

# Rain and Dust\*

Richard Burns

*The subject of this paper is the pan-Balkan rainmaking practice associated with the names 'dodola' and 'peperuda' and their many and various cognates. The paper develops out of the author's experience in writing a long poem based on these customs (In a Time of Drought, 2006; U vreme suše, 2005). The paper proceeds to offer an analytical reading of the well known example of the Balkan rainmaking custom. In the course of close linguistic examination and comparative contextualisation, attention is focussed on one specific motif: the sieve. The paper opens conjectures that relate the Balkan practice to two ancient Mediterranean mythological motifs: first, to Minoan and Mycenaean rainmaking invocations, and, secondly, to the goddess Persephone, via the theories of V. V. Ivanov and V. I. Toporov.*

## 'Correspondance' and *In a Time of Drought*

When I first heard about the rainmaking customs of the Balkans, their mythological dimensions and content triggered something in me, snagged, stirred, pulled me in and kept me bound, until a book-length poem had written itself out of me, *In a Time of Drought* (Burns 2006a). There was an immediate sense of recognition, of discovery, of multiple unfolding connections and 'correspondances'. These struck like lightning. The unfolding went on throughout the process of composition (Burns 2006a: 33–4).

As I started working on the poem, an idea that had come to me started unravelling: it began as a hunch, a theme, accompanied by a little (*too* little) knowledge. So, during composition of the first drafts, I set about finding out as much as I could about the rainmaking practices and songs. More than once I was astonished to find that images which had been cropping up spontaneously in my own mind during composition turned out to belong *to the sources themselves*, and even to be part of their stuff or grain (Burns 2006a: 31–33).

This curious recognition of a spontaneous 'matching' between my inner images and personal compositional processes on the one hand and, on the other, material already "out there" (i.e. woven, patterned, documented and above all *socialised* in myth, legend, ritual, folk custom, etc.) had often occurred to me before, but rarely with such force. Whenever that kind of heuristic experience arrives, however well prepared one may be, and however well one may have envisaged it, it is always new, surprising, uplifting, expansive: *a gift*.

\* This essay is an extract from a longer monograph on the Balkan rainmaking custom.

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From the experiential point of view, words like “illumination” and “epiphany” are hardly too strong to describe the state of mind, of being, instantly triggered and simultaneously validated by this set of multiple recognitions. There is a numinous element.

My current understanding of this kind of “correspondance” is that, in certain kinds of “deep” poetic composition, mythological patternings well up through individual consciousness with a force that a poet learns to trust, follow and be bound by. Without this binding, this following and this trust, no poem emerges – unless it be one that is stunted or maimed. It might also be said that it is both necessary and inevitable that, during the act of composing itself, the poet is not likely to be able to fully understand the powerfully loaded material that surfaces through what may well be subjectively experienced as the most profound and intimate layerings of his or her being.<sup>1</sup> In the first and last resort, the craft (Fr. *métier*, It. *mestiere*: compare Eng. ‘mastery’) of making poems involves and tracks a *mystery* (in the Greek sense of the word), and necessitates this willed and willing two-way flow between the consciousness of the individual poet and a mode of consciousness that might be called transpersonal.<sup>2</sup>

But of course the making of a poem is not an involuntary process. Experientially, for a poet working with, in and through a myth, both volition and intelligence appear to be fully harnessed by the ‘other’ (‘higher’ / ‘deeper’ / ‘magical’ / ‘inspired’, etc.) forces for the *precise purpose*, as it were, of the poem’s making. In this context, such mantic and teleological notions as ‘inspiration’, ‘destiny’, ‘vocation’, ‘calling’, ‘divine calling’, that have so often been invoked to validate the poet’s practice, remind us that the evolutionary origins of poetry are probably shamanic (Eliade 1964: 510). The poet recognises and participates actively in this harnessing. Indeed, the poet, apparently, *wants* this yoking, this yielding, this involvement with the interiorised and transpersonal other. And, for the poet (Scots. *makar*), the fulfilment and pleasure wrought into the *poesis* – i.e. into this making that is equivalently a yielding, a trusting and a following – reside and are justified precisely in the resultant discoveries that occur, in the mind’s heuristic leaps and plunges through the act of creation, in the connections that appear, unexpectedly and “as if from nowhere”. Such further and later outcomes as the possibilities of publication and recognition, the chances (and fantasies) of acclaim, fame and fortune, and so on, may well be ancillary: as the passionate intentness on reclusiveness that we trace in the lives of such poets as Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins makes abundantly clear, even if such privacies were enforced by circumstances.

Aside from correspondances *during* the making of a poem itself, in the particular instance of *In a Time of Drought*, I have also found it curious that the mythological

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Michael Polanyi writes: ‘Scientific discovery, which leads from one framework to its successor, bursts the bounds of disciplined thought in an intense if transient moment of heuristic vision. And while it is thus breaking out, the mind is for the moment directly experiencing its content rather than controlling it by the use of any pre-established modes of interpretation: it is overwhelmed by its own passionate activity.’ (Polanyi 1958: 196). These observations about scientific discovery are comparable to some of Shelley’s statements about poetic composition in *The Defence of Poetry*, such as: ‘[...] the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.’

<sup>2</sup> In 1964-5, in Venice, I apprenticed myself to the English poet Peter Russell (1921–2003). In his old age he told me that, in his experience, his own poems that remained most deeply meaningful to him had emerged from material that he ‘didn’t know much about.’ He said that what was strange (unknown, not-understood, partially understood, mysterious, ‘other’, etc.) had always held the strongest and most passionate pull for him, and tended to fascinate and bind him. This attraction, he recognised, often included or was akin to erotic longing and desire. (See also Polanyi 1958: 198: ‘Mystics speak of religious ecstasy in erotic terms.’)

sources and associations which the poem draws on have been powerful enough to go on quietly working in and through me long *after* poetic composition ended. Indeed, since then, I have found myself continuing to be “held” by all aspects of the underlying and surrounding material, continuing to want to explore more of its roots and ramifications, and continuing to be astonished and delighted by the emergence of further unexpected details and apparently chance associations. That is to say: this material is still alive for me, it hasn’t petered out, it carries a charge, it wields tiny hooks and needles, it won’t let go, it won’t let *me* go. It might be said: involvement in a myth can have an obsessive quality about it.

Even so, I think it also needs to be added here that, as far as such correspondances are concerned, this later (secondary) process of “prosaic” re-analysis and re-synthesis often calls for a course of recapitulations that seems laborious, pernickity and frustratingly slow, by comparison with the instancy of the lyrical flushes, heady flights and heuristic breakthroughs that marked the first phases of composition.<sup>3</sup>

From a psychological perspective, these occurrences and perceptions of pattern make full and coherent sense when viewed through a Jungian lens. Taken together, the theories of Jung, and those of others like Neumann and Hillman who have followed and applied them, are not only consonant with these processes, but can scarcely be seen as anything other than authentic inner mappings of what goes on psychologically during poetic composition, that is, at least in my own experience and practice.<sup>4</sup> According to these thinkers, myths, legends and folk tales present and re-present the patternings of archetypes. Their manifestations and influences, their strings, skeins and strands, their webs, meshes and knots surface and sink and re-surface, apparently spontaneously and unpredictably, and according to laws partially but not fully understood. They combine and recombine. They spin and weave constantly new but always recognisable patterns. They are the DNA of myths, legends and rituals.

I think that in my work on *In a Time of Drought*, just as on this essay that follows it, particularly bearing in mind the material’s mythic elements, I have recognisably been caught (touched, embraced, moved, transported, etc.) by an *archetype*, *within* and *through* an archetype, perhaps even *for* an archetype, that is to say, *in the service of* that archetype.<sup>5</sup>

### Scope and Modes of Enquiry

In the discussion that follows, on psychological grounds, I have taken the Jungian perspective as *given*. But because I am interested here not only in tracking psychological patterns, but in mapping possible historical and evolutionary relationships, I integrate several other methodological models. First, broadly speaking, my approach is diachronic-linguistic. Second, I apply a structuralist analysis to one particularly well known example of the Balkan rainmaking practice. For all the obvious risks this approach carries – that is, on the one hand, of simplifying and hence misunderstanding the material, and, on the

<sup>3</sup> Compare Polanyi 1958: 124–131, on “Mathematical Heuristics”.

<sup>4</sup> Among the many salient titles by these authors, those most pertinent to this discussion of poetry and mythology are: Jung (1959, 1966), Neumann (1959) and Hillman (1973, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> This is true, too, of my other long poem that emerged out of the same “deep” mythological nexus, *The Blue Butterfly* (Burns 2006b). At the time of writing this, I suspect more poems may emerge that are related to the theme / mythologem of the butterfly.

other, of superimposing interpretations on it and so crushing it, rather than delicately teasing them out of it – the unpicking of a composite whole into its parts is nevertheless capable of yielding interesting insights. Within this approach, comparative strands are necessarily interwoven. Third, I take a single feature of one particular rainmaking custom, and to this detail I apply close linguistic examination and comparative contextualisation. Fourth, I throw in some pure fanciful conjecture.<sup>6</sup>

The approach that combines comparative mythology with comparative linguistics has many antecedents among scholars. In this instance, I owe most to Roman Jakobson, who made a striking contribution to the study of the Balkan rainmaking rituals (Jakobson 1985a: 6-7 & 1985b: 22-23). By submitting the chosen material to analysis and, in the course of doing so, bringing other linguistic, mythological and historical information and conjectures to bear on it, my intention is to open questions for discussion of the rainmaking custom as a whole. Inevitably, this procedure will involve excursions and diversions. These, I hope, will lead back into the material at possibly unforeseen angles and along unexpected declivities – which in turn may reveal further perspectives, layerings and conjectures. Finally, since it is in the nature of myth to enfold and include, I am aware, too, that both *In a Time of Drought* and this essay not only derive from the mythological material and comment on it, but now come (return) to be part of it.

### Source and Text

The finely documented account by Đorđević of a version of the Balkan rainmaking custom, performed near the River Morava in south-eastern Serbia near the Bulgarian border, is so well-known that it has almost taken on the status of a classic. Here is his text (Đorđević 1958: 401-3. Extract tr. Vera V. Radojević & RB.):

When there is a period of drought during summer, and rain is withheld over a long period of time, the Dodolas go around the villages even today. In Leskovac, until around ten years ago the Dodolitsas used to go from house to house singing “dodolitska” songs,<sup>7</sup> praying to God to give rain and wealth. Nowadays, only small gypsy girls go around the town, followed by an older gypsy woman. In some of the villages, one can still see small local girls, although gypsy Dodolitsas appear even there. In Dušanovo, even today, when the rain is “withheld”, four small girls go around as Dodolitsas. Each one is dressed in old and shabby clothing. Each one has a wreath made of nettles and *burjan* [‘sambucus’, a weed]. They walk barefoot. The first two carry a copper bowl with water which they sprinkle over the houses with a bunch made of *burjan* and nettles . . . When the Dodolitsas arrive at a house, using the bunch of *burjan* and nettle, they sprinkle water over the yard and sing:

1. Fly, fly, *peperuga*  
Oh, *dodolas*, Dear Lord!  
We go over the fields  
And the clouds over the sky

<sup>6</sup> A good deal of what passes as “scientific” among even major scholars (historians, historical linguists, archaeologists, ethnographers and anthropologists) is in fact no more than conjecture, suitably dressed up to appear accurate, objective and authoritative. Ideology and vanity play tricks with even the best minds.

<sup>7</sup> *dodolitsa*, n. ‘little Dodola’; adj. *dodolitska*.

- 2 The sun is burning our fields  
The little *dodolitsas* are praying to our Lord  
'Give us, Lord, gentle rain,  
To bedew our fields  
So that gentle grain will grow  
So that two grapes will give a barrel of wine
  
3. Fly, fly, *peperuga*  
So that great wealth will be born  
So that the barns will be full  
Both barns and stores  
So that white grain will grow  
So that the ploughman will have white bread  
Give, Lord, give, give, Lord, give!
  
- 4 So that white hemp will grow  
A thin thread of little hemp  
Do not give it in teeny bits –  
But if in teenies, with bits of cheese  
With bits of cheese and a bit of flour.'

After each verse the refrain 'Oh, Dodolas, Dear Lord' is sung twice, or this refrain once, followed by 'Give, Lord, give, give, give.'

Whilst the *dodolitsas* are singing, the "lady" of the house, or someone from the family, takes a bucketful of water from the well, and pours it over the wreaths on the *dodolitsas*' heads and over their feet. The *dodolitsas* splash their feet in the spilt water and sing. Many housewives add fresh water to the copper bowls, so that the rain may overflow in similar manner onto the dry soil. When the *dodolas* have finished their song, the housewife brings out corn flour in a sieve and gives it to the *dodola* who is collecting flour. When the *dodola* pours some of the flour which has been presented as a gift to her into her bag, she positions the empty sieve on her hip towards the East, and lets it drop with her right hand, saying, 'Full, full!' Should the sieve settle in the correct position, as when one is sieving flour, it is believed that rain will come and the crop will be rich. However if the sieve turns over and falls onto its other side, the opposite will happen. It is customary for the *dodolas* in the village of Dušanovo to go into the fields. As soon as they have finished calling on the houses, they go through the fields singing and sprinkling water as far as the local quarry. They go into the quarry three times, and sing and sprinkle it with water, and then they return to the village to a widow who, usually, makes them some corn porridge from her own flour.

In other villages, as used to be customary in the town of Leskovac as well, the *dodolas* take the flour which they have been given to a local widow, who makes a porridge from it in their copper bowl. The porridge is eaten in the middle of the yard and the bowl is placed on a plate which is turned upside down, underneath which they have first poured some fresh water. In Štulac (in the county of Jablanica), the dining table for the *dodolas* is set above running water, so that a few crumbs of porridge may fall into the running water.

When all this is finished, the *dodolas* take off their leafy clothing, and take their wreaths and bunches made of *burjan* and nettle with which they have sprinkled the houses and fields, and throw them into running water.

Recently, Gypsy *dodolas* have collected not only flour, but also other victuals – bread, beans, cheese, paprika, etc.

### The names: *Dodola* and *Peperuga*

The terms *peperuga*, *dodola* and the diminutive *dodolitsa* that appear in Đorđević's text are among the names for the Balkan rainmaiden. The various names have been elegantly mapped by Plotnikova (1999) to reveal regional variations. Names of the *dodola* type, which I designate as the 'central' group, are more common in Serbia, Bosnia, and names of the *peperuga* or *perperuda* type, designated as the 'eastern and southern group', tend to be more frequent in Bulgaria, Rumania, Moldavia, Albania, Thessaly and Epirus (Burns 2006a: 35, 37–38 & 42). In the border-area of dialect-continua between Bulgaria and Serbia, as in Macedonia, both verbal variants appear in the same song.

Names in the *peperuga* (or *perperuda*) group are related to the Slavonic storm-god *Perun*, cognate with Lithuanian *Pergunas* or *Perkunis*, Latvian *Perkons*, *Perkuns*, Prussian *Percunis*, Norse *Fjörgynn* and, of course, *Thor*. But in Bulgarian, the *peperuga* (*perperuda*) has two apparently quite unrelated further meanings: 'butterfly' and 'poppy' (Duridanov 1996: 161–4). While there exists plenty of fascinating theoretical conjecture among scholars on these etymologies, all of it relevant to a depth-study of the rainmaking practices, the key factor to bear in mind for this discussion of Đorđević's account is that, to the villagers actually involved in practising and witnessing the ritual, multiple overlays of meaning and associations were *simultaneously* present in their language and minds. The niceties of scholarly etymology were hardly relevant

### Karadžić, Stevanović and Đorđević

Đorđević's text confirms many of the observations made by the first known commentator on the practices, Vuk Karadžić, 180 years previously, in his first edition of the *Srpski rjecnik* [Serbian Dictionary] (Karadžić 1818). A later dictionary entry on the rainmaiden (Stevanović 1989: 4/446–7), listed under *Dodola* and giving some of her other titles, along with secondary meanings and literary references, provides further commentary:

**dodola** f. ethn.; peperuda, prporuša, čarojica. folk-custom in some parts of south-eastern Europe, in which participants (usually girls) go from house to house in time of drought, sprinkle (or get sprinkled with) water, and sing folksongs praying for rain. (Translation RB)

Here, a key fact, not mentioned by Karadžić, is that the participants not only 'sprinkle water' but can 'get sprinkled' themselves. Đorđević's account of the Morava version strongly bears out this reciprocity, which progressively takes clear shape as a key structural and thematic feature.

## Stages in the Ceremony

From the wealth of specific detail in Đorđević's account, the ceremony can be seen to develop in clearly demarcated stages, each rich in symbolic associations:

1. The girls walk to each house in the village, bringing their own copper water-bowl and bundles or sprays of plants, and use these to sprinkle water over the house.
2. The first words of their songs identify or correlate their own action of walking over or through the fields with that of the movement of clouds across the sky. It is implicit here that the *dodolas* are (or are *like*) clouds, in that both are dispensers of rain. The first line of the song also means 'Fly, fly, butterfly.'
3. The words of the song call on God to pour down rain, to enable the fields to yield grain for bread, as well as wine, hemp, and basic victuals.
4. The housewife takes water from her well and pours it over the girls' wreath-covered heads and feet.
5. The housewife gives the girls a sieve and some flour.
6. One girl does more pouring or sprinkling of flour on the ground according to a formulaic procedure which involves using the right hand and facing the east. The emphasis on the right hand and on the easterly direction together imply invocation of the sun as the source of light. There follows a "heads-or-tails" procedure with the sieve. Effective performance and results constitute success and good luck.
7. The girls go to the fields and repeat their sprinkling of water there.
8. They go in and out of the quarry three times, with more sprinkling of water into it.
9. They receive porridge from a widow. In some cases, the bowl from which they eat is placed on a plate which has been turned upside down.
10. Their food is served and they eat it over spilt or running water
11. At the end they throw their ceremonial leafy clothes and gear into running water.

In this ritual, several distinct natural transformations, reciprocities and interdependencies are re-enacted, both sequentially and simultaneously. The most obvious is the set of transitions from the sprinkling and pouring of water, via flour, to porridge, then to the action of eating the porridge over water, followed by more sprinkling on the fields, and the final discarding of their leafy clothes into running water. This sequence in itself represents an entire natural cycle.

## The Sieve

The sprinkling of flour from the sieve in stages 5 and 6 of the ceremony is similar enough to the pouring of rain from clouds for the latter to symbolise the former. Flour is the finest of dusts. From this single set of associations, further vivid and evocative correspondences emerge. For example, the word *sito*, which means 'sieve' in both Serbo-Croat and Bulgarian, has many derivatives, all of which indicate smallness or minuteness, e.g. the Serbo-Croat adjective *sitan* (*-na*, *-no*) meaning 'fine', 'little', and hence *sitno*, meaning 'small change' or 'loose change', as well as words like *sitnarijia*, meaning 'odds and ends'.

Thus, a common formula in many of the Serbian rainmaking songs for ‘fine rain’ (i.e. ‘rain falling in small droplets’) is *sitna kiša*, more precisely, ‘sieved rain, sifted rain’ and in Bulgarian, *sitna rosa*, ‘sieved or sifted dew’.

Surely, then, the sieve in Đorđević’s account actually *embodies* this *sitna kiša* or *sitna rosa*. Bearing in mind the rainmaiden’s connection with *Perun*, and the possible link between *Perun* and the Vedic god *Parjanya*, consider the striking similarities evident from the following commentary on the woollen sieve that filters the *soma*, or ‘juice of the divine plant’, in the *Rig Veda* (Zaehner 1962: 20–1):

... the woollen sieve through which the juice of the divine plant is filtered is identified with the sky, and the filtering and pouring of the juice into the water and milk that awaits it is made to represent all manner of cosmic processes. Because the juice is liquid it is compared to and identified with the rain, and Soma becomes the Lord of streams and son of the waters. Because the plant is golden in colour it is compared to the lightning and the noise made by the pressing is compared to the thunderstorm. Assimilated to the sun it fills heaven and earth with its rays [...]

According to the same commentator, the woollen filter in the *Rig Veda* is by no means a mere metaphor for clouds:

The sieve which filters the juice, as we have seen, is likened to the sky; indeed it *is* the sky. Soma is ‘in the navel of heaven in the woollen filter’ (RV, 9.12.4), it ‘traverses the lights of heaven, the woollen filter’ (ibid., 9.37.3), or ‘purifying himself in heaven . . . he walks with the sun in the filter’ (ibid 9.27.5). In none of this is any incongruity felt, for the cultic act creates a magical rapport with the entire cosmos, and the woollen filter thus becomes the centre of the universe and identical with the sky.

Exploring the same example, the commentary by Schrader (1921: 40) is pertinent:

Magic may be practised either by *an action* or by *words*, as can be clearly gathered from its terminology.

Similarly, the flour (powder) that passes through *Peperuga*’s sieve may be said to stand for (represent, embody, symbolise, etc.) the wished-for rain.<sup>8</sup> This implication in turn opens up still more fascinating and fertile correspondences, which will lead, firstly, in directions away from our text, and then back into it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rain is identified with ‘heavenly’ seed in many cultures. See Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1994: 783. ‘In Amerindian tradition rain is “the storm god’s sowing”. Rain was the sperm which made fruitful the sacred marriage. All agrarian civilizations attribute the same symbolic properties to it’.

<sup>9</sup> Melanie Rein has reminded me of a symbolic aspect that is not explored here: the function of the sieve is not primarily to “refine” but to separate. In some cases, what is of value is “fine” and so passes through. In other cases, the contrary is true: the sieve “nets” what is of value and it is the waste or by-product that passes through. See also Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1994: 881–2.



## An excursus through rain, mist and dust

Across a very wide range of Indo-European languages, it is apparent that there is a huge and fascinating maze of perceptual associations and semantic meanings embedded or hidden under words for *rain*, *mist*, *dust*, *powder*, etc. I would hazard the guess that this network is present as a kind of mesh of 'deep' memories and associations, whose echoes reverberate dimly but directly beneath all versions of the Balkan rainmaking customs. Here, there is space for a few hints of these connections. The following tables contain expressions collated from dictionaries and other sources (which are listed in the bibliography).

### Some words and phrases expressing notions of 'rain', 'dew', 'water', 'vapour', 'mist', 'powder', 'dust', etc. in Indo-European languages

**Table 1: some cognates beginning with /T/, /f/, /d/, /t/**

|                    |                                 |  |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Ancient Greek      | <i>thymiān</i>                  | 'to burn so as to produce smoke'                           |
|                    | <i>thymós</i>                   | 'spirit, breath, life, mind, soul, desire, courage, anger' |
| Latin              | <i>fumus</i>                    | 'smoke'  |
|                    | <i>fuscus</i> (s <i>fusc-</i> ) | 'sombre, dark, dusky'                                      |
| Old English        | <i>dust</i>                     | 'fine powder, dust'  |
| Old High German    | <i>tunst, tunist</i>            | 'storm, breath'  |
| Middle High German | <i>tunist</i>                   | 'a storm, breath'  |
| Modern German      | <i>Dunst</i>                    | 'haze, steam, smoke, vapour, mist'                         |
| Modern Dutch       | <i>duist</i>                    | 'meal-dust'  |
| Irish              | <i>tunst</i>                    | 'vapour, fine dust'  |
| Norwegian          | <i>dusk-regn</i>                | 'fine rain, dew' (i.e. 'dust-rain')                        |
| Swedish            | <i>regn-dusk</i>                | 'fine rain, dew' (i.e. 'rain-dust')                        |
| Norwegian          | <i>dysja</i>                    | 'fine rain, drizzle'                                       |
| Serbian, Croatian  | <i>dažd</i>                     | 'rain' (obsolete in standard current speech)               |
| Bulgarian          | <i>dāzhd</i>                    | 'rain'   |

**Table 2: some words (cognates?) beginning with /p/**

|           |                        |  |
|-----------|------------------------|--|
| Tocharian | <i>pärs-</i>           | 'sprinkle' (dust, powder),<br>'splash' (sprinkle, water) |
| Hittite   | <i>papparš-</i>        | 'splash, water'  |
| Czech     | <i>prš</i>             | 'rain'   |
|           | <i>prchat</i>          | 'evaporate'  |
| Slovenian | <i>pršavica, pršec</i> | 'drizzling rain, spray<br>Scotch mist'                   |
|           | <i>pršen</i>           | 'shower'   |
|           | <i>pršenje</i>         | 'drizzle, drizzling, rain'                               |
|           | <i>pršeti</i>          | 'to drizzle, to sprinkle'                                |
|           | <i>pršiti</i>          | 'to spray, to sprinkle'                                  |
|           | <i>prašen</i>          | 'dusty, powdery'   |

|                     |                           |   |
|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Bulgarian           | <i>prah</i>               | ‘dust’  |
| Bulgarian dialects  | <i>pārsholi, prashuli</i> | ‘it’s raining, drizzling’, derived from <i>prah</i> [‘dust’], i.e. ‘rainfall consisting of fine drops, like dust’ |
|                     | <i>prashasvam</i>         | ‘to cover with dust’  |
|                     | <i>prashevitsa</i>        | ‘mill’  |
|                     | <i>praunka</i>            | ‘fine ash from the fireplace, ash from ‘wood’   |
| Bulgarian dialect   | <i>prashitsa</i>          | ‘water’, derived from <i>prah</i> (‘dust’)  |
| Serbian, Croatian   | <i>prah</i>               | ‘dust’  |
|                     | <i>prskati, prsnuti</i>   | ‘to spray, sprinkle, spatter; to gush, pour; to explode, blow up’   |
|                     | <i>prašiti</i>            | ‘to dust, to spray, to sprinkle with powder’  |
| Croatian            | <i>prašek</i>             | ‘powder’  |
| Serbian, Croatian   | <i>pepeo</i>              | ‘ash’   |
| Bulgarian           | <i>pepel</i>              | ‘ash’   |
| Montenegrin dialect | <i>prpor</i>              | ‘water poured over ash’   |
| Croatian (Dalmatia) | <i>prporuše</i>           | ‘participants in rainmaking ceremony’   |

**Table 3: /p/ and /d/ together**

|         |                          |                               |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Russian | <i>poroshena dozhdya</i> | ‘powdery rain’                |
| Latvian | <i>dudina pērkuoniņš</i> | ‘thunder is thundering a bit’ |

**Table 4: common formulas in rainmaking songs**

|           |                   |   |
|-----------|-------------------|---|
| Bulgarian | <i>sitna rosa</i> | ‘fine dew’ or more precisely ‘sieved dew’, ‘sifted dew’ |
| Serbian   | <i>rosna kiša</i> | ‘dewy rain’   |
| Serbian   | <i>sitna kiša</i> | ‘fine rain’ i.e. ‘sieved rain’, ‘sifted rain’           |

Even a cursory glance at Table 1 and Table 2 indicates gradual metaphorical shifts in meaning within and across languages which, when laid out in this way, not only make “good sense” in perceptual and cognitive terms, but even suggest several twangs of recognition and delight to a person who is registering these connections for the first time. Moreover, these varied linguistic examples, across many languages, themselves indicate that the obvious “opposites” – ‘dust’ and ‘rain’ – may well be intimately related in human perception.<sup>10</sup> For example, the compound Scandinavian expressions in Table 1, meaning ‘fine rain, dew’, *dusk-regn* (‘dust-rain’) and *regn-dusk* (‘rain-dust’), find similar counterparts both in the Russian expression in Table 3, *porošena doždya* [‘powdery rain’], and in the formulas of Balkan rainmaking songs in Table 4: *sitna rosa*, *rosna kiša* and *sitna rosna*

<sup>10</sup> I wonder if such labyrinthine associations as these may not be present somewhere below the cognitive surface among many (all?) contemporary speakers of Indo-European (and other?) languages and, furthermore, break through the surface occasionally, in much the same way that interlinked subterranean chambers consisting of cave, tunnels and wells supply our overground rivers and lakes. Such a conjecture would be consonant with Jungian theory.

(‘sieved rain’, ‘dew rain’ and ‘sieved dew’).<sup>11</sup> In one location, at Graovo in western Bulgaria, the rainmaiden is actually called *Rosomanka*, ‘dew-caller, dew-bringer’ (Plotnikova 1999: 101).

Furthermore, the two sets of etymologically and semantically related Indo-European words listed in Table 1 and the semantically related words in Table 2, many of which also have clear etymological links, fall consistently into two *phonological* sets: those beginning with the /d/, /θ/, /f/, /t/ consonants, and those beginning with /p/: comparable, that is, to the sets for the /d/ and /p/ groups of names for the rainmaiden, *Dodola* and *Peperuda*. Thus, in a number of Indo-European languages, a wide range of words beginning in both /d/ and /p/ covers similar fields. Moreover, from a mere glance at the Russian expression in Table 3, *porošena doždya* [‘powdery rain’], with its combination of /p/ and /d/ sounds, it is hard *not* to be reminded of the Western (Dalmatian) variant of the name for the rainmaker, *prporuša*, whose etymology has been directly related to *prah* [‘dust’] via the reduplicated *prpor* [‘water poured over ash’] (Skok 1973: 55–6; and see also below). Nor does it seem entirely coincidental that the Russian expression *porošena doždya* presents a similar combination of /p/ and /d/ sounds to the *Peperuda-Dodola* configuration. In the light of these comparisons, one can hardly help wondering, too, if the regularity of occurrence of the reduplicated plosives /p/ and /d/ associated with the rainmaiden is more than coincidental.

To sum up: I suggest that the specific words used to describe some of the actions and functions in these Balkan songs, along with the phenomenon of ‘fine rain’, that is to say, ‘sieved or sifted rain’ (*sitna kiša*), are of direct linguistic relevance to any discussion of the rainmaking ceremonies, as they are integrally bound up with the meanings both of the rituals themselves and of the names of the protagonists.

### Water above, water below

To return, albeit lingeringly, from this linguistic excursus to the Morava custom and Djordjević’s text: it is equally interesting that his account indicates several intermingling reciprocities between water from above and water from below. The water and flour sprinkled by the girls symbolises rain in the stages that have been numbered above as the 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, as do the words of the song in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages. In this context, as a “pourer” in her own right, the rainmaiden herself is transformed into an agent, representative or embodiment of the clouds which deliver rain, miming their actions and in her song identifying her own movements with them (‘We go over the fields / And the clouds over the sky’). Incidentally, more than 45 years before Djordjević, Frazer had read a very similar account of the ritual, and published an extract from a 19<sup>th</sup> century translation in *The Golden Bough*.

*We go through the village;  
The clouds go in the sky;  
We go faster,*

*Faster go the clouds;  
They have overtaken us,  
And wetted the dorn and the vine.*

<sup>11</sup> I suggest that, to someone coming across these phrases for the first time, their striking quality may well consist in the apparent “unlikeliness” of the analogy between *liquid* (dew, rain) and *solid* (dust, powder).

Frazer comments:

The words of the Serbian song, however, taken in connexion with the constant movement which the chief actress in the performance seems expected to keep up, points to some comparison of the girl or her companions to clouds moving through the sky (Frazer, 1911: 275).<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, water from *below* (i.e. from the well, under the plate and as a stream) is represented in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> stages. So the *dodola* herself is the *recipient* of the sprinkling or pouring too, and as such *re-presents* and even symbolically *becomes* the earthly vessel or container into which the rain falls, and/or the growing plant onto and around which it descends, thereby enabling the plant to grow and flourish in the soil.

In all these respects, this discussion clarifies that the “purity” of the rainmaiden is unquestionable, whether she is momentarily the agent or recipient of the rain that it is her function to promote, invoke or encourage – as well as to represent and embody in her own person by means of her actions and movements. Sky-water is purer and less contaminated than earth-water, or at least, used to be until pollutant acids got into it; and arguably, rain symbolises purity in and of itself. The girl’s role as agent thus emphasises her connectedness with “spiritual” elements: in this aspect, in the rite she becomes, almost literally, “heavenly”. On the other hand, as recipient, whether as an embodiment of the earth itself or as the mortal symbol of all that will grow from it, live and die on it and be buried in it, she may equally be regarded as a “pure” vessel or receptacle into which, one might suggest, the equivalent of a libation is poured. As we shall see, this motif in itself suggests further, and much older associations for the rainmaiden.

In the context of this ritual of sprinkling and pouring, all the lowly “earthly” attributes of the rainmaiden<sup>13</sup> – her barefootedness, her humble social status in the village and her rootedness in cyclic and seasonal change, not to mention her individual mortality – are modulated, blended and uplifted into a ‘higher’, impersonal, elemental and perennial pattern. And as far the notion of any *rite de passage* is concerned, this discussion at least gives credence to the idea that, whatever the age or maturity of the ritual’s leading celebrant, its main accent was always on the onset and arrival of fertility, in the springtime or early summer, as a ‘pure’ gift from above as well as from below, both for the girl herself and for the community she belonged to or interceded for. In this sense, it might be said that this humble Balkan peasant or gypsy girl fully embodies the Herakleitan principle, ‘As above, so below.’

Furthermore, the idea that the ceremony has elements in common with a kind of pagan “baptism” should not be ignored. It appears to be not merely a fertility ritual but one of purification and initiation which, for the people of the village, needs to take place if fertility (i.e. survival and, hopefully, prosperity) is to occur at all. Such actions of sprinkling and pouring water occur widely, of course, in purificatory and initiatory ceremonies (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1994:1082). Christian baptism is just one example. Far earlier

<sup>12</sup> But interpretations of ritual actions and gestures are never interpretable as *simple signs*. “Meanings” are multivalent, as in poems. Here, the constant movement might, quite obviously, also be intended to indicate the fluttering of a butterfly.

<sup>13</sup> These motifs are well documented by such writers as Kulišić (1970: 108-9); Arnaudov (1971:155–201) and Plotnikova (1999).



*Mycenaean bead-seal from Thisbe in Boeotia*

evidence is provided, too, by Minoan and Mycenaean seals which, in this context, suggest that the modern Balkan rainmaiden may have very ancient antecedents.

### **The Pouring of Water in Minoan and Mycenaean Art**

In his 1925 paper entitled “the Ring of Nestor”, Sir Arthur Evans the excavator of Knossos, examines Minoan and Mycenaean seals, including signet rings, which depict female figures. Among these, he correlates designs which show what he calls ‘the Spring Goddess rising from the earth’ (12) and ‘a female figure . . . rising from the ground’ (15). Several artefacts reveal a central, more mature female figure accompanied by two smaller and probably younger females. He asks: ‘Were these little twin companions and ministrants simply handmaidens of the Goddess? Were they perhaps her daughters?’ (14). With scarcely veiled excitement, his discussion then gathers pace towards an interpretation of this central figure, who is holding ‘poppy heads’. Evans sees this figure not only as the ‘Spring Goddess’ but as the goddess who appears ‘*one thousand years before . . . her Hellenic successor Persephonê, at her moment of ascension from the earth*’ (16, italics mine, RB).

Evans then goes on to compare a Mycenaean bead-seal from Thisbê in Boeotia with a Minoan seal-impression from the Domestic Quarter of the Palace of Knossos (17-18) As can be seen from the illustrations, both clearly show a female figure pouring a libation.

Evans writes (18):

On the left side of the field, with one of *her little girl attendants* imitating her action behind, stands the Goddess [...] Her left arm is raised and her right hand is held immediately over the rim of a large jar or amphora, into which an adult female attendant . . . is pouring some kind of liquid from a jug. (Italics mine, RB.)

He then introduces the second seal, discovered in 1922 in the Domestic Quarter of the Palace at Knossos (18-19):



*Minoan seal-impression from Knossos*

[...] the substantial correspondence of the major episode in the two designs is such as to necessitate the conclusion that both refer to some ritual function of the same kind.

Then, rejecting the argument that the libation was wine, Evans proposes his interpretation (19):

It seems preferable to connect the ceremonial pouring of the liquid content of the smaller vessel into the greater with methods of “sympathetic magic” in vogue *among primitive folk the world over by securing rain in seasons of drought*. [...] The view that these intaglio types present ceremonial acts designed to secure rain in a dry season – a not infrequent contingency in Crete – receives support from the appearance of a whole series of somewhat summarily engraved stones, belonging to a numerous amuletic class, which there is every reason for regarding as rain-charms. (Italics mine, RB.)

Here, Evans’s term ‘primitive folk’ echoes the terminology and attitude of the redoubtable Victorian scholar Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, 1871). He then inserts a footnote that directly cites Grimm’s discussions of rainmaking ceremonies in *Deutsche Mythologie* (1875), and offers a further hint of the survival of ancient rainmaking customs in the Macedonia of his own time, correlated with a shrine to the Roman thunder god:

A curious instance of such a rain-producing rite was noted by me at Ibrahimovci near the ancient Scupi (Skoplje). I was informed that an altar, with a dedication to Jupiter, which I had observed lying face downwards there on the village green, was set up in its proper position in times of drought, and that villagers, both Christian and Mahometan, with a local Bey at the head, went together to the stone and poured wine over the top, praying the while for rain.

To summarise: Evans interprets the images of water-pouring female figures carved into these seals as those of a ‘goddess’ who was the pre-Indo-European antecedent of

Persephone. Furthermore, when he wrote these passages, I think it likely that Evans had the Balkan *dodola* at the back of his mind. He knew the work of Grimm, Frazer and others on this theme.<sup>14</sup>

Is there a link between these images and the rainmaking practices that survived to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? In the absence of any hard historical evidence, although it is impossible to go further than hypothesis and conjecture, I suggest that these passages are, at the very least, indications of what the Russian scholars Ivanov and Toporov call “typologically parallel” practices in the ancient world (see below). In that sense, at least, the Minoan and Mycenaean images may be interpretable as precursors, even if not as direct ancestors, of the modern Balkan rainmaking practices.

Furthermore, the idea of “typological parallelism” is consonant with a Jungian interpretation: that, at different times and places, similar constellations of archetypes surface, apparently ‘spontaneously’, yet without necessarily being linked via direct historical cause or even influence. Combining Jung’s approach with that of Ivanov and Poporov would suggest that, rather than searching for ancestral lineage, it is probably more helpful methodologically to ground the exploration of links in examining similarities both of societal type, structure, ideology, etc., and of patterns among the mythical configurations themselves.

### The Rainmaiden and Persephone

The variant “western” names for the participants in the Balkan rainmaking ceremony are *prpac* and *prporuše*. This pair constitutes the third main group of Balkan rainmakers’ names. They are found along the Adriatic coastline of Dalmatia and Istria, with only two locations in inland Croatia and one further south on the Montenegrin coast (Plotnikova 2000; Burns 2006b: 35 & 44–5). The name *Prpac* is of masculine gender. The name *Prporuše* occurs only in the plural and is feminine. The variant *Preporuše* also occurs. The two names describe different functions in the ritual. They were first described by Vuk Karadžić:

In the same way as the *dodolas* go in Serbia, so do the *prporuše* in Dalmatia (Kotari), except that they are not girls but unmarried youths, and they go from house to house with green branches and flowers, and dance and sing. Their master or danceleader is called the *prpac*, and he is wrapped in *pavetina* [a herb] and brambles. While they are dancing and singing, the women pour water over them, making sure that the *prpac* is the one who gets [drenched] most; once they have finished singing and dancing, the housewife makes them a gift of wool, salt, cheese, curds, butter, eggs, etc., and in the evening they make a feast of whatever they have collected during the day and share it among themselves. The *prporuše* sing in front of the houses. (Karadžić 1868, extract tr. Vera Radojević & RB.)

<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, the youthful and as-yet-unknighthed Arthur Evans travelled widely in the Balkans, and wrote a fascinating book, illustrated with his own sketches, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina On Foot During the Resurrection, August and September 1875* (1876). For historical insights underlying the state of affairs in Bosnia in our days, as well as revelations of his own assumptions and prejudices, this text makes enlightening reading.

This group of names is geographically separated from the eastern group, to which it shows marked similarities, especially in the reduplication of /p/. There are three distinct theories to account for the etymology of these names. First, Jakobson (1964; and 1985b: 23) identifies them with the eastern group and with his derivation from *Perun*:

In Dalmatia, Perperuna has the name Prporuša with the substitution *per* > *por* in the second part of the root and with zero grade in the first part.

The second theory is Skok's: for *prporuša*, he lists two meanings: firstly, 'when water is poured on burning ash', and secondly:

[...] a term in folklore made metaphorically from this, on account of the pouring of water: unmarried youths who in drought go from house to house, dancing and singing, so that rain will fall; women who pour water over them (in Kotor and Dalmatia). (Skok 1973: 3/55–56; extract tr. RB. See also Table 2 above.)

The third theory comes from Ivanov & Toporov (1974: 106–8), who present a conjectural but fascinating argument for a correlation between *Persephone* and *Prporuša*:

In this connection, one's attention is attracted to the ancient Greek fertility goddess *Persephone*, daughter of Zeus, the god of the sky, and of Demeter, the goddess of the earth. The depiction of *Persephone* in the form of a *young maiden with ears of corn and/or flowers*, her representation or appearance as the *opener* of Spring, of the earth, the motif of the first *rain* of spring which accompanies her arrival on earth, and finally, the presence of the ritual and cult of *Persephone* and *Demeter* in the Eleusinian mysteries, with elements which are reflected in ceremonies among contemporary Balkan peoples – all of this leads one to perceive in the image of *Persephone* something like a *typological parallel* [my italics, RB] to the images which are under consideration here (localised, indeed, at the highest level). Moreover, the ancient Greek *Persephōni*, the Latin *Proserpina*, the Etruscan *Phersipnai* and *Phersipnei* (the Orco tomb/sepulchre) and the like, have not yet received any satisfactory explanation, even though these have been the continuous objects of 'folk etymological' transformations. In so far as any tentative explanation has been put forward about this, i.e. that these genuinely attested names were preceded by a form of the type *\*Prsepna*, *\*Prse(r)pona* and the like, one cannot help thinking about the closeness in sound of these forms to the source of the Balkan names for isofunctional personages such as *Prporuše* < *\*Pr(s)pors-*; *Perperona*, *Perperoūna* < *\*Per(s)per-on-*, and so on. The comparison of Etruscan *persu*, meaning 'underground world', with Latin *persona* is a characteristic example (Extract tr. Richard Cook & RB).

Conjectural though this is, and whether one finds the link between *Peperuga-Dodola* and *Persephone* acceptable or not, the material gathered in this essay leads to a single incontrovertible conclusion. Hemming the borders and edges of the rainmaking songs and interwoven through the fabric of their linguistic associations, ancient mytho-



logical patterns are stitched intricately in. This observation would suggest that detailed and in-depth comparative analysis of formulas, set phrases and patterns of imagery in rainmaking songs from *all* the Balkan languages is called for, within the scope of a single systematic study. This, ideally, should include research into etymological, ethnographic, literary-critical, musical and folk-song patternings. There is no doubt that this would yield richly rewarding results.

### Fertility and Soulmaking

Finally, to return to the opening words of the Morava song: its opening injunction 'Fly, fly', combined with its invocation of God and its comparison of the young singers and dancers themselves with 'clouds over the sky', must mean that *at this moment* the village girls are given the status of aerial, spiritual beings. From this opening, I suggest, they are to be understood as servants or handmaidens of the all-powerful god who makes the rain fall. And this line of thinking leads to two further willing suspensions of disbelief, both of which should, of course, be entertained simultaneously. The first is that these singing, dancing girls *represent a goddess*, whether as living embodiments of the feminine deity herself, as her aerial ministrants or as her mortal priestesses. The second is that they represent *departed souls*, who have vanished like clouds 'into air, into thin air' – or who are, perhaps, still present, as if fluttering, close by. We have already pointed out that the words 'fly, fly, peperuga' identify the rainmaidens with butterflies. Butterflies symbolise the soul.

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## Dež in prah

*Richard Burns*

Razprava obravnava panbalkansko prakso klicanja dežja, ki jo povezujemo z imenoma dodola in peperuda in s številnimi njima sorodnimi besedami. Delo je nastalo kot rezultate daljše pesmi, ki jo je napisal avtor in ki obravnava ta običaj. (*In a Time of Drought*, 2006, najprej natisnjena v srbskem prevodu kot *U vreme suše*, 2005). Pričujoči članek najprej oriše nekatere značilne elemente nastajanja pesemske strukture, ki se pojavijo takrat, ko avtor uporablja material, ki je pred tem že bil 'mitološki'. V nadaljevanju članka se avtor loti analize znanega primera balkanskega običaja klicanja dežja, ki ga je opisal Dragutin M. Djordjević v svojem delu *Život i običaji narodni u Leskovačkoj Moravi* (1958). Med podrobno jezikovno analizo in primerjalno kontekstualizacijo je posebna pozornost posvečena motivu sita. Sledi obravnava različnih kognatov v indoevropskih jezikih, ki se navezujejo na izraze za »dež,« »prah,« »prašek,« »pepel,«, »dim« in tako naprej. Če te izraze nanizamo drugega ob drugega, opazimo, da so v tesni in globoki zvezi z običajem klicanaj dežja. V nadaljevanju avtor obravnava sorodna motiva cikličnega očiščevanja in prošnje za rodnost, ki se zlivata v simbolizem »nalivanja vode«. Članek nato postavi hipotezo, ki balkansko prakso povezuje z dvema starima mediteranskima mitološkima motivoma. Prvi se navezuje na minojske in mikenske priprošnje za dež (preko dela Sira Arthurja Evansa o tjušnjih (1925), drugi pa na boginjo Perzefono (preko teorij V. V. Ivanova in V. I. Toporova, 1974). Avtor meni, da obstaja dovolj elementov, da bi lahko imeli minojsko, mikensko in grško gradivo za »tipološke paralele« in morde celo za predhodnike balkanskega običaja pri katerem nastopajo dodole/peperude. Skratka, običaj klicanja dežja je bil s pomočjo analize izbranega gradiva osvetljen iz zornega kota raznovrstnih jezikovnih, mitoloških in zgodovinskih podatkov in predpostavk, na ta način pa razprava odpira nova vprašanja o tem običaju.