

S T U D I A
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STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA
ISSN 1408-6271 www.ISSN 1581-128x

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Izdajata / Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti, Inštitut
Publicato da / za slovensko narodopisje, Ljubljana, Slovenija
Published by in / e / and

Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature, Comunicazione,
Formazione e Società, Udine, Italia

Založnik / Casa editrice / Založba ZRC / ZRC Publishing, ZRC SAZU
Publishing house

Spletna stran / <http://sms.zrc-sazu.si/>
Sito internet / Website <http://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/sms/>

Prispevki so recenzirani / Gli articoli sono sottoposti a referaggio / The articles are externally peer-reviewed

Izhaja s podporo Agencije za raziskovalno dejavnost RS / Pubblicato con il sostegno finanziario deli' Agenzia per
la ricerca scientifica della Repubblica di Slovenia / Published with the support of the Slovenian Research Agency

Studia mythologica Slavica is included in the following databases: MLA Bibliography; SCOPUS, Sachkatalog
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Slika na ovitku / Fotografia sul copertina / Cover photo:
Gvido Birola, Kuga (Peste / Plague), 1972.

Naklada / Tiratura / Imprint 300

Tisk / Stampato da / Printed by Collegium Graphicum, d. o. o.



Belenus, Cybele, and Attis: Echoes of their Cults through the Centuries

==== Marjeta Šašel Kos =====

V članku sta obravnavana dva zanimiva primera čaščenja rimskodobnih božanstev v severovzhodni Italiji, Noriku in Panoniji, ki je, kot se zdi, preživelo skozi srednjeveško obdobje vse do novega veka. Belen, ki so ga kot pomembno keltsko božanstvo častili v Noriku in Akvileji, je bil kot »sveti Belin« še vse do druge polovice 19. stoletja med ljudstvom čaščen na Tolminskem v zaledju Ogleja. V Prekmurju in slovenskem Porabju (ter širše na Madžarskem, Gradiščanskem in avstrijskem Štajerskem) so se po vsej verjetnosti ohranili sledovi kulta Kibele in Atisa, ki se kažejo v nenavadnem pustnem običaju svatbe z borom (borovo gostüvanje).

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Tolminsko, Prekmurje in Porabje, Belin, Kibela, »poroka z borom«

There are two interesting cases of the worship of Roman period deities in the north-eastern Italian and Pannonian regions, which in one way or another seem to have survived through the early medieval to modern times. The first is the cult of Belenus, the well-known Celtic and most notably Norican and Aquileian god. The second case is that of Cybele and Attis, the so-called eastern deities, whose cult became highly influential in the mentioned areas – as well as elsewhere – in the second and third centuries AD. Interestingly, a deity called “holy Belin” was documented in the second half of the 19th century in the area of Tolmin in Slovenia (the hinterland of Aquileia), as a traditional folk belief. In Pannonia, traces of the cult of Cybele and Attis seem to have survived from antiquity in Prekmurje and Porabje (Slovenia, Hungary), reflected in the unusual and still existing custom of the “wedding with a pine-tree”.

KEYWORDS: Tolminsko, Prekmurje and Porabje, Belin, Cybele, “wedding with a pine-tree”

BELENUS – BELINUS

The worship of Belenus, the well-known Celtic and most notably Norican and Aquileian god,¹ is well-attested in Celtiberia, Galliae, and western Alpine regions.² However, his cult was of particular significance in eastern Venetia and Carnia, notably in Aquileia and its surroundings, as well as in Noricum, where he was regarded as the main god of

¹ Maraspin 1968; Birkhan 1997: 582–585 and *passim*. Šašel Kos 2001; Wojciechowski 2002; Zaccaria 2008 (Beleno); Piccottini 2017; Handy 2018; De Bernardo Stempel, Hainzmann 2020, 1: 151–156; 2: 902–909 and *passim*.

² Gourvest 1954; Hatt 1976: 358–359; Olmsted 1994: 386; Haeussler 2008: 29–30 and *passim*.

the Norican kingdom. In two passages, Tertullian referred to him as the most important Norican deity, not unlike the goddess Atargatis in Syria, the god Dusares in Arabia, worshipped as the chief deity by the Nabataeans, Caelestis in Africa, and otherwise unknown Reguli in Mauretania (*Apol.* 24.7: *Unicuique etiam provinciae et civitati suus deus est, ut Syriae Atargatis, ut Arabiae Dusares, ut Noricis Belenus, ut Africae Caelestis, ut Mauretaniae Reguli sui*; cf. *ad nat.* 2.8). In Noricum, from where the worship of Belenus had probably spread to Iulium Carnicum (Zuglio) and Aquileia, the god has always been documented as Belinus;³ dedications to him have mainly come to light in the core of the Norican kingdom in Virunum (Zollfeld near Maria Saal) and Magdalensberg (probably old Virunum: Dobesch 1997, but see Glaser 2003). An otherwise unknown goddess Belestis (possibly the goddess of nature and fertility),⁴ who may be associated with Belinus and whose cult has been attested in the same area (Šašel Kos 1999: 21–22, 25), seems to confirm the local importance of the god.

At Aquileia and its hinterland, Belenus was frequently equated with Apollo; in a similar way as Apollo, he was also worshipped as a god of (sun)light and healing powers (Green 1997: 152–164; see also Green 1995: 474), although according to a new etymology of the name, Belenus should rather be related to springs of water (De Bernardo Stempel 2004: 212–213; De Bernardo Stempel, Hainzmann 2020, 1: 152–153). His close association with water is confirmed by two dedications to Fons B(eleni),⁵ and by an altar, in which Belenus is worshipped together with the Nymphs (*Inscr. Aq.* 155 = *EDR117090*); Wojciechowski 2001: 140–141, no. 12). Thermal springs are also attested at Iulium Carnicum (Zaccaria 2008 [Beleno]). Belenus was regarded as the divine patron of Aquileia (Maraspin 1968; Wojciechowski 2002; Zaccaria 2008 [Beleno]) and, as such, he figures in Herodian's *History after Marcus Aurelius* (8.3.7–8) and in the *Historia Augusta (Vita Maximini duo* 22.1), in rather long narratives, in which these authors described the march of Maximinus Thrax and his troops to Italy in AD 238. The emperor died during the siege of Aquileia (Šašel Kos 1986: 412–433), and his army was shortly afterwards defeated. These events were ascribed to the divine protection of Belenus Apollo, who – as the most prominent god of the city – was regarded as a powerful protector against any enemies, as the *defensor* of the city.⁶

At Iulium Carnicum, a town close to the border with Noricum, Belinus (his name does not appear as Belenus) was undoubtedly worshipped as one of the important gods, possibly under the influence of his cult at Aquileia, or in Noricum, or both. The region was inhabited by the Carni, as is indicated by the second part of the name of the town (which formerly seems to have been a *castellum* or *forum*), while “Iulium” suggests that the settlement had been given certain autonomy very likely by Julius Caesar. At that time, it must have been granted the status of a Roman *vicus*, while eventually, under Augustus,

³ Scherrer 1984: 175–187; Šašel Kos 1999: 25–27; Zaccaria 2004; Piccottini 2017; Handy 2018.

⁴ *ILLPRON* 446 (= *HD042481*); *ILLPRON* 654 (= *HD057853*); De Bernardo Stempel, Hainzmann 2020, 1: 147–150; 2: 800–804.

⁵ *Inscr. Aq.* 153 (= *EDR116842*); 152 (= *EDR116841*); Wojciechowski 2001: p. 160, nos. 61, 62; the abbreviation has probably been correctly explained.

⁶ Birkhan 1997: 282–285; Olmsted 1994: 386–387, and *passim*. Pascal 1964: 123 ff.; Maraspin 1968: 145–161; Chirassi Colombo 1976: 175–180.

it became a *colonia* (Mainardis 2008: 36–55). The town must have had close links with the Norican kingdom, particularly commercial ones; it was excellently situated in the mid-way between the kingdom and north-eastern Italy with Aquileia as the most significant city in the region. The cult of Belinus must have flourished in the town for a long time, since his sanctuary had to be repaired as early as the second half of the first century BC.

Belinus' sanctuary in the town is epigraphically attested on a large stone monument from the second half of the first century BC, perhaps a stele, erected by two chiefs of the village (*magistri vici*), both freedmen: Publius Erbonius Princeps and Sextus Votticius Argentillus. They commemorated the renovation of the sanctuary and its decoration with five gilded disks and two statues, which they financed themselves.⁷ An altar dedicated to Belinus has also been discovered at Celeia (Celje), one of the most important Norican towns, where his cult had perhaps been introduced from the Virunum territory, or, more plausibly, from Aquileia.⁸ This can be inferred from the name of the dedicator, Lucius Sentius Forensis; Sentii are well-attested at Aquileia but not in Noricum (*Inscr. Aq.*, indexes; *OPEL* IV, 68).

Belinus may have been the main god of the Norici, and it cannot be excluded that the famous bronze statue of the “Youth of Magdalensberg” (a 16th-century copy of a statue from the first century BC) should actually be identified with Belenus, as has been suggested by Peter Scherrer (1984: 175–187). This can plausibly be argued on the basis of a small bronze statue of a youth from the early Augustan period, found at Concordia but now missing. The dedication to Belenus was inscribed on the left thigh of the statue in the name of Marcus Porcius Tertius.⁹

A sanctuary of Belinus has also been attested at Santicum in the territory of Virunum (present-day Villach, Slovenian Beljak); it is mentioned on one of the two altars dedicated to the god.¹⁰

THE GOD BELIN IN THE TOLMIN AREA (WESTERN SLOVENIA)

What is indeed fascinating is the fact that the worship of a deity called Belin, with the epithet “sveti” (meaning “holy” in Slovenian) was documented in the second half of the 19th century in the area of Tolmin (present-day Slovenia, *fig. 1*) as a traditional folk belief. The local population believed that Belin was a divine healer in possession of a miraculous “key”, with which he could cure blindness (Ovsec 1991: 472). This was described by a

⁷ Mainardis 2008: 85–88, no. 1 = *CIL* V 1829 + p. 1053 (= *EDR*007048): [---] / et q(ui) s(upra) s(cripti) s(unt), aedem Belini / [su]a pecunia refecere et / [clu]pea inaurata in fastigio V / et signa duo dedere, / [P.] Erbonio P. l. Principe / [Se]x. [V]otticio Sex. l. Argentillo / mag(istris) vic(i). See also Fontana 1997, 153–165.

⁸ *Belino* / L. Sentius / Forensis: Lovenjak 2003: 335, fig. 4 (= *HD*045030); he originally published the first line as *Beleno*, thus also in *EDH*.

⁹ *CIL* V 1866 = Lettich 1994: no. 1 (= *EDR*097739): M(arcus) Por(cius) Tertius / Bel(eno) Aug(usto) v(otum) s(olvit) Concord(iae). Zaccaria 1995, 184–185; Zaccaria 2008 (Beleno), 382; 384. See also Mastrocinque 1995, 273–274. I would like to thank Prof. Claudio Zaccaria very much for having kindly drawn my attention to this statuette.

¹⁰ Leber 1972: 19, no. 15 = *ILLPRON* 685 = Scherrer 1984: no. 26 (= *HD*057524): [---?Be]lin[o ---] / [---templum ve]l[ust]a[te con]labsum ---] / [---?].

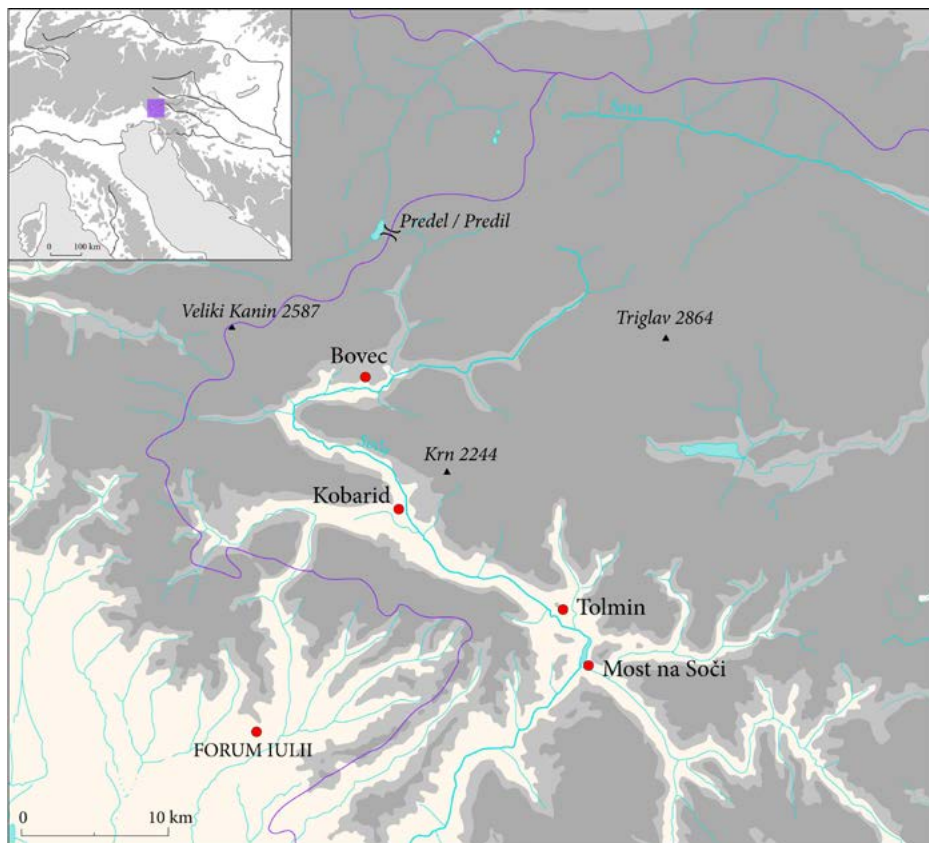


Fig. 1: The region of Tolmin, Slovenia (Computer graphics: Mateja Belak).

historian and ethnologist Simon Rutar in his book about the history of the Tolmin area (*Zgodovina Tolminskega*, 1882), which is the only testimony to the presence of Belin among the inhabitants of the Tolminsko region. Rutar interpreted this phenomenon as the Slovenian adaptation of the belief in Belinus/Belenus, who had been widely venerated during the Roman Republican and imperial periods in eastern Venetia and Noricum, as the principal god of the Carni and patron of Aquileia. Rutar regarded him as a deity of sunlight and correctly noted that the god had had several shrines and temples at Aquileia; however, he erroneously ascribed him an Illyro-Thracian, i.e., oriental, and not Celtic origin (Rutar 1882: 21; Rutar 1883). Rutar's misinterpretation of the Celtic Belenus/Belinus and of his worship in the Roman period is understandable, since towards the end of the 19th century, when he wrote, no adequate scholarly literature concerning Roman and Celtic cults must have been available to him, and not much had been done on these subjects in his time.

How to explain the phenomenon of Belin in the Tolmin region, as described by Rutar? The worship of Belinus at Aquileia and its hinterland may or may not shed light on the belief in Belin in the Tolmin area, and indeed, the conclusion that the cult of Belinus/Belenus continued throughout antiquity and has never entirely ceased is far from certain.

However, it is certainly true that adoration of pagan divinities took deep roots in the regions of Tolmin and Kobarid, preventing the advancement of Christianity, which is not least illustrated by an incident that happened in Kobarid in late Middle Ages, in 1331. The local population must have been to a great extent pagan, since the inhabitants worshipped a sacred tree and a sacred spring. The church in Cividale (Čedad in Slovenian) took severe measures against the “ethnic religion”, engaging the inquisitor Franciscus de Clugia (Francesco di Chioggia), a Franciscan, to act against the heretics; he was in charge of the regions of Venetia and Friuli. During the punitive expedition to Kobarid the sacred tree was felled, and the sacred spring was destroyed with large stones having been thrown into it (Juvančič 1984, with further citations). Similar pagan traditions may have been alive among the indigenous population of the Tolmin and Kobarid regions during the prehistory and the Roman period. The existence of an important pagan sanctuary in the immediate vicinity of Kobarid, at Gradič, sheds a most interesting light on the pre-Roman and Roman cults in this relatively remote area.¹¹

Sacred places, such as caves, stones of unusual shape, sacred trees and springs, must have been rather common in this region, living on through centuries and surviving as late as the second half of the 20th century, as has recently been revealed by the testimony of Pavel Medvešček – Klančar (2015; 3rd edition 2018). Old faith in the divine qualities of the surrounding nature has persisted in this area for long centuries and must have merged, upon the arrival of the Slavs in the beginning of the Middle Ages, with the Slavic forms of paganism. Thus it cannot be entirely denied that the belief in Belinus could have taken deep roots in an area outside the main communication routes such as the regions of Tolmin and Kobarid. It may be supposed that the veneration of this popular deity, which was no doubt modified over several centuries, persisted among the Romanized indigenous inhabitants up to the arrival of the Slavs. They may have come late in this area, where they encountered mainly the descendants of the pre-Roman Carni. The god’s name was not modified or linguistically adapted to the Slavic language, which probably indicates that the local indigenous population was vital enough to impose their own beliefs to the entire community there.¹²

CYBELE – GREAT MOTHER

The second interesting case is that of Cybele and Attis, her youthful consort who castrated himself, the so-called eastern deities, whose cult became highly influential in the north-eastern Italian, Adriatic and Pannonian regions – as well as elsewhere – in the second and third centuries AD (Šašel Kos 2010).

The worship of Cybele originated in Phrygia, where she had been venerated as the “Mother of the mountains” since the early first millennium BC (Roller 1999: 124–125, 171).

¹¹ Osmuk 1987; Osmuk 1998. Several statues of Apollo were discovered, as well as of Hercules, other statues that have been found were those of Venus, Mars, and Diana; votive tablets, as well as Celtic and Roman coins have also come to light, see also Osmuk 1997; cf. Horvat 2018: 344.

¹² Celtic culture and cults had exercised some influence on the Slavic world elsewhere, cf. Rosen-Przeworska 1964.

In the Greek-speaking world, where her worship had been introduced in the early sixth century BC (Roller 1999: 119–141), she was known as *Mêter oreia* (the Greek translation of the “Mother of the mountains”); in the Roman Empire, she was worshipped as *Magna Mater*, the Great Mother. Most interestingly, in a dedication to *Magna Mater* from Emona (Ljubljana) in the Italian Regio X, the divine name *Oraea* appears, which should almost certainly be explained as Cybele’s epithet *oreia*, although it appears as if this was the name of another goddess on the same altar.¹³ At Salonae (Solin), where eleven dedications to her have been found to date, a *dea barbarica* is mentioned in one of them, an epithet that could have hardly referred to any other goddess but Cybele, since festivities related to her worship were regarded as barbaric. In the Dalmatian metropolis, she seems to have been worshipped as early as the second half of the first century BC (*CIL* III, 14663,2 = *AE* 1994, 1348 = *HD*031710; Šašel Kos 1999, 82, no. 1).

Upon the decision of the Roman Senate, the dark meteorite symbolising the goddess was solemnly transferred to Rome from Pessinus (Ballıhisar in Turkey) in 204 BC, during the war against Hannibal, when his army had invaded central Italy. However, because of different accounts of ancient writers it is not entirely certain what were the exact reasons and initiative for this political and religious mission headed by the eminent Roman senators (Gruen 1990; Roller 1999, 263–265; Šašel Kos 1994). Rome strove to gain prominence in the Greek East, not least justifying her ambitions by referring to its legendary Troianic origin (Gruen 1990). A sanctuary had been built for Cybele on the Palatine, and her cult had become and remained one of the official cults in Rome, enjoying greater or lesser favour from the Roman aristocracy despite the fact that several rites performed in her honour were indeed barbaric.¹⁴

As the goddess of mountains and wild nature, she was usually accompanied by two lions. She was mostly equated with Rhea by the Greeks, her servants having been called “*Couretes*”, such as Rhea’s companions, who rescued with their shouting the new-born infant Zeus from his father Kronos. According to several writers, among others Posidonius and Strabo, Rhea was called the Mother of Gods, or Agdistis, or the Great Phrygian Goddess, but also *Idaea* (referring to Mt Ida), *Dindymene*, *Sipylene*, *Pissinuntis*, *Cybele*, or *Cybebe*, in accordance with various places of her worship (10. 3. 12 C 469; cf. 12. 5. 3 C 567; Van Haeperen 2019: 57–77).

The cult of *Magna Mater* is well documented in northern Adriatic area (Vermaseren 1989), notably in Histria, and particularly in a metropolis such as Aquileia, but also at Emona.¹⁵ At Celeia or its territory, the Great Mother was worshipped by a member of the municipal aristocracy, one Gnaeus Pompeius Iustinus, as *M(ater) D(eum) M(agna) Blau(n) dia*. Iustinus was a town councillor (*decurio*) and one of the two mayors (*duumvir*) of the town.¹⁶ The dedication is most interesting because of the epithet of the goddess, derived

¹³ *RINMS* 21 = *AIJ* 162 (= *EDR*128998 = *lupa* 8871): *Orae(a)e / ex imp(erio) / M(atris?) D(eum?) M(agnae?) / L(ucius) A(---) P(---)*.

¹⁴ Sanders 1981. See also Thomas 1984; Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018; Van Haeperen 2019.

¹⁵ Jurkić 1975 (Histria); *Inscr. Aq.* 284–291; Zaccaria 2008 (Cibele); *RINMS* 20 (= *EDR*128997); 22 (= *EDR*129001); *RINMS* 21 = *AIJ* 162 (= *EDR*128998 = *lupa* 8871).

¹⁶ *CIL* III 5194 + p. 1830 (= *HD*067019); Wedenig 1997: 120 C 11; Visočnik 2017: no. 49, with earlier citations.

from the Phrygian town of Blaundus (Toutain 1911: 75, n. 11; Swoboda 1969: 200, no. 8). At Poetovio, within an area of minor sanctuaries at Spodnja Hajdina (Ciglencečki 1998: 255), an altar dedicated to Iuno and Magna Mater has been found, as well as a statue of Cybele (*ILJug* 1138 = *HD016103*; Modrijan – Weber 1981: 95–97).

Cybele had all the characteristics of a “divine mother”; Diodorus Siculus, for example, mentioned that she could heal children with her purification rites, *καθαρμοί* (*Bibl. hist.* 3.58). The goddess was worshipped in several towns in Noricum and Pannonia. The great influence of the cult of the Great Mother in the mentioned regions, as well as in the Roman Empire generally, is indirectly confirmed by the so-called “mourning Attis”, often depicted on Roman period grave monuments. It may be supposed that his representation on the tombstones symbolizes an untimely death (Sanders 1981: 282).

The goddess called Great Mother was worshipped under different names all over the Roman Empire, among various Romanized peoples of the Empire, thus notably also among the Celts, who had been the pre-Roman inhabitants of the Poetovio region. The cult of Magna Mater often took the place of local goddesses, as seems to have been the case of Adsalluta, worshipped in the sanctuary of Savus and Adsalluta at Podkraj near Hrastnik, where in addition to several altars dedicated to Savus and Adsalluta or to Adsalluta alone, a small altar to Magna Mater has also been discovered. Among the Celts, the cults of various Mother Goddesses, in plural or singular, enjoyed great popularity, as was the case with the Alounae (Alovnae) at Bedaium (Sebruck im Chiemgau; Hainzmann 2016), the *Nutrices* at Poetovio, the most favoured goddesses in the city (Šašel Kos 2016), or Dea Nutrix, worshipped in the sanctuary at Frauenberg near Flavia Solva (Schrettle 2016). These were some kind of birth goddesses, nourishers and guardians of children; some of the aspects of their worship must have presumably been congenial to Magna Mater. The great impact of the cult of Magna Mater throughout antiquity could also be explained due to the soteriological aspects of the goddess; therefore, it should not be surprising that the worship of Magna Mater might have been a challenge to the spread of Christianity (Fear 1996; Borgeaud 1996: 169 ff.; Alvar 2008: 383 ff.).

“WEDDING WITH A PINE-TREE (BOROVO GOSTŪVANJE)” IN PREKMURJE, AND THE CARNIVAL FESTIVAL

Most interestingly, traces of the cult of Cybele and Attis seem to have survived from antiquity in Slovenia and outside its borders, most notably in Prekmurje (the extreme north-eastern region of Slovenia), as well as at Ptuj (Roman Poetovio) and the surrounding countryside. Poetovio was an important and cosmopolitan Roman town where, as has been mentioned, the cult of Magna Mater is well-attested. The city had been transferred from the province of Noricum to Pannonia at the beginning of the Roman rule, and came again to Noricum in the late Roman period (Slapšak 2001; Horvat et al. 2003; Šašel Kos 2014).

The most unusual and still existing custom of the “wedding with a pine-tree”, which takes place during the Carnival time in various, mainly Protestant, villages in Prekmurje (*fig. 2*), quite likely sheds light on the long tradition of the cult of Cybele and Attis,



Fig. 2: “Wedding with a pine-tree” (Porabje, 2005: photo Slavko Ciglenečki).

these once very popular deities. The custom is also known in Porabje in north-eastern Hungary, where a Slovenian minority is living, in the nearby regions in Croatia, as well as in Austrian Burgenland and Styria. The ceremony of the “wedding with a pine-tree” is performed in those villages, where there was no wedding in the pre-Carnival time, between Christmas and Shrovetide (Ciglenečki 1999; Ravnik 2009). In the Protestant villages young people were not so many as in the Catholic communities, therefore the weddings were rarer. Moreover, Catholic priests did not approve of the custom, since they regarded it as making fun of church rituals.

The “wedding with a pine-tree” is an event involving an entire village and, as has been suggested by Slavko Ciglenečki, resembling in an interesting way the festival that was celebrated each year on 22 March in various towns of the Roman Empire (Ciglenečki 1999). On this day the “timber workers” (*dendrophori*: “tree-bearers”) ceremoniously performed the act of carrying a pine-tree in procession, having embellished it with flowers and wrapped it in bandages. The pine-tree symbolically represented the dead Attis, the youthful consort of the mother-goddess Cybele.

On Carnival Sunday, the cutting down of a pine-tree takes place in the course of elaborate ceremonies in one of the villages in Prekmurje and the regions mentioned above, where nobody got married. It is a combination of Carnival and wedding customs (Kuret 1989, I: 24–28). A skilfully decorated pine-tree is being carried in procession by adolescents, both male and female, one of the performing youths should marry the pine-tree. The comparison between the worship of Cybele as it was celebrated in Rome (Summers 1996), and elsewhere in the Roman Empire, notably also in Pannonia (Tóth

1992), and the “pine-tree wedding” in various villages in Prekmurje and Porabje is indeed quite striking. Mojca Ravnik described the traditional event as it took place in 2002 in the village of Predanovci in the Prekmurje municipality of Puconci;¹⁷ there the pine-tree personified the “bride”, who was sitting on it, when it was being brought from the forest to the village. Jelka Pšajd analysed the custom in detail, basing her research on all available sources, both written and oral.¹⁸ The custom is increasingly becoming a tourist event, losing its original meaning of making fun of unmarried young people. However, it seems more likely that the pine-tree should represent the bridegroom, not least because the “pine-tree” in Slovenian is of masculine gender (Hari, *op. cit.* in n. 17).

The most outstanding Carnival event in Slovenia is “Kurentovanje” festival. The masked men, mainly young adults, are called the Kurents (Kurenti/Koranti); they are the main performers of the traditional and widely famed Carnival merrymaking at Ptuj and in the Ptuj region, as well as in several other towns and villages in Slovenia and outside its borders, most notably in Dravsko polje, Haloze, and Slovenske gorice (Kuret 1989, I: 11–73). In 2017, the carnival was registered in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Among the masked companions of the Kurents are the “piceki” (“cockerels”), children bearing pointed caps, who can be regarded as reminiscent of young Attis.¹⁹ It may be interesting to note that the emasculated attendants of Cybele were called *galli*.²⁰ *Gallus* is also the Latin word for a “cock”; however, in this context this should merely be regarded as a strange coincidence or a misunderstanding. The roots of the “Kurentovanje” festival should be sought in the old beliefs in the spirits of the deceased, as well as in the spirits of nature who should chase away the winter and bring back the fertility of the soil (Kuret 1989, I: 11–73).

A coincidental similarity of the names of Kurents (Kurenti) and the Curetes (nature spirits protecting the fruit of the fields) should be noted, as well as certain similar features associated with their activities. Lucretius’ description of festivities related to the cult of Cybele and Attis may shed some light on the role of the Kurents. The Roman poet and philosopher described the Curetes as the armed groups attending the Great Mother. His passage reads: “Here an armed band, which the Greeks name Curetes, disport themselves randomly among the Phrygian troops, and leap up among their group, joyful in blood, shaking the frightful crests by the nodding of their heads.” (2.629–632; translation from: Roller 1999: 298).

There are, of course, no “Phrygian” or any other troops during the Carnival; instead, many other maskers are walking around the towns and villages, dressed in a most specific attire. However, “joyful in blood” can in one way or another be compared to the behaviour of some of the Kurents before the second world war, especially if two groups

¹⁷ Ravnik 2009. An excellent description of the custom, first noted in Prekmurje already before the First World War and possibly as early as in the 19th century, is in the “*Wikipedija, prosta enciklopedija*”, written by Brigita Hari (consulted in November 2021).

¹⁸ Pšajd 2004.

¹⁹ Ciglencečki 1999: 27; about the spiritual roots of the Kurents, see also Čelan 2020.

²⁰ *Galli* were not Cybele’s priests, but rather her attendants: Van Haepere 2019: 53–54.

of Kurents met. They were armed with hedgehog clubs, several also with knives and some even with revolvers and it happened that a few were killed during the ensuing skirmishes (Kuret 1989, I: 29–30). The Kurents do make much noise and behave rather wildly also during recent Carnivals.

The two presented cases of the echoes of the pre-Roman and Roman worship of Belinus and Cybele with Attis, as also of the festivities related to their cults, shed a most interesting light on the great impact of ancient religious practices. It cannot be denied that their traces, although transformed by the passing centuries, persisted to the modern age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would very much like to thank Slavko Ciglencečki and Monika Kropelj Telban for their most valuable comments on my paper.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE = L'Année épigraphique.

AIJ = V. Hoffiller, B. Saria, Antike Inschriften aus Jugoslawien. Heft I: Noricum und Pannonia Superior. Zagreb 1938 (re-print Amsterdam 1970).

CIL = Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum.

EDH = Epigraphic Database Heidelberg.

EDR = Epigraphic Database Roma.

ILJug = A. et J. Šašel, Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Jugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et MCMLX repertae et editae sunt. Situla 5. Ljubljana 1963; iidem, Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Jugoslavia inter annos MCMLX et MCMLXX repertae et editae sunt. Situla 19. Ljubljana 1978; iidem, Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Jugoslavia inter annos MCMII et MCMXL repertae et editae sunt. Situla 25. Ljubljana 1986.

ILLPRON = Inscriptionum lapidariarum Latinarum provinciae Norici Indices (compos. M. Hainzmann, P. Schubert). Fasc. I. 1986; II-III. 1987.

Inscr. Aq. = J. B. Brusin, Inscriptiones Aquileiae. I–III, Udine 1991–1993.

lupa = F. und O. Harl, <http://lupa.at> (Bilddatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern).

OPEL = B. Lőrincz, Onomasticon provinciarum Europae Latinarum: Vol. I: *Aba – Bysanus*, Budapest 2005²; Vol. II: *Cabalicius – Ixus*, Wien 1999; Vol. III: *Labareus – Pythea*, Wien 2000; Vol. IV: *Quadratia – Zures*. Wien 2002.

RINMS = Marjeta Šašel Kos, *The Roman Inscriptions in the National Museum of Slovenia / Lapidarij Narodnega muzeja Slovenije*. Situla 35. Ljubljana 1997.

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BELEN, KIBELA IN ATIS: ODMEV NJIHOVIH KULTOV SKOZI STOLETJA

MARJETA ŠAŠEL KOS



Belen – Belin

Belen, v Noriku znan kot Belin, je bil keltski bog, ki je bil čaščen od Iberije do Galije in območja Alp, njegov kult pa je bil posebej priljubljen zlasti v Noriku in Akvileji (Oglej). Veljal je za najpomembnejše božanstvo Noriškega kraljestva, kar je omenil grški pisec in zagovornik krščanstva s konca 2. in iz 3. stoletja, Tertulijan (*Apol.* 24.7). Iz Norika se je njegov kult zelo verjetno razširil v mesto *Iulium Carnicum* (Zuglio), kjer je stalo njegovo na napisu omenjeno svetišče, in v Akvilejo, kjer je veljal za zaščitnika mesta. V času, ko jo je oblegal rimskih vladar Maksimin Tračan, ki je bil na poti v Rim, da bi kaznoval uzurpatorje, naj bi mesto rešil Belen. V Noriku so častili tudi boginjo *Belestis*, kar po vsej verjetnosti dodatno potrjuje pomembno vlogo Belina. Ni izključeno, da znameniti bronasti kip »mladeniča s Štalenske gore« predstavlja Belina. V Akvileji in njeni soseščini, kjer je stalo več Belenu posvečenih svetišč, so ga pogosto enačili z Apolonom, bil je torej božanstvo (sončne) svetlobe in zdravljenja, po vsej verjetnosti pa tudi zaščitnik vodnih izvirov, saj so ga častili skupaj z Nimfami. Njegov oltar je bil najden tudi v noriški Celeji (Celje).

Bog Belin na Tolminskem

Zelo zanimivo je, da je bilo čaščenje svetega Belina dokumentirano še v drugi polovici 19. stoletja med staroverskim prebivalstvom na območju Tolmina (*sl. l*). Ljudje so verjeli, da je Belin božji zdravilec, ki ima čudežen ključ, s katerim lahko pozdravi slepoto. To je v svoji *Zgodovini Tolminskega*, ki je izšla leta 1882, zapisal zgodovinar in etnolog Simon Rutar. Lahko domnevamo, da bi kult Belina iz Akvileje utegnil preživeti iz antike skozi dolga stoletja do konca 19. stoletja, da torej nikdar ni popolnoma zamrl. Čeprav je staroverstvo na območju Tolmina

in Kobarida izpričano v dokumentu iz 14. stoletju, v odročnem področju zahodne Slovenije pa celo vse do 20. stoletja, predvsem v Posočju, je treba vendarle priznati, da ta razlaga ni povsem zanesljiva.

Kibela, velika mati

Njen kult izvira iz Frigije, v času rimskega imperija je bila ena najvplivnejših boginj, ki je bila v Emoni čaščena kot Velika mati *Oraea* (z gore). Na oltarju iz Salon (*Salonae*, zdaj Solin) pa se, glede na svoje poreklo in nenavaden obred, saj se je njen mladi soprog Atis kastriral, imenuje celo »barbarska«. V Celeji so jo častili kot Veliko blaundijsko mati, boginjo iz frigijskega mesta *Blaundus*. V času vojne proti Hanibalu je rimski senat leta 204 pr. kr. št. sklenil, da temen meteorit, ki naj bi predstavljal boginjo, prenesejo iz Pesinunta (Ballihisar v Turčiji) v Rim. Bila je boginja gora in divje narave, ki sta jo pogosto spremljala dva leva. Imela je vse značilnosti božanske matere, lahko je ozdravljala otroke, o njenem velikem pomenu pa priča tudi »žalujoči Atis«, ki je bil pogosto upodobljen na nagrobnikih. Ko je umrl, naj bi se spremenil v bor.

Poroka z borom (Borovo gostüvanje) v Prekmurju in pustovanje

Vse kaže, da so sledi čaščenja Kibeles in Atisa preživele iz antike do danes; to je mogoče opazovati predvsem v Prekmurju, Porabju in sosednjih območjih, tudi na Madžarskem, Hrvaškem in v Avstriji. Elementi tega kulta pridejo najbolj nazorno do izraza v običaju »poroke z borom«, ki se je v času pustovanja ohranil predvsem v protestantskih vaseh v Prekmurju (*sl. 2*), kajti katoliški duhovniki ga niso odobrvali. Ta slovesni obred je potekal med Božičem in pustnim časom v vaseh, kjer se tisto leto ni nihče poročil. Poroka z borom je bila dogodek, pri katerem je sodelovala vsa vas, in kot je opozoril Slavko Ciglenečki, je v nekaterih podrobnostih zelo zanimivo sovpadala z antičnim praznovanjem, ki se je 22. marca odvijalo po raznih mestih rimskega imperija. Na ta dan so »drvarji« (*dendrophori*: nosilci drevesa) v procesiji slovesno nosili iz gozda bor, ki so ga okrasili s cvetjem in slavnostno povili. Bor je simbolično predstavljal mrtvega Atisa. Običaj »poroke z borom«, ki je do nedavnega še imel simbolični naboj, saj je opozarjal na to, da tistega leta ni bilo poroke, pa, kot ugotavlja Jelka Pšajd, vse bolj postaja turistični dogodek.

Tudi kurentovanje, ki je zlasti odmevno na Ptuj in v širši okolici (Dravsko polje, Haloze, Slovenske gorice) in je vpisano v seznam svetovne nesnovne kulturne dediščine, ima svoje zametke v antiki. Spremljevalci kurentov so »piceki«, in zanimivo je, da so se spremljevalci Kibeles, evnuhi, imenovali *galli*, *gallus* pa je latinsko ime za petelina. Kurenti oz. koranti spominjajo na Kurete (*Curetes*), udeležence pri Kibelinem kultu, duhove narave in zavetnike poljskega pridelka. Izvor kurentov je treba iskati v starem verovanju v duhove umrlih in duhove narave, ki so pregnali zimo in zemljo ponovno napravili rodovitno.

Iz obeh komentiranih primerov je mogoče sklepati, da so sledi kultov Belina, Kibe in Atisa po vsej verjetnosti preživele od predrimskega in rimskega časa vse do polpreteklih oz. celo današnjih dni, kar dokazuje, da je vpliv antičnih verovanj resnično velik in ni nikoli povsem zamrl.

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