological origin of the term dragon and its synonyms in the European tradition show that the dragon already existed as a kind of monster in early social imagination. It is reminiscent of or related to a snake; it may be similar to a worm or insect and is sometimes capable of flying. Dragon (Heb. tannin is a snake, sea monster, crocodile; Greek *drákon*, Latin *draco*) in a broader sense denotes a supernatural being with elements of the snake, lizard, crocodile, bird and sometimes the lion. In Europe, Southwest and Western Asia, the dragon symbolizes evil and is the enemy of deities and people (Bellinger, 1997, 502–503). Etymologically, the term dragon comes from the Latin word *draco*, which was the genus of the dragon. The Latin term *draconem* (nominative *draco*), which meant a “huge serpent, dragon,” originated from the Greek term *drákon* (genitive *drakontos*) meaning a “serpent, giant seafish” (Harper, 2020–2021). Middle High German synonyms of Lat. *draco* are the terms *trache*, *tracke* and *drache*, *dracke* (Lexer, 1961, 229). The Old Nordic *dreki*, Old High German *traccho*, Old English *draca* appear from the eighth century onwards (Jontes, 2000, 140). Middle High German also used the term *lint*, which meant a snake (Lexer, 1961, 128), and *wurm* meaning worm or an insect and a snake (Lexer, 1961, 329). The German term *Lindwurm* originates from these two words. From this term (*Lindwurm*) emerged similar terms that were used in Slovenia.² In the Middle Ages, *lintrache* and *lintwurm* meant a fairy animal that was half dragon, half snake (Lexer, 1961, 128).

The dragon’s habitat is water or a swamp. This monster is a kind of animal, but it is more than that, and it changes its features to some extent. In some ancient mythological and later fairy tale versions it may have several heads. The minimum criteria for defining a dragon as a monster can be defined as follows: it is a monster that is a species of aquatic animal, but not fully included in the systematization of animal species because it has certain attributes that go beyond the definition of a mere animal. These

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- 1 The visual material is used with kind permissions of National Gallery of Slovenia, Slovene Ethnographic Museum and Mladinska knjiga. The author thanks to these institutions. This paper is the result of research carried out in the research project “Social Functions of Fairy Tales” (ARRS J6-1807), in the research project “Political Functions of Folktales” (ARRS N6-0268) and in the research program “The Practices of Conflict Resolution between Customary and Statutory Law in the Area of Today’s Slovenia and Neighboring Countries” (ARRS, P6-0435), funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).
 - 2 Such as “*lentuorn* (Grafenauer, 1956, 316), *lintuorn* (Svetokriški, 1691b, 112; Svetokriški, 1707, 91); *lintvar* (Pajek, 1884, 91); *lintver* (Pajek, 1884, 90; Pleteršnik, 1894, 519); *lintvern* (Pleteršnik, 1894, 519; Štrekelj, 1895–1898, 589); *lintvert* (Pajek, 1884, 89-91); *lintvor* (Dalmatin, 1584, 5. neoštevilčena stran; Megiser, 1603, 77); *lintvoren* (Stabej, 1997, 165); *lintvorn* (Svetokriški, 1691a, 62); *lintvrn* (Pleteršnik, 1894, 519); *lintvrt* (Pleteršnik, 1894, 519)” (Makarovič, 2001, 28).



Fig. 1: Zvonko Čoh, illustration of the fight of the hero with the dragon accompanying the tale Ad Lintverna (Tratar, 2007).

attributes are aimed primarily at the quality of this animal, which is that it is absolutely dangerous to humans, meaning that it is more dangerous than any existing animal or living creature. Given this quality, its attributes change in different social circumstances and the monster either breathes fire, is incredibly fast, extremely strong, gigantic, has multiple heads symbolizing multiple lives, and so on. Furthermore, this monster lives in an environment that is inaccessible to humans as a habitat. Thus, 1.) with these properties the dragon primarily represents the ultimate danger to man, which the human community living in the same area cannot remove; 2.) the monster's habitat is inaccessible to man. This reinforces its dangerous power and makes human confrontation and domination over it an impossible task. It has an extraordinary power beyond human power, and one which renders man incapable of an equal encounter or the ability to eventually prevail over it, this monster is man's adversary. It belongs to another world than man and represents man's opposite, his absolute otherness. This is expressed in characteristics that are the opposite of those desired for humans – it is ugly, disgusting, and horrifying to humans. The interests and actions of this monster are contrary to the will of the society. What's more, its actions affect society. It is an enemy of society. It represents the forces that are an existential threat to society. The goal is to overcome these forces and destroy the power of the monster.

According to the ontology of the dragon, a hero who defeats the dragon must have two necessary attributes: 1.) he must have abilities that exceed those of an ordinary person. It is characteristic of this hero that he exceeds the capacities of human action. This can make him divine or a demigod or a being with divine qualities. 2.) His activities are essentially not aimed at the realization of private, individual and particular aims. This hero is a representative of higher interests. This characteristic clearly shows in the context of national revival.

The sketched ontology of the dragon that lives in a world inaccessible to man, completely foreign to humans, and which is the other of humans, which endangers humanity and represents the ultimate danger that must be eliminated, establishes a matrix in which a hero defeats the dragon. It has gradually formed over time, yet, the genealogy of the dragon leads to the ancient mythologies that speak of a number of dragon-like monsters. The Babylonian myth of the genesis of the world from about the third millennium BC speaks of the monster Tiamat (sea), the dragon of the chaos of antiquity, the personification of sea water and the ancestor of the universe and deities. The hero Marduk, the Babylonian god of agriculture and the spring sun, exterminates Tiamat and thus becomes the state god of Babylonia (Guirand, 1986, 49, 51, 53, 54; Bellinger, 1997, 284, 447). In the Hebrew song of creation, Tiamat is called the depth (Bellinger, 1997, 447). The myth of defeating the dragon played an important role in the religions of the Hittites and the Canaanites. The Hittites ritually recited the myth of the battle between the storm god and the dragon (*illuyankas* meant the dragon or a serpent), on the occasion of the New Year festival, *purulli*. In this myth the storm god, vanquished a first time, ends by triumphing not by virtue of his own heroism, but with the help of a human being (Eliade, 139–144). Different species of serpent dragons appear in ancient Greek myths. Python is a dragon who pursued the pregnant goddess Leto because he knew that one day her son Apollo would kill him. Python was killed by the god Apollo (Bellinger, 1997, 366). Typhon (Greek Typhón means smoking, Latin Typhon, Greek Typhoeús) is 1.) a giant monster from the underworld of Hades which has serpentine legs and a hundred dragon heads; is the embodiment of the destructive forces of nature, e.g. volcanic eruptions; is 2.) a terrifying monster with snakes for legs and wings that covered the sun. Hydra (Hýdra is a water snake) is a nine-headed sea monster from Lerna in ancient Greece which destroys everything with its poisonous breath. Each time her head is cut off, two new ones grow in its place, until Heracles burns off her cervical vertebrae with the help of his nephew. Ladon (Gr. Ládon) is 1.) a demonic snake-dragon with a hundred heads that guards the tree with golden apples until Heracles kills it. 2.) He is a river god in Arcadia and the personification of the river of the same name. Cetus (Greek Kéto, Ceto or Latin Cētō) is a sea monster in ancient Greece. The Greek hero Perseus cut off Medusa's head and rescued Andromeda from the monster Cetus and took her as his wife. Kadem (Greek Kádmos, Latin Cadmus) was a Phoenician king who killed a dragon in Boeotia and planted its teeth in the ground, from which grew soldiers who helped him build the city of Thebes. A serpentine dragon in Colchis under the Caucasus guards the Golden Fleece, which Jason steals to take the usurped throne from his uncle. Then he kills a dragon in the swamp in what is today

the city of Ljubljana. In reference to this legend, the city of Ljubljana has the dragon in its heraldic arms. In Judaism, the dragon is a monster from ancient times, the embodiment of chaotic forces and the anti-god power that must be eliminated. It is sometimes equated with the giant snake Leviathan. In the Bible, God punishes “with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent” (Isaiah 27: 1). He slays the sea monster. This concept of a dangerous dragon-like monster that is slayed by God is inherited by Christianity. In the legends of the Middle Ages however the dragon slayer is a saint. In Christian eschatology, the dragon is a snake-like monster that appears in the biblical book of Revelation (written by John). He sweeps away the stars from the sky with his tail and throws them to earth. Like the ancient Greek Python, the dragon in scripture pursues a pregnant woman and wants to swallow her child when it is born. God rescues the woman by having the earth swallow up a river of water spewed out by the dragon. The woman’s offspring contends with him (Bellinger, 1997, 503).

THE DRAGON SLAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN CODEX AND MYTHOPOETIC HERITAGE

Jacques Le Goff interprets the Romanesque as a world of battle between virtue and vice, between good and evil, the righteous and the corrupt. In the Carolingian Renaissance (eighth to ninth century), the sublime warrior Saint Michael fought the dragon. He attacked the beast in the new Christian mythology of salvation, and then the knights, the military aristocracy in its social ascent joined the clergy in fighting the monster with bishops occupying a special place, thus emphasizing their symbolic power (Le Goff, 1980, 175). The well-known legend of Saint George appeared only in the twelfth century (Nebeški zavetniki, 1996, 238) or in the eleventh century according to Le Goff (Le Goff, 1980, 175). In the thirteenth century, Jacobus de Voragine included it in the famous collection of hagiographies *Legenda aurea*. The “iconic” image and scene of Saint George on horseback as a warrior and fighting the dragon was uncommon prior to the thirteenth century, although it does appear in the twelfth century in the tympanum of the Cathedral of Ferrara, and on a capital at Vézelay (Maddocks, 1989, 29).

George is said to be a Christian, Roman knight who was born in the fourth century in Cappadocia. One day, in a swamp near the town of Sylene in the Libyan province, he defeated the dragon which had been poisoning the locals with its breath. They gave the dragon sheep to keep it from coming near the people, and when they ran out of sheep, they began to sacrifice humans. When it was the turn of the king’s daughter, George came to rescue her. He stabbed the dragon and brought it to the city using the princess’s belt. Citizens had to convert to Christianity in exchange for George killing the monster (Nebeški zavetniki, 1996, 238). George rescued the girl, as well as the kingdom, that is, the political formation and the system. In this legend George represents feudal society as self-imagined, that is in the hierarchical order, analyzed by George Duby, viewed from the top down as follows: the Clergy, Nobility, and the Third Estate. As highlighted



Fig. 2: Anonymous (Gorizia workshop), Saint George Slaying the Dragon, around 1410–1420, Breg near Preddvor, succursal Church of St Leonard. Tempera, canvas, 175 x 174 cm (NG S 1497, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana).

by Duby, this feudal order was restored in the twelfth century (Duby, 1985). The function of the legend of Saint George, which appears exactly at this time, is a good fit with the goal of promotion of this order and the highest status being assigned to the Christian Church, which is also the one that legitimizes secular authority. The legend of Saint George therefore served religious propaganda and the consolidation of the political role of the Church as an institution.

The ontological status of hagiography as such is significant, as it refers to a biography of an allegedly real person, a martyr or a saint, who serves as a model for believers. André Jolles, defining the “simple”, in his explanation non-artistic verbal forms, also



Fig. 3: Saint George. Original: Friderich von Villach, workshop, c. 1430, fresco, Church of St Cantianus, Selo pri Žirovnici. Copy of the fresco, 1957 (Vladimir Makuc), tempera, canvas, 197 x 121 cm (NG S 1456, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana).

analysed the form of a legend. He resorts to the Latin word *imitation*, commonly used in the Middle Ages, in order to denote the specific way in which a *vita* of a saint must be *imitabile*. Accordingly, the life of the saint as represented by the legend must look different from the way it would look in a “historical” biography. The form of a legend thus *makes* the saint (Jolles, 2017, 28–32). Jolles chose the case of Saint George as an example to present how the saint stands before us, worthy of imitation, inimitable – as



Fig. 4: Saint George slaying the dragon, beginning of the fifteenth century, Church of Saint Štefan in Zaniograd. Fresco (Wikimedia Commons).

a figure who corresponds perfectly with the need to imitate. According to Jolles, Saint George, “about whose historical existence nothing is known,” made its way from antiquity into the West. The Roman Emperor Constantine the Great first built him a church, later his relics were carried from the Orient to Paris, and at the end of the millennium and the beginning of the new one, his shape changes: “Saint George is no longer a martyr; he becomes a dragon killer and the rescuer of the virgin” (Jolles, 2017, 37–38). If we believe modern hagiography or Le Goff, a long time of at least seven centuries elapsed between the death of George and hagiography about him. Jolles himself noticed that as a rule some fifty years must elapse between the death of the candidate for sainthood and the opening of the proceedings. The process of sanctification that has been followed since the papacy of Urban VII takes place in the form of a court trial (Jolles, 2017, 21). The large distance between the time when a hagiography was written and the life of the person it was written about is significant because evidence and witnesses fade away or disappear with temporal distance. In the case of Saint George, this period spans centuries. Beside the “classical” legend about Saint George, modern hagiography notes that George was more likely a martyr who was put to death at Diospolis in Palestine before the time of Constantine (Nebeški zavetniki, 1996, 238). Such a remark impugns the first statement about the life of George, yet its basic effect is not that it produces doubt about the existence of George as a real person, but on the contrary, it strengthens



Fig. 5: Hans Georg Geiger von Geigerfeld, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, c. 1641, oil, canvas, 265 x 151,5 cm (NG S 1946, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana).



Fig. 6: Anonymous, Saint George Against the Dragon, 1923. Painted *panjska končnica*, wood (Photo: Marko Habič. Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, inv. Nr. EM7220).

the statement that he was a real person, only the facts about his life differ somewhat from the legend. However, the presence of the dragon in any case partly converts the report on a real life into a fictional discourse or at least shifts biography to a metaphorical level. In the Christian code, miracle in the legend testifies to God's presence and intervention, because, as Thomas Aquinas defined it: "Things which are done by God, beyond causes known to us, are called miracles" (Jolles, 2017, 22). A miracle related to a saint in a legend therefore functions to strengthen the narrative and not the other way around. In the case of Saint George, the miracle in defeating the dragon, strengthens the hero and relates his act to God's intervention.

In the legacy of Karel Štrekelj there are four poems about Saint George (no. 626, no. 627, no. 628 and no. 629 in Štrekelj, 1898, 589–592) slaying a dragon to be found from 1841³, 1845⁴, 1838⁵ and 1887⁶. In three versions from Carniola, the

3 Anonymous. Sveta Marjeta, sveti Jurij in zmaj, 1841 (Carniola no. 626. Štrekelj, 1898, 589).

4 Written by Matevž Ravnikar-Požencan in 1845 (Carniola no. 627. Štrekelj, 1898, 589–590).

5 Written by Matevž Ravnikar-Požencan in 1838 (Carniola no. 628. Štrekelj, 1898, 590–591).

6 Written by Ivan Šašelj in 1887 (told by Marija Skuba from Adlešiči, White Carniola, no. 629. Štrekelj, 1898, 591–592).



Fig. 7: Maksim Gaspari, *Sveti Jurij*, postcard, *Družba svetega Cirila in Metoda*, 1912. Depicted is a custom of *jurjevo* horse riding from *Adlešiči* in *Bela krajina* with *Zeleni Jurij* and the typical birch tree in the background (Gaspari, 2000, 137).

scene is a white castle above the lake, inhabited by a dragon⁷ that demands human sacrifice. It is the turn of the family that inhabits the castle to offer up one of their own and the stepmother suggests that Marjetica be sacrificed to the dragon. In the title of a poem from 1841 by an anonymous poet she is called Saint Marjeta. The girl meets a juvenile (“*pobič mlad*”) (no. 626) or George the gendarme (“*Juri orožnik*”) (no. 627) or sacred George himself (no. 628), who helps her. Marjeta (no. 626 and no. 628) or Jurij (George) (no. 627) makes a daisy cross across the dragon, and then the girl throws a belt (“*pasica*”) around the dragon’s neck and the dragon completely obeys. In two versions (no. 626 and no. 627), the castle then collapses or sinks (no. 627). In two songs (no. 626 and no. 628), Marjeta is called a witch (*copernica* or *copernca*). Jurij or George rescues Marjetica, the daughter of the lord of the castle, but does not take her as his wife and accepts the kingdom offered by the king. His mission is to convert the population to Christianity. In the version from White Carniola, the start of spring which George

7 The dragon is called “the strange beast” (“*čudna zvir*”), “the evil serpent” (“*hudi zmij*”) (no. 626), “the evil worm, a dangerous lintvern” (“*neguden červ, lintvern hud*”) (no. 627), the lintvern (no. 628), the dragon (no. 629).



Fig. 8: Maksim Gaspari, *Jurjevo*, watercolor, gouache, 1924 (Slovene Ethnographic Museum collection).

brings is emphasized (silent dew, dark green, snows breaking in the mountains, and roses blooming on the rosehips “tihe rose, dubrave zelene, u planinah snegi prekopnijo, i po šipku rožice procviču”). In this version, the king has no male offspring, only a daughter who he must sacrifice. George meets her and promises her salvation if she accepts the Christian faith. The king offers him the kingdom and his daughter for his wife. George refuses the offer and only asks to gather “enough priests to celebrate masses for all souls” (“dosta duhovnikov, da mašuju maše za vse duše”, Štrekelj, 1898, 592).

The poem called *Saint George Kills the Dragon and Rescues the King's Daughter* from White Carniola (Štrekelj, 1898, 591–592, no. 629) speaks of the hero from the Slovene or Slavic pantheon, Zeleni Jurij (the Green George or the Green Yuri). Zeleni Jurij is a mythological character, a rider on a green or white horse heralding the arrival of spring. “Jurjevanje” is a holiday that is celebrated on “Jurjevo” (Saint George’s Day), i.e. north of the Drava River on April 23, and south of the Drava on April 24. If on “jurjevo” the snow has already melted, Zeleni Jurij arrives on the green horse, while in case the snow still remains, he rides on a white horse. In folk rituals, Zeleni Jurij is personified by a young man dressed in green or wrapped in ivy.



Fig. 9: Maksim Gasper, postcard with a motive of Zeleni Jurij (Maksim Gaspari collection, Slovene Ethnographic Museum).

On the meadow, he fights with the raboly, a young man dressed in straw who personifies winter. Zeleni Jurij is the patron saint of cattle and horses, who protects against snakes, brings fertility and defeats the enemy in a duel. Zeleni Jurij represents the power of the sun, which wakes up the earth and vegetation in spring (Kropej, 2007b). Monika Kropej established that both Zeleni Jurij and Marjetica were marked as the tenth children and such child is to be a deity, a demonic creature, or a witch/wizard. Zeleni Jurij is a deity who brings renewal and fertility in spring, while his sister Marjetica is dedicated to the female counterpart of this deity (Kropej, 2000, 75). The poem (Štrekelj, 1898, 591–592, no. 629) indicates that Zeleni Jurij, heralding the arrival of spring, comes on horse from afar, from the land of eternal spring and the land of the dead, that is, from the Veles' land called Vyrej, across the bloody sea, through a mountain to a flat field (Hrženjak, 1999, 99). In the poem the dragon is called the water god, indicating the Proto-Slavic god of the dead, Veles, who lives beyond the sea and is sometimes presented as “The Angry Beast” (“ljut zvižer”) (Hrženjak after R. Katičič, 1999, 100). In addition, Zeleni Jurij can have a brother or a half-brother who aims to kill him and who finally treacherously shoots him. This creature is called Jarnik. The name originates from “jar”, which means “angry” when used as an adjective (“ljut”), wrathful, the “Jara” snake, to rage (“razjariti”) (Kelemina, 1930b, 13). On Jurjevo when the most beautiful juvenile is chosen to be decorated with flowers so completely that they cover his clothes to personify Zeleni Jurij or Vesnik, he is accompanied by Rabolj, who is wrapped in straw or sometimes fur. They fight and Zeleni Jurij wins (Kelemina, 1930a, 51).

Zeleni Jurij is also connected to the mythological character of Kresnik, which is much present in the mythopoetic heritage. Zmago Šmitek explored the topology of the Slovenian tradition about Kresnik (Šmitek, 2009). Šmitek raised the issue of Kresnik's connection with the Old Slavic pantheon, his identification with the thunder god, as assumed by N. Mikhailov. In doing so, he draws attention to the fact that in the early stages of the myth of the fight with the snake demon, the hero and the god of war appear as two separate persons, while in the later stages, individual characteristics merge (Šmitek, 1998, 133). In the Slovenian folk tales Kresnik rescues his sister, who has been trapped in a cave, from the dragon who is Kresnik's adversary. After the rescue, Kresnik marries his own sister (Kropej, 2007a). Šmitek finds the difference between Jurij and Kresnik, such as the fact that Jurij has a close connection with water (Šmitek after Ivanov and Toporov, as well as Kelemina, 1998, 130–131), while Kresnik is a solar hero who performs a series of important acts for humanity during his life, among which, as with Herakles, who is also a solar hero, twelve are especially important (Kelemina, 1930b, 9). However, in Kresnik's "mythological" cycle, the components of the basic Indo-European myth about the hero's fight with the snake demon and the myth about the annual return and wedding of the deity of vegetation and fertility (Zeleni Jurij) are intertwined. Jurij, whose name is etymologically connected with swamp and water, became contaminated with *irej*, *vyrej*, which meant the paradise that lies beyond the water. Kresnik is connected to Zeleni Jurij through the mention of the "bloody sea", Kresnik's incestuous marriage. Three poems about Saint George from Carniola recorded by Štrekelj take place in the white castle above the lake, like those which appear in narrations about Kresnik at the castle of Deva. Deva, a Slavic deity, also called "devica", virgin, is the king's daughter, who was kidnapped by Trdoglav, who locks her in the castle. The princess's name is Marjetica. Her brother is determined to rescue her and the two wish to marry, so she jumps out of the castle window. This jump is called "Devin skok" (Maiden's jump or German Jungfernsprung). Still, Trdoglav does not want to give her up. The narration says that the villain turned around and destroyed half of the castle with its tail ("hudoba se je zasuknila, je z repom pol gradu pobila") (Kelemina, 1930a, 53), indicating that Trdoglav is a dragon. "Devin skok" has, Šmitek claims, mythological semantics and is related to the trinity of deities: Perun – Veles – Mokoš (Šmitek, 2002). Such a white castle above the lake as pictured in the Carniolan poems on Saint George can actually be found in Bled, Carniola.

THE DRAGON IN SLAVIC MYTHOLOGY. THE DUEL BETWEEN PERUN AND VELES

In Slavic mythology, Perun had a primary place among the gods. He was that mythological person who pointed in the direction of the monotheistic development of the religious system, because he was clearly perceived as the main god, as a privileged god who was connected with all the functional-social layers – with magical-legal, military and natural-production. Only Perun was the hero-winner in the plot

of the main myth in the Slavic mythopoetic tradition. During the Christianization of the Russians, the idol of Perun was erased, as he represented the threat of being equated with the Christian God, claims a prominent scholar of Slavic mythology Vladimir N. Toporov (Toporov, 2002, 29). In the archaic structure of the mythical epic Perun the thunderer (because he personifies thunder-lightning) is presented as the one who strikes-kills someone, presumably his opponent. This myth shows Perun as warlike, terrible, and armed. Perun's opponent is a representative of the forces of chaos – the devil, the evil one, Satan in the Christian code and the dragon in the “pagan” code. Perun's opponent in the duel is associated with the earth, mother-earth, in various Indo-European mythopoetic traditions, his name is determined by words derived from the Indo-European roots uel, uol, ual, which all meant below. Perun's opponent was Veles/Volos, whose name derives from the same root (Toporov, 2002, 36–38). The fundamental function of Veles was the patronage of livestock, but also other areas of economic and productive activity with the representation of fertility and wealth. Goods such as fields, bread, and the home were the purview of Veles/Volos, so people associated with him a special, inner feeling: he was “ours” (Toporov, 2002, 40). Vel-persons have the nature of a snake (in the development of the Vedic mythological tradition, Varuna in the image of the world ocean embraces the earth as a kind of dragon/serpent, the snakes of Vela have a similar meaning), which connects Veles with the sea (Saint Nicholas as the Christianized successor of Veles, is the patron saint of sailors) (Toporov, 2002, 43).

This mythological context brings the tale of Saint George closer to other tales of dragons in Slovene and Slavic mythology, as well as to the Mesopotamian myth of the genesis of the world in which the god Marduk kills the monster Tiamat – the primordial goddess who personifies the sea. Veles and his transformations are associated with water. The characteristic motif of the closure of water, expressed in the Vedic tradition, Vela's, or in the reconstruction, also Veles' control of water does not bring anything good, as the potential of water remains unrevealed. The goal of the antagonist, which is Perun in the highest instance, is the liberation of the waters and their use for the benefit of plants, animals and people. The motif of holding back, closing the waters, which is essential for Veles and other Vel-persons, is connected by the analogy with the motif of holding back, penning up herds. After Perun's victory, they were confiscated and passed to a new owner (Toporov, 2002, 44).

In Slovenian tales of dragons, the death of a dragon living in a lake or in a mountain next to it, killed by a mythical dragon slayer, often causes the lake to overflow, which means the release of water. A dragon living in a lake or a mountain can cause flooding. Perun confronts the serpent god, the dragon Veles, because he came from his world, the land of the dead that lies beyond the water, where he accompanies the souls of the dead into Perun's sphere and closes the waters (Hrovatin summarizes Ivanov after Toporov, 2007, 110). In a variant of the Great Flood, the water that floods the previously happy valley seems to be God's punishment for human corruption, as in the Bible (Genesis 6:13, 6:17). In another variant, the dragon that lives in the lake destroys the dam; the water rushes out, the lake dries out and

the dragon dies, allowing people to settle. The legend about the flowing lake speaks of the settlement of space, represents a version of the cosmic flood and the renewal of the world, and in versions with a dragon, also represents the cosmogonic myth of the creation of the world, the beginning of life and human settlement (Hrovatin, 2007, 111). The function of water seems to be a boundary between those spaces where man can and cannot live (Hrovatin, 2007, 109).

In the matrix of the duel between Perun and Veles, Perun pursues his opponent and threatens to kill him. Veles hides from him, but Perun drives him out of his temporary refuge each time – until the villain finds his ancient place – the underground (chthonic) waters. Toporov recognizes the theme of this matrix in the choice between life and death (Toporov, 2002, 34–35). Perun stands on the side of life, while Veles is the embodiment of death itself and its kingdom, where death is transformed into “new” life, life force, fertility, livestock, offspring, wealth. The fecundity of snakes and the connection of the snake with gold, money, gifts of nature, wealth, with self-rebirth and eternal life suggests that Veles was also characterized by similar qualities. In the conception of the afterlife, Veles plays the role of a shepherd in a pasture where the souls of the dead graze, similar to herds of domestic animals, and has a similar function to a snake that controls, grazes and protects the herd. Toporov observes that in this myth the herd (livestock) sometimes belongs to Perun the Thunderer, and sometimes to Veles, and therefore the herd appears as a kind of exchange object. The subject of the dispute is the deficit that needs to be supplemented. Supplementation is the conceptual basis of this myth, the core around which everything revolves (Toporov, 2002, 46). In this point, Toporov’s definition of the matrix of the main myth is in accordance with Vladimir Propp’s definition of the function of the dramatic trigger related to the functions of dramatic personae, which is the lack of something – because one family member lacks or desires something, he or she acquires that (Propp, 2009, 35). In the fairy tales which are the transformation of the main myth, Toporov claims, the protagonist (the third brother, the younger brother, Ivan, etc.) and his antagonist (dragon/snake, dragon, monster, etc.) appear, as well as the kidnapped, hidden, imprisoned underground, well-guarded emperor’s daughter, who is finally rescued and freed after a duel, and who becomes the hero’s wife, as well as bringing the empire as a dowry. According to Toporov’s interpretation, the emperor’s daughter appears in the function of the herd, lost and gained after a duel (Toporov, 2002, 46–47). In the transformations of the main myth, motifs are expressed in late Slavic traditions, as well as earlier, in which characters are often gathered in new variants of triads. Toporov mentions three examples of heroes from the Russian tradition who represent such triadic schemes – Ilya Muromets, Dobrynya Nikitich and Alyosha Popovich. All of them are victorious over the dragon (Toporov, 2002, 52–55).

The motif of a hero defeating a dragon appears in literary fiction also in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, which refers to a sixth-century Scandinavian pagan setting.

FAIRY-TALES: A JUVENILE THAT RESCUES THE PRINCESS AND BECOMES A KING

In the poem from White Carniola discussed before (Štrekelj, 1898, 591–592, no. 629), Saint George is connected with the motif of the tithe. The king must “give his daughter to the dragon for a tenth, a tithe” (“dat’ zmaju za deseto”, Štrekelj, 1898, 591). In Slovenian folklore the motif of the tenth daughter is much more common than the motif of the tenth son. The tenth daughter was called either “desetnica” or “rojenica” in the Carniola region, while the tenth son was named “desetnik” or “rojenik” in the Carniola region and “kresnik” in the Primorska region. In the Slovenian folk tradition one of the main characteristics of the rojenice and desetniki is prophecy or fatal destiny (Kropej, 2000, 79, 84, 81). Štrekelj collected the poems on the tenth daughter under the numbers 310–315 (Štrekelj, 1989, 352–360). Monika Kropej summarized the characteristics related to the tenth child in the folk tradition after Josip Pajek (Pajek, 1884, 17): 1. The tenth child represents the tithe and has to leave home; 2. The tenth child is connected with the sacred; 3. The tenth child is clairvoyant; 4. The tenth child is compelled to roam the world; 5. One must warmly welcome such a person, or they are committing a mortal sin and will be punished by thunder, lightening, or death (Kropej, 2000, 76). First Niko Kuret in 1956 when the German translation of Irish fairy-tales was published and then later Dušan Ludvik in 1960 paid attention to the Irish heritage about the tenth child: it denotes a tithe which should be sacrificed to Deachma. Dušan Ludvik ascertained that originally the tithe, which was a kind of sacrifice, was part of a religious ritual. Ludvik found Greek sources confirming that the tenth part of the booty or harvest was sacrificed to the gods, while the Slovenian and Irish traditions, familiar with human tithes, have a historical basis (Ludvik, 1960, 84). The etymological origin leads to the Irish term *deachma* (tithe), *deachmadh*, which meant “roaming the world” or exile in the ultimate meaning of the tithe, for *deachmadh* is an ordinal number (tenth) derived from the Old Irish *deich*. The Irish term *Deachma* has the same meaning as the German term *deheme* (Ludvik, 1960, 82–83). The poem recorded by Josip Pajek on Margetica (Pajek, 1884, 17–18, also no. 314 in Štrekelj, 1898, 359) shows that the tenth daughter represents death.⁸ Radoslav Katičič and Vitomir Belaj established that the character of the tenth brother was not imported from Ireland. Slavic traditions, Baltic and Irish parallels, as well as the broader European tradition, all testify to an Indo-European origin. The tenth brother who leaves home to roam the world, returns to his father’s (Perun’s) home, and marries his sister. The tenth brother, Jurij, is thus the son of Perun. The same story is only shortened and simplified in folk heritage (Kropej 2000, 84–85). As Toporov also mentions sacrifice to the Veles-Volos god (Toporov, 2002, 45), there are several aspects that establish connections between the versions of the matrix of the dragon slayer appearing in different contexts.

8 Cf. also Milko Matičetov’s cognition that the tenth sister is no ordinary victim of death, but she helps “the white lady” (Kropej, 2000, 80).

In the Irish fairy tale *Liam Donn* there is a wild duck that hatched twelve ducklings and kicked one duckling away. Among the twelve hatched ducklings “none was left for the Deahma,” says the wiseman in the tale, therefore, the old duck sacrificed the banished duck to Deahma. The twelfth child has to be left to faith, similarly as in the Slovenian folk tales the tenth child is destined to wander the world without peace and rest (Širok, 1961, 23). In analogy to the scene with the ducklings, Liam Donn, the son of the King of Ireland, as one of twelve sons had to be sacrificed by his parents to Deahma, which in the context of the fairy tale means to go from home out into the world. The motif of human sacrifice to the deity is explicitly presented here as banishment, exile. Liam Donn sets out to rescue the Greek king’s daughter, Deahmina Una, who, like him, was dedicated to Deahma by her father, who had twelve daughters. After a difficult journey, the young man reaches the place where Deahmina Una is chained to a rock, waiting to be devoured by a monster from the sea. Liam Donn fights the monster three times and defeats it. Finally, when the princess finds the hero through a shoe (Cinderella motif), she marries him. In the case of this story, the motif of the tithe and the hero who defeats the monster that lives in the water and saves the king’s daughter who has been given in sacrifice are connected, as they are in the White Carniolan poem about Saint George. The matrix of this fairy tale and the story of Saint George is the same. Liam Donn saves the land of Greece from a monster that no one else can defeat. The essential difference is in the outcome, which in this case does not speak about Christianization like the legend of Saint George. Instead, it leads to a marriage between an Irish prince and a Greek princess, which symbolically rounds off the whole of the European Christian world, as it politically connects the south-east and north-west of Europe, or rather connects Greek and Celtic mythology.

The Tale of the Giants, which is similar in matrix to the story of Liam Donn, is not about a tithe, but about a poor boy, the only son, who sets out to make his way in the world. He finds employment as a shepherd with a farmer. The boy violates the ban on entering the land of the giants, killing them (by cutting off the head from the body, which is connected with the belief that the head can be reattached to the body and come to life) and thereby obtains magical objects: “fiery a sword, a magic wand and a sparkling black horse to catch the spring wind” (Širok, 1961, 6) and a castle with great wealth. When defining the morphology of the fairy tale, Vladimir Propp established the magical agent that helps the hero to victory to be a typical element of the fairy tale (Propp, 2009, 43). In the Slovenian translation the hero is called Janez. As Janez is the most common Slovenian name which has even sometimes been used as a nickname for a typical Slovene man, the name Janez obviously suggests the hero is a Slovene. Janez departs to the “Eastern Land” to rescue the king’s daughter, who was intended as a sacrifice to a terrible monster that lives in the sea. The young man defeats the monster, and then someone else reaps the victory, until the boy is found through a lost shoe. The young man refuses the king’s offer of half the kingdom and half his property. His only desire is to marry the king’s daughter. The young man takes the princess to his country, to Ireland, where the young couple settle independently in a castle with the great wealth



Fig. 10: Gvido Birolla, illustration for the fairy tale Liam Donn (Širok, 1961, 31).



Fig. 11: Illustration of the fight between the hero and the dragon accompanying the tale Of a Juvenile Who Defeated the Dragon adapted by Anja Štefan (Illustration by Zvonko Čoh. Štefan, 2019, 186–187).

the boy acquired from the giant. This fairy tale, which is also a version of the matrix about the hero who defeats the dragon and rescues the king's daughter, is interesting for the consideration of Slovenian versions because of the motif of a poor, simple boy who leaves home due to existential hardship. The boy is "small, insignificant" (Širok, 1961, 13). This motif brings this version closer to the well known Slovenian fairy tale about Peter Klepec, who is also a small and initially weak boy, but who is empowered with the help of magical objects.

In Slovenian folklore, we also find a fairy tale about a young man who defeats the dragon and rescues the king's daughter (Resnik Dremelj, 2010a in 2010b), which was recently adapted for children (Štefan, 2019).

This fairy tale features a poor shepherd who lives with his mother, but then leaves home due to existential hardship. The hermit tells the boy about a princess who is destined for a lintvern, a dragon, who lives in a lake and has such power that if he swings his tail, he can flood the whole city. The dragon from the Bible sweeps away the stars and Trdoglav, Marjetica's husband, destroys the castle with his tail, the dragon in the Slavic mythology is related to flooding. In the fairy tale the hermit also tells the shepherd that a reward has been offered for anyone who can rescue her; he will have the hand of the princess in marriage and rule the kingdom. The hermit introduces the boy to a magical

element, salt, which he should throw at the dragon so that he can cut off the main head, the middle one of the nine heads, and thus kill it. The shepherd slays the dragon and cuts off half of each tongue, collecting them and eventually using them as proof that he has killed the dragon, for a villain had stolen the heads of the dragon in order to obtain the prize. The young man and the princess are happy to marry each other and take over the royal court. The obvious motif to be found here is a poor country boy who ascends from the lowest to the highest social-economic class. The message conveyed could be summarized as follows: any individual (in this case we have a male), even a poor one without any privilege at birth or in the social environment he originates from, can succeed at any task if he is clever and cautious, as well as if he listens to those who know. The magical objects could be understood as a means to an end which is needed to achieve a goal. In this case, success means that the situation at the end is diametrically opposed to the situation the character faces at the start of the tale. At the end of the tale, the protagonist will have a carefree life expressed in the form of great wealth, a spouse from the highest social strata, whose function is to affiliate the individual to this class, and finally, the acquisition of political power. No particular details about these points, such as who was the king or where exactly did it take place, are needed in order to understand the message. The story functions in the realm of fiction with no particular references to the real world, but it also functions in the realm of everyday reality.

Finally, the motif of a shepherd might seem culturally self-understood in a folktale from this region, because poverty was significant and having animals grazing in a pasture was common. The country children often worked as shepherds. Yet, one might as well keep in mind the fact that mythological characters were also shepherds. Kresnik was a shepherd, Veles was a shepherd, and the herd was the reason for the clash between Perun and Veles, Jesus is the Good shepherd (Gospel of John 10:11 and 10:14). If the fairy tale matrix of the dragon slayer is related to the mythopoetic versions of this matrix, this motif gains a deeper meaning. The Christian codex, in which “The Lord is my shepherd” (A Psalm of David, Psalm 23:1), speaks of the people as a herd and God or Jesus as the people’s guardian and guide. In the mythopoetic versions of the dragon slayer matrix, the princess has come to symbolize the herd as she is the king’s daughter meaning the successor of political power over the population, i.e. the “herd.” From this perspective, the shepherd, as our fairy tale hero initially is, is set as a guardian of the herd, indicating that the protagonist is the future king, that is, a political sovereign.

CONCLUSION: FROM MYTHS TO FAIRY TALES

Jakob Kelemina ascertained that modern fairy tales have their genealogical origins in mythologies. He differentiated between fairy tales and myths. The narrator comprehends fairy tales as a fictional discourse, while people believed in myths (mythos) and legends (German Sagen). Strictly speaking, Kelemina wrote, myths are tales that deal with the content of pagan religions, in which only higher beings appear. We know very few such “pure” myths in Slovenia. Legend has evolved from myth, with higher beings given human characteristics, while at the same time the mythical core has been veiled



Fig. 12: Anonymous, A Hero Fighting a Dragon. Painted *panjska končnica*, wood (Photo: Blaž Verbič. Slovenian Ethnographic Museum).

(Kelemina, 1930, 5). The mythical core is even more veiled in fairy tales. It is worth examining Kelemina's definition of fairy tales in order to discuss their ontological status. Kelemina's differentiation of these narratives (myths, legends, and fairy tales) is not grounded in defining the status of the narrative in relation to reality. One could pose the question of whether a story could be considered as "true" in relation to reality. Considering this issue, the fact that the category of "truthfulness" or objectiveness in reporting on real events has been efficiently disputed (see for instance John Fiske's discussion on "transparency fallacy", addressed in reference to another sort of discourse, but still useful as a critique of the referential function of texts in general; Fiske, 1987) may not be disregarded. This question could be reformulated as follows: is the text's main function a referential one (using Roman Jakobson's differentiation of linguistic functions, Jakobson, 1981)? This problem is quickly solved with the recognition of the illuccionary dimension of a literary discourse, following John L. Austin's acknowledgment that each speech act does not necessarily have a locutionary dimension, but has an illocutionary dimension (Austin, 1962), and the subsequent acknowledgement that writing or literature also consists of performing speech acts, which are actually illocutionary acts (Searle, 1975). The proper question is therefore not if fairy tales are fictional or "true" narratives in relation to reality, external to the text, but what is the effect of fairy tales, what do they *do* to people, how do they function in society.

As previously mentioned, Kelemina did not refer only to the issue addressed above, but he defined fairy tales as a fictional discourse and considered the relevance of *belief*

in regard to different sorts of narratives that can use the same matrices. The question of whether people believe in a certain narration might be linked to the question of genuineness of the text in relation to the external reality addressed above. Yet this is a twentieth century question, it is a question of the ontological status of the media. Kelemina's issue has to do with the semantics of the narrations in relation to the world view of the people who circulated them. In order to address this issue properly, one needs to understand the status of the myth in the context of mythical thought. Myth, as ascertained by Ernst Cassirer, "sees real identity. The 'image' does not represent the 'thing'; it *is* the thing; it does not merely stand for the object, but has the same actuality, so that it replaces the thing's immediate presence" (Cassirer, 1955, 38). Or, in the words of Henri Frankfort: "The imagery of myth is therefore by no means allegory." It is a cloak for abstract thought. "Myth, then, is to be taken seriously, because it reveals a significant, if unverifiable truth—we might say a metaphysical truth" (Frankfort, 1946, 7). The symbol is coalescent with what it signifies (Frankfort, 1946, 12). For the mythical consciousness, the world "is not merely contemplated or understood but is experienced emotionally in a dynamic reciprocal relationship" (Frankfort, 1946, 5). Accordingly, the mythical consciousness does not know an inanimate world. For mythical thought, the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge is meaningless. Also meaningless is the distinction between reality and appearance. "Whatever is capable of affecting mind, feeling, or will has thereby established its undoubted reality" (Frankfort, 1946, 11). The principle of mythical causality is established based on spatial and temporal proximity. Mythical thought does not know the impersonal, mechanical, and lawlike functioning of causality. It looks for the "who" and not for the "how." Mythical thought "looks for a purposeful will committing the act. [...] When the river does not rise, it has *refused* to rise" (Frankfort, 1946, 15). The river or gods intend to do something to people, therefore people give them gifts to establish a good relationship with them. Kelemina did not address the difference between "genres" of a myth, a legend and a fairy tale, but in fact noticed the effects of an epistemological shift that took place in Western society, which was a shift away from mythical thought and to a disenchanted cognition. From Kelemina's perspective, ancient myths occupy a "privileged" position, as people believed in them. They explained the world and its internal laws. A legend comprises some fictional elements, which are likely to be understood as fictional, or better said, understood in a metaphorical sense. A fairy tale comprises magical elements by rule, however they are not meant to be *believed*. A fairy tale is an abstraction. It abstracts characters, situations, meanings, leaving room for the receiver to fill in the missing gaps by him- or herself. A fairy tale is, contrary to a myth, open to individual projections. The genre of fairy tales as we know it today is attractive for children in particular because of this quality. The receiver can take these abstracted versions of the matrixes, which might have already appeared in other contexts and have proven to effectively convey certain messages, and apply them to one's own perspective of the world in order to better understand it.

OBLIKOVANJE PRAVLJIČNE MATRIKE UBIJALCA ZMAJA

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POVZETEK

Genealogija matrike ubijalca zmajev vodi do starodavnih indoevropskih mitologij. V prispevku avtorica preiskuje zgodnje predstave o zmaju in junaku, ki ga premaga, ter oba lika obravnava ontološko. Mitološka domišljija je bila zapletena in teh dveh likov ni predstavljala črno-belo. Postopoma pa se je razvila matrika, v kateri je zmaj začel predstavljati absolutno drugost človeka in dobrega ter tako postal tisto, kar je treba odpraviti, da se v družbi vzpostavi pravi red. Matrika se je razširila s krščanskim kodeksom v visokem srednjem veku, zlasti z legendo o svetem Juriju. Avtorica se posebej posveča primerom iz mitopoetskega izročila iz slovenskega prostora, kjer se lik sv. Jurija prepleta z Zelenim Jurijem, Kresnikom in slovanskim bogom Perunom. V pravljicah se matrika pojavi v svoji najbolj abstraktni obliki. Avtorica razpravlja o variacijah, ki se pojavljajo pri različnih uporabah matrike, v različnih epistemih in njihovih družbenih funkcijah.

Ključne besede: pravljica, ljudska pravljica, zmaj, mit, mitologija, slovanska mitologija, sveti Jurij, Zeleni Jurij, Kresnik, desetina

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