

# From the Tauriscan Gold Mine to the Goldenhorn and the Unusual Alpine Animal

Marjeta Šašel Kos

*Three themes are analysed in the article, which are related under certain aspects to each other. These are the discovery of a rich gold deposit in the land of the Taurisci, mentioned by the Greek historian, Polybius, and the geographer and historian, Strabo; the folk-tale of the Goldenhorn/Zlatorog, in which the search for gold and treasure is reflected; and the third, the peculiar Alpine animal mentioned by the same Greek writers. It could be interpreted as a mythic animal, although in view of the accurate description, the animal was probably an elk.*

## Gold Mine

Objects of gold were not unusual in Hallstatt period “princely” graves hidden under huge tumuli around Stična, Magdalenska gora, Novo mesto, Velike Malence, Podzemelj, Vače, and in the vicinity of other once mighty hill forts in Lower Carniola. By the time Aquileia was founded in 181 B.C., and various tribes of the Taurisci had already been settled in most of present-day Slovenia for several generations, the origins of these barrows with an empty grave in the middle, perhaps belonging to a mythical ancestor of a *gens* or tribe, had already been half-lost in the distant past. Memories, faded by then, of life in peace and war in once prosperous prehistoric “towns”, partly depicted on situlas, certainly gave rise to different legends and folk stories. The vital force of the Hallstatt period population had been destroyed, but the reasons for its decline, apart from the Celtic invasion, are not clear; they may range from wars, incursions of hostile tribes from the eastern direction, pestilence (possibly brought by the latter) and other epidemic diseases, to various internal factors.

The Celtic Taurisci brought with them a different culture and a different way of life; they settled in the plains, along the rivers and important roads, they engaged in long-distance trade and founded emporia. The material remains of the former inhabitants (despite the impoverished living conditions of their descendants) must have inspired in the Celtic newcomers images of considerable wealth and riches. The Taurisci were undoubtedly also seeking precious metals, as were the Italics, who had recently settled in northern Italy, both additionally prompted perhaps by stories of hidden treasure, robbed from the rich graves of the former inhabitants of the Alpine and subalpine regions, and occasional discoveries of gold and other rare metals in the same area.

This, roughly sketched, was the background against which Polybius’ fragmentary note about the gold mine, discovered in his time in the land of the Taurisci, may better be understood. This fragment of Polybius’ narrative has been preserved in Strabo and is

unfortunately devoid of any context (Polyb. 34.10.10-14 [= Strabo IV 6.12 C 208]); it has recently been twice interpreted from different aspects.<sup>1</sup> This passage has often been quoted, both in Greek and in various translations, so it will be sufficient here to paraphrase it in order to comment briefly on certain data it contains, which are important for our analysis. Strabo reported that in Polybius' time a gold mine was discovered near Aquileia, in the region of the Norican Taurisci, which was extremely convenient to exploit. The diggers only had to remove a relatively thin layer of the earth from the surface, varying from two to fifteen feet. Gold consisted of nuggets as big as a bean or a lupine, losing only one eighth of its weight in the course of smelting, although a part of it required more smelting. The deposit, which was exploited both by the Italics and the natives, caused the price of gold throughout Italy to drop by one third in two months. The Taurisci then expelled the Italian workers, establishing a monopoly of it. Strabo added that alluvial gold, too, was found in the rivers of that region, in addition to the primary deposits of gold, although in much smaller quantities. He concluded Polybius' report with a statement that, by his time, all the gold mines had come into the possession of the Romans.

Polybius referred to the gold mine in his 34th book, dedicated to geography, which he supposedly wrote between 144 and 129 B.C.,<sup>2</sup> however, he may have collected material for it during his travels in Cisalpine Gaul and the Alps before 150 B.C.<sup>3</sup> It can thus be postulated that the mine was discovered before this date, or, possibly, but less likely, in the second half of the 2nd century B.C. In any case, its discovery occurred before 129 B.C., the year of the expedition of the Roman general C. Sempronius Tuditanus against the Carni, Histri, Taurisci, and Iapodes, since Tuditanus' campaign is not mentioned in this context either by Polybius or Strabo. Whether Tuditanus' punitive expedition could in any way be related to the expulsion of the Italian seekers of ore deposits, gold-diggers and merchants by the Taurisci, is not at all certain; the two events are at any rate not connected in the sources. According to J. Šašel, however, the arrogant behaviour of the Taurisci probably did provoke a reaction from the Roman senate, and he considered Tuditanus' military operation a natural consequence for the recent events.<sup>4</sup> The offence of the Taurisci was in my opinion just one of several hostile actions undertaken by the Carni, Histri, Taurisci, and Iapodes against the Roman state. These peoples, except the Histri (defeated in 177 B.C.), were still relatively powerful, and disputed among themselves the transit route between the Balkan and Apennine peninsulas, a part of the important Amber Route. The geopolitical and strategic position of these transit regions was of enormous importance, and the Romans, too, wished to control them. The Carni had one of their strongholds at Tergeste, the Taurisci were powerfully based at their emporium at Nauportus, while the Iapodes, settled in the hinterland of Notranjska, directed their attacks towards the Nanos region (the pass of Ocra at Razdrto) and Tergeste.

As opposed to the Norican kingdom, which had a *hospitium publicum* with the Romans, attested in 113 B.C. when the Cimbri invaded Noricum and threatened Italy, but probably

<sup>1</sup> J. Šašel, *Miniera aurifera nelle Alpi Orientali, Aquileia Nostra* 45/46, 1974/75, 148-152 (= *Opera selecta*, 538-540); C. Eibner, *Keltisches Gold aus den Alpen*, in: *Lebendige Altertumswissenschaft. Festgabe zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres von Hermann Vetters*. Wien 1985, 91-94.

<sup>2</sup> K. Ziegler, Polybios, in: *RE* XXI,2 (1952), 1488-1489.

<sup>3</sup> P. Pédech, *La méthode historique de Polybe* (Coll. d'études anciennes), Paris 1964, 528-529, 564-565.

<sup>4</sup> Šašel (n. 1), 538. Thus also E. Swoboda, *Carnuntum. Seine Geschichte und seine Denkmäler*, Graz, Köln 1964<sup>4</sup>, 227 f.

of a much earlier date, the Taurisci were in general openly hostile to the Roman state.<sup>5</sup> G. Alföldy, who rejected any connection between the gold mine affair and Tuditanus' expedition, located the gold mine in the Norican kingdom.<sup>6</sup> First of all, the location of the mine must once more be briefly examined.



Fig. 1: Sites, rivers, mountains, and peoples mentioned in the text.  
Kraji, reke, gore in plemena, ki so omenjeni v besedilu.

Polybius located the gold mine in the country of the Taurisci, not far from Aquileia. The expression κατ' Ἀκυληϊῶν is not particularly precise and may have served only as a point of orientation for the readers of Polybius' *History*, meaning no more and no less than "in the sphere of influence" of Aquileia, or "in the broad hinterland" of the city. Aquileia was the northeasternmost colony in Cisalpine Gaul around the middle of the 2nd century B.C., and a point of geographical reference for areas outside the limits of Cisalpina. So the regions determined by the (relative) proximity of Aquileia may have comprised even a distant territory, not just the immediate hinterland of the city. In Polybius' time, there was no toponym east and north of Aquileia that could have served contemporary Greek and Roman readers as a point of geographical orientation.

The next problem posed by Polybius' text are the Norican Taurisci. The location of the Taurisci has until recently been controversial, since according to several scholars (who based their opinion mainly on the linguistic aspect), notably also G. Alföldy,<sup>7</sup> they would have been the original inhabitants of the Norican kingdom, getting their name from the Tauern Mts., whereas others, on the basis of ancient sources, have located them south of the Karavanke

<sup>5</sup> M. Šašel Kos, *The End of the Norican Kingdom and the Formation of the Provinces of Noricum and Pannonia*, *Akten des IV. intern. Koll. über Probleme des Provinzialröm. Kunstschaffens/Akti IV. mednarod. kolokvija o problemih rim. provincialne umetnosti*, ed. B. Djurić, I. Lazar (Situla 36), Ljubljana 1997, 21-24, with the relevant earlier bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> G. Alföldy, *Noricum*, London, Boston 1974, 34.

<sup>7</sup> G. Alföldy, *Taurisci und Norici*, *Historia* 15, 1966, 224-241; cf. idem, *Noricum* (n. 6), 25-27.

Alps.<sup>8</sup> This controversy has definitely been solved, despite some different opinions,<sup>9</sup> in favour of the latter thesis. The Taurisci were settled in the regions south of the Alps, occupying most of present-day Slovenia; on the one hand, their presence there is confirmed by the data in classical literature,<sup>10</sup> on the other, by archaeological evidence, reflected in the so-called La Tène period Mokronog culture.<sup>11</sup> The only areas connected with their name in the ancient sources are the Aquileia and Nauportus regions; while the name of Aquileia, as mentioned above, obviously served as a geographical reference, Strabo claimed that Nauportus was a settlement of the Taurisci (VII 5.2 C 314), that is to say that they inhabited the Emona Basin and the broader area surrounding it. Their influence had certainly reached as far to the east as Ocra in the region below Nanos, while towards the west they inhabited the Celeia and Poetovio regions, and extended even further to the northwest (*fig. 1*).<sup>12</sup> The Taurisci in the Emona Basin are not related to the Norici in the sources; in league with the Lower Carniolan Celtic tribes, who were later, after the reign of Augustus, known under the name of the Latobici, they possibly resisted the expansionistic tendencies of the Norican kingdom, and certainly those of the Roman state. *Regnum Noricum* undoubtedly wished to extend its authority as much to the south and southeast as possible, and during certain periods it certainly gained some influence over the Celeia and Poetovio regions – those nearest the kingdom – and those Taurisci would have properly been termed the Norican Taurisci. The Norican conquest of these regions is very well reflected also in coin finds.<sup>13</sup> When Pliny the Elder says that those who had once been known as Taurisci, were in his time known as Norici (*N. h.* III 133: *quondam Taurisci appellati, nunc Norici*), he obviously referred most of all to Celeia, which was part of the province of Noricum and one of its most important administrative centres, and to the Taurisci, settled in the region of Poetovio.

Where could gold deposits such as that mentioned by Polybius be located? In Slovenia no traces of gold extraction are known to date; the nearest gold mines are situated in the region south of the Hohe Tauern (Visoke Ture) in Austria, the centre of the Norican kingdom. Polybius' gold mine has often been located precisely there.<sup>14</sup> Other gold deposits in Noricum (or in the country of the Taurisci?: Tauriscan Noreia is mentioned by Plin., *N. h.* III 131), 1200 stades (ca. 222 km) distant from Aquileia, are mentioned elsewhere in Strabo (V 1.8 C 214). In this passage he described Aquileia as an *emporium* for the inhabitants of Illyricum, stating that a navigable river connected Aquileia with Noreia, where Cn. Papirius Carbo was defeated by the Cimbri. He further noted that alluvial gold was being won in large

<sup>8</sup> R. Egger, Ricerche di storia sul Friuli preromano e romano, *Atti dell'Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Udine* 13, 1954-1957, 385-388; J. Šašel, Lineamenti dell'espansione romana nelle Alpi Orientali e nei Balcani occidentali, in: *Aquileia e l'arco alpino orientale* (Antichità Altoadr. 9), Udine 1976, 78-81 (= *Opera selecta*, 415-422).

<sup>9</sup> P. W. Heider, Zu den "norischen Tauriskern". Eine quellen- und literaturkritische Studie, in: *Hochalpine Altstrassen im Raum Badgastein-Mallnitz* (Böcksteiner Montana 10), Wien 1993, 219-271; for the arguments *pro* and *contra* see Šašel Kos (n. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Šašel Kos (n.5).

<sup>11</sup> D. Božič, Keltška kultura u Jugoslaviji. Zapadna grupa [The Celtic Culture in Yugoslavia. The Western Group], in: *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja* 5 (Sarajevo 1987), 855-897.

<sup>12</sup> Božič (n. 11).

<sup>13</sup> P. Kos, *Keltški novci Slovenije / Keltische Münzen Sloweniens* (Situla 18), Ljubljana 1977, *passim*; idem, *The Monetary Circulation in the Southeastern Alpine Region ca. 300 B.C. - A.D. 1000* (Situla 24), Ljubljana 1986, 20-24.

<sup>14</sup> O. Davies, *Roman Mines in Europe*, Oxford 1935, 175; his opinion has in general been accepted in the subsequent scholarship, thus for example by H. Quiring, *Geschichte - Vorgeschichte, Altertum und Mittelalter*, in: F. Friedensburg, *Gold* (Die Metallischen Rohstoffe 3), Stuttgart 1953<sup>2</sup>, 41-42; see also Alföldy (n. 6), 34, who cited earlier opinions concerning the location of the mine, also p. 293 n. 41; Eibner (n. 1).

quantities in the region of Noreia where also an iron industry was developed. The site of Noreia, too, has not been identified to date.<sup>15</sup> Returning to the gold mine mentioned by Polybius, however, and the possibility that it was located in Carinthia, it can hardly be imagined that the core of *Regnum Noricum* would not have been referred to under the name of the Norici, but under that of the Taurisci who are otherwise never located in the kingdom by the ancient sources. Some Austrian scholars have thus already argued for the location of the Taurisci, and consequently also the mine, in the southeastern Alpine region.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of Slovenia's geological structure, the Pohorje Mts., Kozjak, and Kobansko region (the broad area of Poetovio), consisting of metamorphic rocks, the oldest ore bearing beds in Slovenia, would have been potentially the most suitable area where gold deposits could have theoretically been expected (*fig. 1*).<sup>17</sup> Strabo implied, by adding at the end of Polybius' report that in the country of the Taurisci alluvial gold, too, was being washed out, that the gold mine in question was a primary deposit of gold. Nonetheless, the discovered gold, as described by Polybius, must have been alluvial gold, found in a geological stratum that had once been the river-bed, and where gold could have coagulated in the course of time. Such terraces could lie even several hundred metres above the present riverbed, giving the impression that gold found on them was a primary deposit of gold.<sup>18</sup> The only rivers carrying gold in Slovenia are the Drava and Mura (Mur). The Drava and Mura regions were settled by the Taurisci; historically considered, Polybius' mine could well be located in this region. It is situated rather far from Aquileia, but if it is considered that the mine was controlled by the Taurisci from the Nauportus-Emona region or from Celeia, where their important settlements and centres of power were situated, Aquileia as a point of geographical orientation is not too distant.

Gold that was found in the form of rather large grains, as big as beans or lupines, can only be – as already mentioned – alluvial gold. Such a deposit could not have been a primary deposit as understood by Strabo (and probably also by Polybius), so it is vain to look for it in regions nearer Aquileia. From the geological point of view, certain areas, such as the Julian and Kamnik Alps, the Bled and Bohinj regions, can be excluded even as potential areas in which gold could be discovered. Copper has been discovered in the Cerkljansko region in the hinterland of Idrija, and some deposits of lead and zinc (and even copper and mercury) are known in several sections of the Posavje regions, between Polhov Gradec, the Trbovlje region, and Čatež.<sup>19</sup> However, no traces of gold have been discovered anywhere in these regions, and no river with its source in Slovenia, carries gold. It appears that gold was found by Italian gold diggers; this information is implied in Polybius' report,

<sup>15</sup> Alföldy (n. 6), 35 ff., but the discussion has continued since. The problem will be dealt with elsewhere.

<sup>16</sup> R. Egger, *Teurnia. Die römischen und frühchristlichen Altortümer Oberkärntens*, Klagenfurt 1963<sup>3</sup>, 10; H. Vetters, Zur ältesten Geschichte der Ostalpenländer, *Jh. Österr. Arch. Inst.* 46, 1961-1963, 209-210, 228, suggesting that the mine should have been located in the land of the Taurisci in the border region of Carnia.

<sup>17</sup> For information on geological structures and possibilities of gold deposits in Slovenia, I am most grateful to Ing. Milan Bidovec and Prof. Dr. Matija Drovenik.

<sup>18</sup> Thus already U. Täckholm, *Studien über den Bergbau der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Diss. Uppsala 1937, 26, and Eibner (n. 1), 92. This opinion has definitely been confirmed by Ing. Milan Bidovec and Dr. L. Placer (Geological Institute), for which I would also like to thank them here. The passage in Strabo is erroneously considered as referring to gold from the Tauern and taken at its face value e.g. also by F. Hofmann, *Gold, seine Lagerstätten und seine Gewinnung*, in: *Gold der Helvetier - Keltische Kostbarkeiten aus der Schweiz* (Schweizerisches Landesmuseum), Zürich 1991, 37.

<sup>19</sup> M. Drovenik, M. Pleničar, F. Drovenik, *Nastanek rudišč v SR Sloveniji (The origin of Slovenian ore deposits)* (Geologija 23/1), Ljubljana 1980, *passim*, and the map.

since otherwise it is hardly understandable why Italics would be collaborating with the Tauriscan workers at the very beginning of its exploitation;<sup>20</sup> even later the Romans often left mining to local workers.<sup>21</sup>

It is not entirely clear from Polybius' description how the actual process of winning pure gold should correctly be explained. He speaks of one eighth being lost during the process of smelting, but it is not certain what exactly he understood by "smelting"; possibly the whole metallurgical procedure from the moment of the discovery of the metal.<sup>22</sup> Gold is often mixed with silver; it could have been heated with salt, which would bind the silver, leaving the gold in a pure state; or mercury may have been used to produce gold by way of amalgamation; the technique is mentioned by Pliny (*N. h.* 33.99: [*omnia ei* (sc. *argentum vivum*) *innatant praeter aurum; id unum ad se trahit*]). Mercury is currently used for producing pure gold out of alluvial gold mixed with sand, thus also from the Drava River.<sup>23</sup>

### The Goldenhorn-Zlatorog

In both the Julian and Kamnik Alps elements of folk tales are preserved containing motifs either of a so-called Goldenhorn-Zlatorog, or chamois goats with golden hoofs, connected with gold or treasure seekers, that may reflect occasional local searching for gold and/or iron and other metals, and various other treasures in these regions.<sup>24</sup> The tale of Goldenhorn-Zlatorog is particularly interesting, since it is transmitted in a variant containing several significant details; it is located in the Soča (Italian Isonzo) valley in the hinterland of the northeastern Italian border, and Italian merchants and treasure seekers play a part in it (*fig. 2*). It is known that in the Middle Ages, as well as in modern age, Italian, mainly Venetian, gold-diggers and treasure seekers came to Slovenian and Austrian regions to search for gold and other metals. Their presence is reflected in various Slovenian and German folk tales, and has already been studied from this aspect.<sup>25</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, it may be claimed that it could in some ways be compared to the presence of the Italics – many of them probably from Aquileia – in the Norican kingdom and the country of the Taurisci.

The Goldenhorn was the leader of a herd of white chamois goats that belonged to the White Ladies, who had made him invulnerable. If he was hurt, a healing Triglav rose grew

<sup>20</sup> Thus also G. Dobesch, *Die Kelten in Österreich nach den ältesten Berichten der Antike*, Wien, Köln, Graz 1980, 237 (on the mine, pp. 236-237), his arguments, however, are different: in his opinion Italics had a better knowledge in mining and metallurgy.

<sup>21</sup> Täckholm (n. 18), 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> For information concerning the metallurgical aspects of Polybius' description of winning gold, I am most grateful to Prof. Dr. Andrej Paulin, University Department of Metallurgy. For data about early metallurgy in Slovenia, see his forthcoming article: *Metalurgija neželeznih kovin na Slovenskem*, in: *Zbornik za zgodovino naravoslovja in tehnike*, Ljubljana 1997. Several ancient metallurgical techniques, concerning gold and silver, are described by R. F. Tylecote, *The early history of metallurgy in Europe*, London, New York 1987, 44-47, and *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> M. Bidovec, *Raziskave zlata v naplavinah Drave in Mure [Gold Exploration of the Drava and Mura Alluvial Deposits]*, unpubl. thesis, Ljubljana 1986.

<sup>24</sup> T. Cevc, *Pripovedno izročilo o gamsih z zlatimi parklji iz Kamniških Alp (Die mündliche Überlieferung über Gamsen mit goldenen Klauen aus den Kamniker Alpen)*, *Traditiones* 2, 1973, 79-96; R. Baumbach, A. Funtek, *Zlatorog. Eine Sage aus den Julischen Alpen - Planinska pravljica*, München 1968 (first printed in 1886, last reprint 1996).

<sup>25</sup> O. Moser, *Die Venediger im Erzählgut des Ostalpenraumes*, in: *Alpes orientales. Acta primi conventus de ethnographia Alpium orientalium tractantis, Labaci 1956* (Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Dela 12), Ljubljana 1959, 91-98.

from the drops of his blood, curing all his wounds. Whoever could seize his golden horns, would gain access to all the hidden treasures guarded by a multi-headed serpent in Bogatin Mt. An Italian gold-digger once succeeded in taking possession of a scrap of Zlatorog's golden horns that Zlatorog had rubbed off on a rock, and with it he could get the hidden gold, which he exploited for the rest of his life.



Fig. 2: A picture of the Goldenhorn-Zlatorog (by Maksim Gaspari).  
Gasparijeva slika Zlatoroga.

The story was first copied by K. Deschmann who published it at the end of the sixties of the last century in German in *Laibacher Zeitung*.<sup>26</sup> He translated it from Slovenian as it had been narrated to him by a local collector of folk tales, who in his turn heard it from shepherds from the Bovec region. Deschmann had apparently already found it shaped in literary form, since in his version, a love story with an unhappy end between the beautiful innkeeper's daughter and the "Hunter from Trenta" has been added to the essential Goldenhorn story as sketched above. In the story as copied by Deschmann, the daughter of the local innkeeper from Koritnica was in love with a young man from Trenta, a blind widow's son, who was the best hunter in the neighbourhood. After a while, the girl yielded to the wealth and good manners of an Italian visitor, a merchant, and despised the poverty of her former lover. He left

<sup>26</sup> K. Deschmann, Beiträge zur Landeskunde Krains II. Der Triglaugletscher und die Spuren einstiger Gletscher in Oberkrain. Die Sage vom Goldkrikel (Zlatorog), *Laibacher Zeitung* 1868, Nr. 43 (21. Februar), p. 325-327.

the inn deeply offended, went with the so-called “Green Hunter”, an evil man, to search for the Goldenhorn and the treasures of Bogatin, wounded him, but the Goldenhorn recovered and caused the Hunter from Trenta to fall over a precipice into the Soča River, where he met his death. The White Ladies with white chamois goats left the region for ever, turning the once beautiful green valley to rocks and barren land. Traces of Goldenhorn’s horns could still be seen on the ground, with which in rage he destroyed the landscape.

There is no doubt that the story, as presented by Deschmann, is to a large extent a 19th century invention. However, it does not seem likely to assume, as has been done by several modern critics, that Deschmann invented any parts of the story and gave it its literary form. It is much more probable that such was the version he found, and that the literary shaping should rather be ascribed to his informant; nonetheless, the story in Deschmann should thus be regarded a product of late romanticism. It inspired a poem by R. Baumbach, which made it known to a wider audience with whom it found great favour. Baumbach’s poem was translated into Slovenian by A. Funtek<sup>27</sup> and it soon became one of the most popular folk tales in Slovenia. The Zlatorog story provided the basis for several German, Slovenian, and Italian literary creations, from operas to dramas and poems.<sup>28</sup>

It is still disputed among scholars how much of the Goldenhorn story may be ascribed directly to the folk tradition, and which components should be considered later additions and embellishments.<sup>29</sup> The essential features of the folk tale are nonetheless well discernible. The core of the story is the idea of an animal different from the others in its appearance, like, for example, an albino, or, possibly, a very rare animal which is sacred to a deity or a divine “Lord of the animals”. The life of such an animal is sacred, taboo for hunters, and hunting it is strictly prohibited. Immanent in these conceptions, and familiar to predominantly pastoral, hunting, and stock-farming societies, is a kind of protection of nature and wild life which cannot, and should not, be endlessly exploited. It was vitally important for the epichoric population not to compromise the balance in the natural order of the world that surrounded it. Not surprisingly, a “sacred” animal became related to the guarding of certain natural resources, the nature of which was considered especially precarious, such as rare metals. Elements of stories with similar content are known in Indo-European folk tradition in general,<sup>30</sup> and reflect ancient mythic and religious conceptions originating from the distant past;<sup>31</sup> actually several motifs of animals with golden horns, or some other golden parts of their bodies, related or not with treasure, as well as the healing powers of certain herbs, are well known in Greek and Roman classical literature,<sup>32</sup> and it has even been postulated that

<sup>27</sup> See n. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Cited by M. Matičetov in: A. von Maily, *Leggende del Friuli e delle Alpi Giulie*, pubbl. con la collaborazione di J. Bolte. Edizione critica a cura di M. Matičetov, Gorizia 1986, 210-211. See additionally A. Ipavec, *Zlatorog. Mito delle Alpi - Alpski mit - Alpenmythos*, Gorizia 1989 (reprint).

<sup>29</sup> L. Kretzenbacher, Sage und Mythos vom Zlatorog, in: R. Baumbach, A. Funtek, *Zlatorog. Eine Sage aus den Julischen Alpen - Planinska pravljica*, München 1968, 129-144; Matičetov (n. 28), 210-213.

<sup>30</sup> J. A. Glonar, “Monoceros” in “Diptamus”. (Postanek in zgodovina pripovedke o Zlatorogu in stare cerkvene pesmi “Jager na lovu šraja...”) [“Monoceros” und “Diptamus”. Über die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Zlatorogsage und des alten Kirchenliedes “Hoch von dem Thron ein Jeger”], *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 7, 1910, 34-106, especially 58 ff.; L. Petzold, *Kleines Lexikon der Dämonen und Elementargeister*, München 1995, 194-195, s.v. Zlatorog; cf. also 54-57, s.v. Einhorn.

<sup>31</sup> Kretzenbacher (n. 29), 144.

<sup>32</sup> Glonar (n. 30).



myths similar to the essential story of the Goldenhorn-Zlatorog may be attributed to the folk tradition of the ancient inhabitants of the Balkans and Thrace.<sup>33</sup>

The tale of the Goldenhorn-Zlatorog may be Slavic, or Slovenian,<sup>34</sup> but in principle, as postulated by R. Wildhaber, I also see no arguments against the assumption that a folk tale, similar to it may have already originated in prehistory. On the other hand, however, there is also no definite evidence to prove it, so it would be useless to pursue this discussion further. Nonetheless, I would like to add a few remarks in order hypothetically to illustrate and interpret a possible circulation of such a folk tale in the pre-Roman period.

It may have been preserved in the oral tradition of the Celtic, or even pre-Celtic, population, nourished from time to time by the actual discovery of rare metals or other treasures. Brave men, or desperados and outsiders, had always ventured to penetrate the realm of untouched and inaccessible nature, where life seemed to have been nearer the divine powers, governed and protected by spirits, good and evil, as people in the valleys below the mountains liked to believe. This must have been especially true of mountainous and hilly countries such as Slovenia and Austria, where modern alpinism, in a certain way not unlike the search for treasure, even nowadays demands several victims every year. The discovery of a gold mine, such as that mentioned by Polybius and Strabo, no doubt strengthened belief among the local population in legends and tales of strange mythic animals, protectors – or agents of a divine protector – of nature and its treasures. In view of such an explanation, it may be postulated that folk tales of the Goldenhorn-Zlatorog type could to some extent reflect reality – as folk tales often do<sup>35</sup> – in so far as they could be considered an indication of the occasional successful search for treasure. Supposed treasure in Bogatin Mt. certainly incited whole crowds of gold-seekers, Italian and local, to invest their money in vain digging at various spots on the mountain just below its peak, some of whom were reduced to poverty because of their blind desire to enrich themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Animals mythic or real? Some animals which appear in folk tales are doubtless the fruit of popular imagination and can be relegated to mythical conceptions of primitive religious folk beliefs, such as various dragons, multi-headed or multi-limbed monsters, and, for example, also the unicorn who has certain features in common with the Goldenhorn-Zlatorog.<sup>37</sup> The Goldenhorn-Zlatorog, on the contrary, should be regarded both as a real and as an imaginary animal, since he may have been a white chamois goat with horns appearing golden against a background of the rising or setting sun, or the sun's rays reflected on his horns.

<sup>33</sup> R. Wildhaber, Das Tier mit den goldenen Hörnern, in: *Alpes orientales 7. Acta septimi conventus de ethnographia Alpium orientalium tractantis Brixiae anno MCMLXXII* (ed. I. Griessmair), Monachii 1975, 93-123.

<sup>34</sup> In general, it is regarded as Slavic, see bibliography cited above; and also V. Nartnik, K izvoru in razvoju povedke Zlatorog [The Origin and Development of the Folk Tale Zlatorog], *Nova revija* 106, 1991, 151-158, who attempted to explain the tale in terms of astronomical considerations.

<sup>35</sup> M. Kropelj, *Pravljica in stvarnost. Odsev stvarnosti v slovenskih ljudskih pravljicah in povedkah ob primerih iz Štrekljeve zapuščine* (Zbirka ZRC 5), Ljubljana 1995.

<sup>36</sup> J. Abram, Bajeslovni svet Triglava, in: J. Kugy, *Pet stoletij Triglava*, Maribor 1979, 239-258; reprinted from: *Koledar Goriške Mohorjeve družbe*, Gorica 1927. The original title of Kugy's book: *Fünf Jahrhunderte Triglav*, Graz; for gold digging in the area of the Soča valley cf. also a note in *Slovenska bčela* 4, 1853, 12-13.

<sup>37</sup> L. Kretzenbacher, *Mystische Einhornjagd* (Bayerische Akademie der Wiss., phil.-hist. Kl., Sitzungsber. 1978/6), München 1978; cf. also J. W. Einhorn, s.v. Einhorn, in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* III (Berlin, New York 1981), 1246-1256.

Rare animals, too, must have stirred up credulous folk imagination. Chamois goats (*Rupicapra rupicapra* [Linnaeus, 1758]) may not have been particularly rare animals, since they inhabited both high and low mountains, and also rocky gorges of the lower hilly regions, such as the gorge of the Iška River, the Zagorje region along the Sava River, the valley of the Kolpa, and elsewhere in Slovenia.<sup>38</sup> The habitat of his relative, the Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex* [Linnaeus, 1758]), for example, is much more limited, it is confined to high mountains above the forest line, mainly the Alps, and the ibex must have been a rare animal also in the prehistoric period. It would have been seen only rarely by the inhabitants of the valleys, and even shepherds would not encounter it too often. Its remains are extremely rare among bone finds in excavated prehistoric and Roman settlements, thus for example at Magdalensberg (Slov. Štalenski vrh) in Carinthia, where three individuals have been identified,<sup>39</sup> and at Stična, from where two bone fragments are known.<sup>40</sup> S. Bökönyi suggested that the inhabitants of Stična may have occasionally gone on hunting expeditions to the Alps, or, possibly, ibex would have lived in prehistoric times, like chamois goats to the present day, also in the high hills regions.<sup>41</sup> It may have been even rarer than it seems, since bone remains ascribed to it could well have belonged in reality to a wild goat, the ancestor of the domestic goat (*Capra aegagrus* [Erxleben, 1777]), and closely related to the ibex.<sup>42</sup>

#### Unusual Alpine animal

According to F. Lasserre, several scholars have proposed that the strange animal seen in the Alps in Polybius' times, would have been an ibex.<sup>43</sup> Lasserre, however, did not cite any works in which this opinion was expressed, but he must have clearly referred to previous editors of Polybius and Strabo (who had preserved Polybius' fragmentary note about this animal), or local histories of the Alps; I have not found any specific study dedicated exclusively to this subject. This fragmentary passage preserved by Strabo, too, originates from Polybius' 34th book, like that about the gold mine, cited above.

Polyb. 34.10. 8 (= Strabo, IV 6.10 C 207-208): "Ἐχουσι δ' αἰ ἄλλεις καὶ ἵππους ἀγρίους καὶ βόας. Φησὶ δὲ Πολύβιος καὶ ἰδιόμορφόν τι γεννάσθαι ζῷον ἐν αὐταῖς, ἑλαφοειδὲς τὸ σχῆμα πλὴν ἀχένος καὶ τριχώματος, ταῦτα δ' εὐοικῆναι κάπρω, ὑπὸ δὲ τῷ γενεῖῳ πυρῆνα ἴσχειν ὅσον σπιθαμιαῖον ἀκρόκομον, πωλικῆς κέρκου τὸ πάχος.

"The Alps are inhabited by wild horses and cattle. Polybius also speaks of the existence of an animal of unusual form in these mountains; its outward appearance closely resembles that of a stag, except its neck and coat which look like a boar's. Below the chin it has a hard protuberance about a span long, with hairs growing at the end, as thick as the tail of a colt."

That the animal in question cannot be an ibex is quite clear from its description: it resembled a deer and not a goat. Since both deer and goats were very well known in the

<sup>38</sup> B. Kryštufek, *Sesalci Slovenije (Mammals of Slovenia)*, Ljubljana 1991, 250-252.

<sup>39</sup> M. Hornberger, *Gesamtbeurteilung der Tierknochenfunde aus der Stadt auf dem Magdalensberg in Kärnten (1948-1966)* (Kärntner Museumsschriften 49), Klagenfurt 1970, 63-64, 139.

<sup>40</sup> S. Bökönyi, *Analiza živalskih kosti (Die Tierknochenfunde)*, in: S. Gabrovec, *Stična I. Naselbinska izkopavanja / Siedlungsausgrabungen* (Katalogi in monografije 28), Ljubljana 1994, 190-213.

<sup>41</sup> *Ib.*, 190.

<sup>42</sup> Kryštufek (n. 38), 255, and personal communication of the author.

<sup>43</sup> Strabon, *Géographie*, tome II (Livres III et IV), ed. F. Lasserre, Paris 1966, 221.

Mediterranean world, Polybius could hardly have written that the animal in question looked like a deer if it was actually an ibex, resembling a goat. There seems to be only one possible identification of the Alpine animal, mentioned by Polybius. According to his description, it seems most likely to have been an elk (*Alces alces* [Linnaeus, 1758], fig. 3).<sup>44</sup> The characteristics given by Polybius would correspond well to this mammal, which no longer inhabits the Alps. Its ramified antlers and overall appearance make it resemble a deer, its hair is bristly, vaguely resembling that of a boar, and it has a hard growth under its chin. Elks were living in the territory of Slovenia and also in the neighbouring Alpine areas as

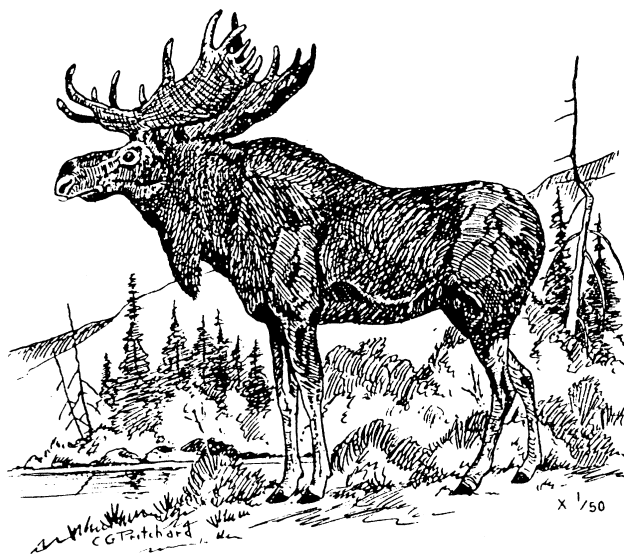


Fig. 3: A drawing showing an elk (from: E. R. Hall, K. R. Kelson, *The Mammals of North America*, vol. II, New York 1959, p. 1014).

Slika, ki prikazuje losa (iz: E. R. Hall, K. R. Kelson, *The Mammals of North America*, II, New York 1959, str. 1014).

late as Holocene,<sup>45</sup> and may have survived in these regions until the Middle Ages.<sup>46</sup> Their natural habitat is a lake landscape, more or less marshy countryside with woods of birches and alders. They were totally unknown in the warm climate of the Mediterranean world and even in the Alpine and subalpine regions, they may have been rare during the late La Tène and Roman periods, so it is not surprising that the animal seemed peculiar to Polybius. At Magdalensberg (Štalenski vrh) bone remains of only three animals have been identified,<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Kryštufek (n. 38), 247. Dr. Boris Kryštufek kindly read Polybius' description and agreed that identification with an elk is the most likely explanation.

<sup>45</sup> See, among others, K. Krivic, Los tudi na Soriški planini (Der Elch auch auf Soriška planina), *Loški razgledi* 32, 1985, 93-97.

<sup>46</sup> I. Rakovec, Razvoj kvartarne sesalske favne v Sloveniji (Über quartäre Säugetierfaunen Sloweniens [NW Jugoslawien]), *Arheološki vestnik* 24, 1973, 260-261.

<sup>47</sup> Hornberger (n. 39), 71, 138.

while in middle Europe, elks were at that time not infrequent.<sup>48</sup> In addition to those still inhabiting the Alps in Polybius' times, some may also have reached the Alpine regions from elsewhere, since they are known as long-distance travellers.

Although Polybius' fragment, such as Strabo preserved it, is devoid of its former context, it nonetheless gives the impression that Polybius himself saw such animals, or that he heard of them from eyewitnesses. If he had not given such a matter-of-fact and concrete description of it, it could even be suggested that this animal seemed so peculiar because it had only rarely been seen, and by very few people, and could consequently be explained as the fruit of folk imagination, a mythic animal seen only from far and under strange circumstances, as is the case with other such animals in folk tales.

Imagination and the supernatural have always been closely related to actuality and to the reality of everyday life, the more so as we focus our gaze back in time. Earlier, although man's ties with nature were deeper, some of its phenomena may have been less familiar to him. Those details for which he found no rational explanation have always had an aura of mystery: hence his believe in supernatural beings such as White Ladies, the Goldenhorn, and hundreds of others known from folk tales. On the other hand, the former prehistoric inhabitants of Alpine and subalpine regions – as in general the prehistoric population – were very well acquainted with several natural phenomena, since their close dependance on the world of nature made them more alert to changes and various details that would remain obscure to modern man living in a civilized world. Thus individuals among the epichoric population became experts in seeking ore deposits and other natural resources, since some of these were vitally important for the survival of their communities, and others for their better living – one of the foremost human preoccupations of yesterday and today.

I am indebted to Dr. Monika Kropěj, Ing. Milan Bidovec, Dr. Tone Cevc, Dr. Boris Kryštufek, and Prof. Dr. Andrej Paulin for their valued advice and observations.

---

<sup>48</sup> J. Boessneck, A. von den Driesch, U. Meyer-Lemppenau, E. Wechsler-von Ohlen, *Die Tierknochenfunde aus dem Oppidum von Manching* (Die Ausgrabungen in Manching 6), Wiesbaden 1971, 98; M. Kokabi, *Arae Flaviae II. Viehhaltung und Jagd im römischen Rottweil* (Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte im Baden-Württemberg 13), Stuttgart 1982, 105.

## Od zlata pri Tavriskih do Zlatoroga in nenavadne alpske živali

Marjeta Šašel Kos

V članku obravnavam tri teme, dve iz antične zgodovinsko-geografske literature, to sta odkritje zlata pri Tavriskih in omemba nenavadne alpske živali, ter eno iz slovenskega ljudskega pripovedništva, to je povedka o Zlatorogu. Med seboj sicer niso tesno povezane, pač pa jih je z določenih zornih kotov mogoče obravnavati skupaj.

Grški zgodovinar Polibij iz 2. stoletja pr. Kr. je poročal o zlatem rudniku pri Tavriskih v 34. knjigi svoje *Zgodovine*, v kateri je opisal svoja popotovanja po severni Italiji in galskih deželah. Knjiga je ohranjena le v odlomkih, zato je širši kontekst, v katerega je bil ta podatek postavljen, žal zgubljen. Polibijevi številni geografski podatki so bili posebej zanimivi za zgodovinarja in geografa Strabona iz avgustejskega obdobja, ki nam je ta njegov fragment tudi ohranil. Pri Strabonu beremo, da so našli bogato nahajališče zlata pri noriških Tavriskih v območju Akvileje, ki so ga Tavriski začeli izkoriščati skupaj z Italiki. Ležišče je bilo tako bogato, da so cene zlata po vsej Italiji padle za tretjino. Tavriski so italske metalurge in trgovce nato izgnali in si zagotovili monopol nad pridobivanjem in prodajo zlata. Zlato so našli v obliki debelih zrn, velikih kot fižol ali bob; ob pridobivanju čistega zlata s taljenjem (moderni interpreti domnevajo, da je to verjetno potekalo z uporabo soli, ki je nase vezala srebro v obliki žindre) se je izločila le osmina mase. Strabon dodaja, da so v deželi Tavriskov zlato tudi izpirali iz rek, vendar ne v tako velikih količinah kot v Hispaniji (današnji Španiji). Sodeč po Strabonovi končni pripombi bi mogli sklepati, da je bilo ležišče zlata, ki so ga nepričakovano odkrili pri Tavriskih, primarno ležišče, v nasprotju z naplavinjskim zlatom. Vendar glede na opis ležišča in oblike zlata skoraj ni dvoma, da gre za naplavinjsko zlato, odloženo na terasi nekdanje rečne struge, bolj ali manj oddaljene od današnjega toka reke (višinska razlika bi lahko znašala celo do 300 m).

Ni popolnoma jasno, kam bi mogli to zlato ležišče pravilno locirati. Lokacijskih poskusov je bilo več, bistveno se ločijo po tem, da ga nekateri postavljajo v območje Tur severno od Alp, v srce Noriškega kraljestva, kjer so ležišča zlata znana, drugi pa južno od Alp, koder bi glede na arheološke in antične literarne vire segal poselitveni prostor Tavriskov. Lokacija je posebej problematična zato, ker Strabon govori o *noriških* Tavriskih. Z analizo razpoložljivih virov skušam dokazati, da je treba ležišče zlata locirati najverjetneje v slovensko območje toka reke Drave. Poselitev Tavriskov je segala vse od Ljubljanske kotline, dela Gorenjske in cele Dolenjske do območja Celeje in Petovione, ne pa v Avstrijo, ki so jo poseljevala keltska plemena, pod hegemonijo Norikov združena v Noriško kraljestvo. V Sloveniji ne vsebuje zlatih zrn nobena od rek, zlasti ne tistih, ki pri nas izvirajo; zlatonosni sta le Drava in Mura. Nedavno je M. Bidovec dokumentiral pridobivanje zlata iz Drave v območju Varaždina; vsekakor ni nemogoče, da bi se kdaj vzdolž toka Drave odkrilo ležišče zlata.

Tako kot некоč Tavriski in Italiki so zlato in druge kovine iskali tudi pozneje, saj je metalurgija postajala vse pomembnejši faktor ekonomije in družbenega razvoja. Z iskanjem zakladov in kovin je povezanih več slovenskih ljudskih povedk, med njimi tudi ena najbolj priljubljenih, povedka o Zlatorogu. Zlati rogovi belega kozoroga ali gamsa naj bi bili ključ do zakladov Bogatina nad Soško dolino in le enkrat naj bi se posrečilo nekemu italijanskemu zlatokopu, da si je pridobil del zaklada z odlomkom Zlatorogovega zlatega roga, ki si ga je le-ta odrgnil na skali. Celo življenje je Italijan črpal ta zaklad, Trentarskega lovca pa, ki je Zlatoroga v želji, da bi se polastil njegovih zlatih rogov, ranil, je Zlatorog pahnil v prepad. Povedka vsebuje prvine indoevropskega ljudskega pripovedništva in ni izključeno, da ima korenine v predslovanski alpsko-balkanski mitologiji.

Od nekdanj je človek iskal zlato in druge kovine ter zaklade in le poredkoma je bilo to iskanje uspešno. Manj kot je človek mogel in znal tehnično obvladovati naravo, ki ga je obdajala, bolj je bil odvisen od vere v božanstva/boga, preprost človek pa si je še dodatno predstavljal, da se za njemu težko umljivimi naravnimi pojavi skrivajo nadnaravne sile, ki si jih je zamišljal v podobi različnih bajeslovnih bitij in tudi mitičnih živali. Iz takšnih predstav je zrasla povedka o Zlatorogu.

Ljudje so si često umišljali, da vidijo bitja in živali, ki v resničnosti niso obstajale. Antični zgodovinarji in geografi, tako npr. tudi Polibij in Strabon, ki so raziskovali manj znane dežele tedanjega znanega sveta, so opazali in beležili posebnosti pokrajine, konfiguracije tal, favne in flore ter posebnosti t.im. kulturne krajine, svetišča, naselbine in druge tvarne priče drugačnih navad in načina življenja še neromaniziranega prebivalstva. Plod takšnih potopisov je Polibijeva, pri Strabonu ohranjena omemba nenavadne živali, ki naj bi živela v Alpah. Žival bi lahko bila mitična in plod ljudske domišljije, vendarle pa je po opisu sodeč najverjetneje šlo za losa. Polibij jo namreč opisuje kot podobno jelenu, s čokatom zgornjim delom telesa in dlako podobno merjascu ter izrastkom pod brado, iz katerega je rasel šop dlak, podoben žrebičkovemu repu. Ta opis v celoti ustreza losu, ki je še do zgodnjega srednjega veka živel v jugovzhodnem alpskem prostoru.