Chthonic aspects of the Pomeranian deity Triglav and other tricephalic characters in Slavic mythology

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This article explores the nature of West Slavic deity Triglav, postulating he was primary a god of the underworld. Parallels that connect Triglav with chthonic beings from Slavic folklore are highlighted, notably dragons and serpents, and with three-headed characters of more ancient Indo-European myths.

The cult of the West-Slavic god Triglav ('Three-headed') is relatively well described in medieval sources documenting the conversion of the Pomeranian duchy on the shores of Baltic, through the efforts of the German bishop and saint Otto of Bamberg. The events of his two missionary tours there (first one in 1124-5, second in 1128) were recorded by the bishop's principal biographers, Ebbo and Herbordus, together with some details of pre-Christian beliefs and traditions that the saint had to overcome. Ebbo in particular, in his *Vita Ottonis episcopi Bambergenis*, gives two reports (II:13, III:1) that offer some valuable insight into Pomeranian beliefs about Triglav.

Based on these accounts, most researchers and popularisers of Slavic mythology tend to assume that such a three-headed god actually represents a unity of three deities: a divine triad, or even some sort of pagan Trinity. Others, however, have noted a darker streak in this mythic character. Both Čajkanović (1994:79-80) and Čausidis (2005:448) speculate he was a chthonic deity, while Gieysztor (1982:125) sees in him a north-western variant of Veles, proto-Slavic god of dead. This paper aims to show, through a study of historic sources, ethnographic data and comparative mythology, that Triglav was indeed believed to be mostly an underworld deity, and that the triplicity of this deity ought to be considered in the context of his chthonic nature.

West Slavic Triglav in Vita Ottonis

We shall first analyse two passages from Ebbo's work that give us some insight into worship of Triglav. The first is in the context of Otto's first mission to Pomerania, which, for the reasons discerned bellow, met with only limited success:

"Cum vero delubra et effigies ydolorum a pio Ottone destruerentur, profani sacredotes auream imaginem Trigelawi, qui principaliter ab eis colebatur, furati, extra

provinciam abduxerunt et cuidam vidue, apud villam modicam degenti, ubi nec spes ulla requirendi esset, ad custodiendum tradiderunt. Que, mercede ad hoc conducta, quasi pupillam oculi sui includens profanum illud custodiebat simulacrum; ita ut, trunco validisime arboris cavato, illic imaginem Trigelawi pallio obductam includeret et nec videndi ne dicam tangendi illud quiquam copia esset. Solummodo foramen modicum, ubi sacrificium inferretur, in trunco patebat; nec quisquam domum illam nisi profanos sacrificorum ritus agendi causa intrabat.... Quoad audiens, inclitus Pomeranorum apostolus multifaria intecione satagebat, quoquo modo illuc attingere; ... sapienti usus consilio, quendam ex comitibus suid Hermannum nomine, ... latenter ad viduam illam destinare curavit. Cui etiam precepit, ut, assumpto habitu barbarico, ad sacrificandum Trigelawo se pergere fingeret. Hermannus itaque, pilleolum barbaricum et clamiden mercatus, post multa ardue vie pericula viduam illam tandem conveniens, asserebat: se, nuper de procelloso maris gurgite per invocationem dei sui Trigelawi erutum ideoque debitum ei pro salvatione sua sacrificium litare desiderantem, ductu eius illo mirabili ordine per ignotes vie tractus devenisse. ... Qui alacer edem illiam ingressus, ... Deinde curiosius attendens, si forte negocii, pro quo missus erat, exequendi facultas ulla suppeteret, animadvertit imaginem Trigelawi tanta cautela et firmitate trunco inpressam, ut nullo pacto eripi aut saltem loco moveri posset. ... Et circumferens oculos, vidit sellam Trigelawi comminus parieti affixam; erat autem nimie antiquitatis et nullo iam pene usui apta. Statimque exiliens cum gaudio, infaustum munus pariet detrahit et abscondit. Primoque noctis conticinio egressus, omni festinatione dominum suum sociosque revisit; cuncta que egerat replicat, sellam etiam Trigelawi in testimonium fidei sue representat. Apostolus itaque Pomeranorum, habito cum suis consilio, sibi quidem et suis ab hac requisicione deistendum censuit, ne non tam zelo iusticie quam auri cupiditate hoc agere videretur." (Ebbo II:13)

"When the temples and the idol images had been destroyed by Otto, the sacrilegious priests carried the golden image of Triglav, which was chiefly worshipped by the people, away by stealth outside the province and committed it to the care of a certain widow who lived in a small country house where it was not likely to be looked for. The widow, for a stipulated reward, took charge of this profane image and shut it up as a man shuts the pupil of his eye. For this purpose, the trunk of a great tree was hollowed out, and the image of Triglav, after being covered with a cloak, was placed inside so that no opportunity of seeing, not to say finding it, was afforded to anyone. Only a small hole was left in the trunk where a sacrificial offering might be inserted, and no one entered the house except for the purpose of offering an idolatrous sacrifice... The famous apostle of Pomerania, on hearing this, considered many plans for getting to the place ... Accordingly, he wisely determined to send secretly to the widow's house one of his companions named Hermann ... He directed him to assume the native dress, and to pretend that he was going to sacrifice to Triglav. Hermann then bought a native cap and cloak and, after encountering many dangers in the course of his difficult journey, he came at length to the house of the widow and declared that, as the result of an appeal to his god Triglav, he had been delivered from a tempestuous sea and desired to offer a fitting sacrifice as a token of gratitude for his safety. He said also that he had been led thither in a marvellous manner and by unknown ways ... He entered eagerly into this sanctuary and ... then examined it more closely to see if there was any means

by which he could accomplish the business for which he had been sent, and he noticed that the image of Triglav had been pressed into the trunk so carefully and firmly that it could not possibly be pulled out or moved. … Looking round he noticed that the saddle of Triglav was fixed to a wall close by: it was of great antiquity and was of very little use. He leapt with joy and, pulling from the wall this inauspicious gift, he made off. He started early in the night and with all haste rejoined his master and his companions, to whom he narrated all that he had done, and showed the saddle of Triglav in order to confirm the truth of his statements. The apostle of Pomerania, after taking counsel with his companions, decided that he and they ought to refrain from further search for the idol for fear lest it should appear that he was prompted to do this not by his zeal for justice but by his desire to secure the gold." (translation: Robinson 1920:89-91)

This entire account appears as a folktale: we have a trickster hero, a mysterious widow and a hidden pagan monstrosity. The line "after encountering many dangers in the course of his difficult journey" very much suggests that the chronicler is skipping over what may be more fantastic parts in the report he was given. It should be noted that Ebbo did not know St. Otto (Robinson 1920:10-11) and is generally considered a less reliable source on bishop's first mission than Herbordus (Leger 1984:39), who makes no mention of this entire incident at all. Ebbo probably had to make do with differing reports (about events thirty years in the past by his time) from various second-hand sources, including, perhaps, Pomeranian converts themselves. It is thus not unlikely that in this strange account we may have some traces of Pomeranian mythic narratives.

Leger (1984:120, footnote 1) noticed similarities between Ebbo's account and a Russian story he heard in his own days: about a clever constable who in a similar manner infiltrates a hidden forest sanctuary of an illegal Old Believer sect, and then makes off with their forbidden icon. The overall theme of a disguised hero who outwits some secret cult may likely indicate a generic folktale structure. However, our interest here is in more specific theme underlying Ebbo's narrative, namely this: St. Otto decides to leave Triglav alone after the idol has been hidden inside a **tree trunk.** We can compare this motif with various East Slavic folk narratives where God is described battling some demonic adversary:

"Гэто спорував Бог зь нячисъциком:

Я цябе, каецъ, забъю!
— А як ты мяне забъе́ш: я схуваюся!
— Куды?
— Под чаловека!
— Я чаловека забъю, грѐху ямỳ отпущу, а - цябе забъю!
— А я пот коня!
—Я й коня забъю, человека на гэтым месьци награжду, а цабе забъю!
— А я пот корову схуваюся!
— Я й корову забъю: хозяину на гэто место награжду, а цябе забъю

"Thus quarrelled God with the Unclean one:

I shall, 'tis said, kill you!
— And how shall you kill me: I shall hide!
— Where?
— Beneath a man!
— I shall kill a man, relieve him of sins, and then kill you!
— And I [shall hide] beneath a horse!
— I shall kill a horse too, compensate the man at once, and then kill you!
— And I shall hide beneath a cow!
— I shall kill a cow too, compensate the owner at once, and then kill you

...
— Ну, дык я, каецъ, схуваюся у воду пот корч, пот колоду!
—Ну, там твое место, там сабе будз!"
(P 4, 155-156)

...
— Well then, I shall, 'tis said, hide in water beneath a trunk, beneath a log!
— Well, there is your place, there you be!"
(translation according to: Katičić 2008b:191)

In South Slavic tradition, the demonic being hiding in a tree-trunk is a dragon. This fragment of a very archaic song from the Croatian island of Šipan describes him as being quite unsettled by the presence of a heavenly creature above him, in this case a grey falcon:

"Javor jeli poručuje:
'Vita jelo, sestro moja,
što si žuta vrha tvoga?'
'Kako neću o javore,
o javore zelen bore!
U stabru mi ljuti zmaje,
a u vrhu više njega
sivi soko gnijezdo vije
Zmaj sokolu poručuje:
'O sokole moj sokole!
Ne vij gnijezdo više mene…"
(HNP 5, 421, no. 14)

"Maple to fir saith:
'Lean fir, sister of mine,
Why art [thou] yellow [in the] tip of thi-
ne?'
'O maple, how will I not be?
O maple, green tree!
In my trunk a fierce dragon
And on a tip above him
Grey falcon wreaths a nest
Dragon to falcon saith:
'O falcon, my falcon!
Wreath not a nest above me…"

A dragon hiding in a tree-trunk to escape the wrath of a celestial adversary is also a motif common to various ancient Russian and Belarusian fairy tales. Their overall narrative is a variation of a "Puss in Boots" story, but various details are incorporated into it from much older mythopoetic traditions. A crafty fox, playing the part of a cat who aids some poor peasant, arrives before a wealthy, cattle-herding dragon and warns him of the arrival of formidable Tsar Flame and Tsarina Lightning (in Russian versions), or simply Thunder and Lightning (Belarusian versions) (Belaj 1998:75).

"Есть в твоем саду старый заповедный дуб, средина вся повыгнила; беги и схоронись в дупло, пока они мимо не проедут."
(A 1, 399-400)

"In your orchard there is a venerable hallowed oak, rotten completely in the middle; run and hide in the trunk until they are gone."
(translation according to: Katičić 2008b:229)

In Belarusian versions, a dragon is usually identified as *Zmey Gorymc*, a name likely derived from a common Slavic word *gora*, which means both a mountain and a forest. This sobriquet is probably quite ancient, because South Slavic tradition also knows of *Zmaj Gorjanin* (Belaj 1998:78). The name may be interpreted in various ways, as meaning a dragon that is upon the mountain, a dragon that is hiding inside a mountain, a dragon that is a mountain himself, or a dragon hiding in a forest (Pleterski 2011).

This final view is partly confirmed by the name of a dragon in Russian versions of the story, where he is called *Tsar Zmijulan*. Such a character is also invoked in one very ancient Russian charm, which was meant to aid travellers lost in woods to find their way:

"Встану я <имя рек>, благословясь, пойду перекрестясь, из избы в двери, из ворот в вороты, а из ворот в чистое поле; поклонюсь на все на четыре стороны и пойду в густой, темный лес. Прийду в середину густого леса, и найду тут старца старого, как лунь седого; поклонюсь ему низехонько и скажу: «Гой еси, старец, как лунь седой! Скажи ты мне всю правду-истину: где живет царь Змиулан?» «Поди ты в правую сторону к царю Змиулану: что, не дуб стоит, Змиулан сидит; что, не ветер шумит, Змиулан говорит.» «Гои еси, царь Змиулан! Прикажи ты своим верным слугам меня <имя рек> из сего леса темного вывести и направить на путь на дорогу.» Бодьте, мои слова, крепки и лепки, отныне до веку. Замок в роте, а ключ в воду." (Май 105, № 261)

"I, [name of supplicant] stand, bless myself and I go, making the sing of cross, from room to porch, from porch to gates, and from gates in plain field, I bow to all four sides and go to a thick, dark forest. I enter the middle of a thick, dark forest and I find here an old elder, gray as a kite, I bow to him deeply and I say: 'Be healthy, old man, gray as a kite. You tell me all the right truth: where does Tsar Zmijulan live?' 'You go to the right side to Tsar Zmijulan: what, that is not an oak standing, Zmijulan is sitting; what, that is not wind whistling, Zmijulan is speaking.' 'Be healthy, Tsar Zmijulan! You command your faithful servants to take me [name of supplicant] outside of this dark forest and send me on the path and road.' Be, my words, stout and sticky, from now till ever. A lock on the mouth, and key in water" (translation according to: Katičić 2007:120-121).

This charm has several parallels to the narrative found in Ebbo. First, the motive: the supplicant here seeks the aid of Tsar Zmijulan to help him find his way in a forest, while Otto's spy, Hermann, proclaims: "He had been led thither in a marvellous manner and by unknown ways". Second, the intermediary: the way to the Tsar Zmijulan is guarded by a grey old man, and the idol of Triglav is guarded by an old widow. Third and most important, both Zmijulan and Triglav hide in a tree, so that they remain inaccessible and unknown to the outsiders. Yet the faithful who have been initiated into the rites of their deity will have no trouble recognizing him in his dwelling place: "That is not an oak standing, Zmijulan is sitting." Fourth and final, in both accounts, there is an emphasis on secrecy of this entire matter: "A lock on the mouth, and key in the water."

It is noteworthy how in South Slavic folklore there exists a character with a name almost identical to Tsar Zmijulan - *Zmijski car*. This serpent king was sometimes imagined as having three heads (Loma 1998:48). That a serpent, and a triune one at that, can be hidden at a bottom of a tree in East Slavic traditions as well, can be shown by various Belarussian charms against snake venom. Typically these have the following form:

"У чистым поли, на синим мори стоиць дуб шыроколист. Под тым дубом вовцы стары, пераяры, чорная вовна. На тэй вовни ляжиць змея змяиная…"

(P 5, 108, № 280)

"On the plain field, on the wide sea, stands an oak of wide leafs. Beneath that oak there are old sheep, sheep of yesteryear, black wool. On that wool lays a serpent serpentine…"

(translation according to: Katičić 2007:104)

But can also appear in variations such as this:

"На мори на Лукоморъи стоить дуб, а под дубом камянь, а на камяни чорное руно, а ў чорном руни три змяи…"

(P 5, 111, № 293)

"On sea, in bay, stands an oak, beneath that oak a stone, and on that stone black wool, and in black wool [lie] three serpents…"

(translation according to: Katičić 2008b:203)

Thus the overall semantic structure of narrative shifts freely between one serpent and three serpents. The conclusion would be that a serpent at the bottom of a tree is somehow tripartite, and this quite obviously implies three heads. Katičić (2008b:201) also notes the triplicity of this mythic serpent; however, he sees a parallel with various Indo-European triune goddesses, rather than what may be a more obvious connection to the West Slavic Triglav. The woolly nest in which this triune serpent hides is also significant, because wool, especially black wool, has a very strong connection with the world of dead in Slavic folklore. (Katičić 2007:101-111, Belaj 1998:138-139,142). There may be parallels to this in Ebbo's account, as the chronicler mentions the idol was covered with a cloak: *pallio obductam*. The basic meaning of *pallium* in Latin is a cloak or a covering (Charlton & Short 1879), but during the middle ages, the word acquired a more specific meaning of a type of liturgical vestment, a woolly scarf, which was worn by the highest ranking clergy and pope himself (Braun 1991). It is thus possible the chronicler meant that Triglav's idol was wrapped into something woolly.

Ebbo's second report concerning Triglav is much shorter, and probably less legendary and more factual. Here the chronicler shortly describes the paganism in which Pomerania lapsed, prior to St. Otto's second mission there in 1128:

"*Stettin vero, amplissima civitas et maior Iulin, tres montes ambitu suo conclusos habebat. Quorum medius qui et alcior, summo paganorum deo Tirgelawo dicatus, tricapitum habebat simulacrum, quod aurea cidari oculos et labia contegebat; asserentibus ydolorum sacredotibus: ideo summum deum tria habere capita, quoniam tria procuraret regna, id est celi terre eti inferni; et faciem cidari operire pro eo, quod peccata hominum, quasi non videnus et tacens, dissimularet.*" (Ebbo III:1)

"Stettin, their most extensive town, which was larger than Julin, included three hills in its circuit. The middle one of these, which was also the highest, was dedicated to Triglav, the chief god of the pagans; its image had a triple head and its

eyes and lips were covered with a golden diadem. The idol priests declared that their chief god had three heads because it had charge of three kingdoms, namely, heaven, earth and the underworld, and that its face was covered with a diadem so that it might pretend not to see the sins of men, and might keep silence" (translation: Robbinson,1920:110).

Two themes are present here: symbolism of the three heads and symbolism of the gold. We shall first examine the latter. The essence seems to be a connection between golden diadems and "sins of men".

Belaj (1998:48) notes how in Slavic folklore "gold is connected with some diseases, for instance jaundice (Czech *zlatenicě*, Slovak *zlátenica, zlatnica, zlatka*, Slovenian *zlatenica*; a close semantic connection is obvious between notions of 'golden' and 'yellow') and scrofula (tuberculosis boils on the neck, in Russian *золотуха [zolotuha]*)."

In a well-known oath of Kievan prince Igor, recorded in the Russian Primary Chronicle for the year 971, the underworld god Veles/Volos is invoked to punish the oath breakers by making them "*злати Якожє злато (zoloti yako zoloto* – 'yellow as gold')" (Zaroff, 1999:60), i.e., have them stricken with diseases. Similar ideas seems to have existed among the West Slavs, as indicated by the German priest Helmod of Bossau, who in his *Chronica Slavorum* (I.84) writes how the Slavs are extremely reluctant to swear an oath, fearing the avenging wrath of their gods (Zaroff, 2001:85). The gods which punish with diseases are, in almost any mythology, of chthonic nature. Diseases belong to the world of dead. Yet the same supernatural power that curses with illness can also remove it, so the underworld is usually the best address to petition for a cure. We can observe this way of thinking very clearly in the following Russian charms against some sort of cattle ailment:

"… пойду в сырые горы, ко синему морю и в ледяную лужу; из ледяныя лужи течет ледян змей и пожирает он чистое сребро и красное золото. И гой еси, змей, не пожирай чистого сребра и красного золота, и поди ты к моей милой скотине в правую ноздрю пожрати всю полтретьядцать ноктев." (Май 77, № 197).

"...I go into the moist mountains, to wide sea and into an ice bog; from ice bog flows an ice dragon and devours he pure silver and beautiful gold. And be healthy, dragon, do not devour pure silver and beautiful gold, and you go to my dear cattle, in right nostril, to devour all half of thirty nails."
(translation according to: Katičić, 2007:100)

Here the dragon's devouring of "pure silver and beautiful gold" is implied to be the same thing as his devouring (i.e., removing) of whatever sickness was meant under this folk name. It is essentially being asked to take back to himself that which afflicted the animal. In the same way, in this following charm, another dragon, the golden-headed like the statue of Triglav, is invoked to remove the snake venom from patient:

"Во морском озере, во святом колодце черпаю я воду, отговариваю, приговариваю от той лютой от медяницы, от

"In the sea lake, in holy spring I draw water, I respond, I complain of that fierce viper, of golden head. You, fierce dragon,

золотой головой. Ты, змей лютый, золотая голова, выкинь свою жалу од рабы божией (имя рек) …" (Май 73, № 183)

golden head, tear away your sting from the servant of God [name of patient]..." (translation according to: Katičić, 2007:99)

Knowing all this, we may offer the following explanation for golden diadems on Triglav's statue: Triglav is blindfolded so he cannot see the "sins of men", which would anger him, and provoke him to unleash his ghastly powers in retribution. To make sure the deity is completely prevented from bringing ills into the mortal world, he is also gagged to "keep silence", i.e., be unable to utter deadly curses which would result in diseases. With the malevolent aspects of the god being so tabooized, beneficent ones are enhanced at the same time, by making the bands over his eyes and mouths golden. Thus, through the rules of imitative magic – the belief that like attracts like – the deity is aided in recalling back onto himself the 'golden' diseases that already plague the world.

Finally, we come to the symbolism of Triglav's three heads. Ebbo's statement, at first, seems to bluntly contradict idea of Triglav being a chthonic deity. The chronicler describes the god as ruling all three levels of mythic cosmos: heavens, earth and underworld. However, the Latin verb Ebbo uses here is *procurare*, which actually means "to take care of, attend to, look after" (Charlton & Short, 1879). *Procurator* would thus be someone who rules not by command or force, but by virtue of providing for the well-being of his subjects. Therefore, the correct understanding of this passage is that Triglav **provides** for the three kingdoms, in a sense that he has a responsibility for maintaining their continual existence.

The belief in tripartite division of cosmos among Slavs is rather well attested by archaeology. The most well-known relic of Slavic paganism yet uncovered is the famous "Zbruch idol", whose three tiers of reliefs engraved upon each of its four sides are assumed to represent three levels of mythical cosmos. If this is so, then what we have depicted in the lowest tier should be a god of underworld who supports the entire earth on his outstretched arms (Čausidis 2007:448).

Two parallels with Ebbo's account are apparent here. First, this Slavic Atlas quite literally bears responsibility for maintaining all three levels of cosmos in existence. They would all collapse into ruinous chaos of underworld was he to cease his support. Second, unlike the characters in upper tiers, he is depicted on only three sides of the pillar: the fourth side in lowest register is left blank, and this was surely not done unintentionally, or without a symbolic meaning. The chthonic deity apparently had to be shown with only three heads. Thus the lowest tier of a Zbruch idol provides us with an image of a three-headed god who provides for the well-being of the three kingdoms (*tria procuraret regna)* of heaven, earth and underworld.

This could also explain why the name "Triglav" is so frequently tied to mountains in the toponymy of South Slavic lands. The three-headed god of underworld acts as the very foundation of *axis mundi*, which in mythic traditions most often takes the form of either the world tree or world mountain. We have already seen how this deity hides in a tree, merges with the tree and becomes the hallowed tree itself. In a similar manner, the god of underworld who resides at the very bottom of the world mountain, who bears the world mountain upon himself, actually become the world mountain, supporting the entire cosmos.

Tricephalic characters among East and South Slavs

The name of Triglav seems to be absent from toponymy, as well as from folklore, of East Slavs. It also does not appear in any of the known historic sources mentioning various East Slavic deities. The theonym which does appear in several East Slavic medieval manuscripts is *Trojan*. It is listed among the condemned pagan gods in the 12th century translation of the pious Greek legend *Virgin's Descent into Hell*, and in the 16th century *Revelation of St. Apostle* (Leger 1984:110). It is also repeatedly mentioned in the epic *Lay of Igor's Campaign,* though in fairly obscure context: the poem sings of the "path of Trojan", "ages of Trojan", and the "land of Trojan", without any hint of what these are (Magnus 1915:50). The name is also known from toponymy: there is a village called Trojan near Smolensk, Trojanovo near Tver, Trojanovka near Poltava, the ruins near Kiev called Trojan's Moat (балъ трояновъ) by local people; also possibly related are several rural localities called Troitsk through Russia, former village of Troitskoye near Moscow, and the town of Troilov on the Don River (Magnus 1915:51). In the Balkans, there is a city (and a nearby monastery) of Trojan in Bulgaria, several Trojan villages in Romania, and the ruins called Trojan's City (*Trojanov Grad*) on mountain Cer in Serbia.

Several explanations were proposed for this name. One has it deriving from the name of Roman emperor Trajan, the conqueror of Dacia, deified after death, whose cult possibly endured long enough among Romanized populations of lower Danube to influence (at least South and East) Slavic pre-Christian beliefs. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that some folk accounts explicitly state that Trojan is (or was) a Roman emperor (Leger 1984:111). The second explanation understands the name as meaning "Third" or "Threefold" (Magnus 1915:52). This, however, in no way excludes the first hypothesis. While Trajan's cult might indeed had some influence on Slavic mythic traditions, the deified emperor would eventually be incorporated into the pre-existing Slavic belief system, and his name explained through Slavic folk etymology. In such a way Trajan could become Trojan, "Triune", and end up being identified with a native Slavic deity, one that was already believed to be somehow tripartite.

Such a view is supported by the fact that in South Slavic folklore Trojan really does appear as a tricephalic and chthonic monster. In particular, among the Serbs, there was a belief in vampiric *Tsar Trojan*, who rides out into the nights and seduces the wives of his subjects, but has to flee before his horses eat their barley and the roosters crow, otherwise the sun dawns on him and he melts. (Magnus 1915:52) The following version of such tale was recorded in the 19th century by Vuk Karadžić:

> "In a castle on Mount Cer there lived Tsar Trojan. He had three heads: one devoured people, the other animals, and third fish. By day, he dwelt in his city on [mount] Cer, and by night in Tsirina on Sava [river]. The people disliked such a way of life, and complained to St. Demetrius, one of Trojan's servants, and pleaded him to ask his master about what he fears. 'I fear only the sun', answered Trojan. Learning this, St. Demetrius filled the horses' feedbags with sand instead barley, and told people to pluck out tongues of their roosters, so their song would not signal dawn to Trojan. Thus was he distracted, and, being late, the sun caught upon him. He plunged beneath a haystack, but a bull came and trampled the hay, and he melted." (Leger, 1984:113)

Based on this, Čajkanović (1994:76-83) equates Trojan with the Pomeranian Triglav. There are indeed several parallels here, aside the obvious tricephaly. First, the presence of horses, and implication of Trojan as a night rider is significant. Describing St. Otto's first mission to Pomerania, Herbordus (II:33) notes how in the city of Stettin, people held a great black horse – a chthonic symbol if there ever was one – considered so sacrosanct that no one was allowed to ride it, and one of their chief priests was charged to look after the animal at all times. (Robinson 1920:79) The chronicler nowhere states Pomeranians believed this to be Triglav's steed: he only describes the augury rite performed by the horse. However, since Ebbo mentions Triglav's saddle in his first report, we may assume the three-headed god was at least in some way connected to this animal.

Second, there is a motif of Trojan hiding beneath a haystack. Katičić (2007:111-117) lists various Slavic beliefs concerning harvest rituals, all of which mention an entity – a bear among East Slavs, or a God among South Slavs – sitting on the haystack, or hiding beneath it. He concludes that among proto-Slavs, the underworld god Veles, in his more benign role as "lord of wealth" had a special connection with the harvest, and was believed to preside over it, by sitting beneath a haystack (2007:118). The word "stack", Proto-Slavic *stògъ*, originally meant "pole, shaft" (cf. old Norse *stakkr* "stack, shaft", Latvian *stēgs* "rod, pole") (2007:113). This wooden pole is simply another representation of *axis mundi*, the world pillar which on the macrocosmic level was symbolized by an image of a world tree or a world mountain. Thus, the deity who hides at the bottom of a haystack is the same deity who hides inside a trunk of a hallowed tree, or who supports the very foundation of a world mountain.

Third, there are quite a few Serbian tales involving the fantastic Cer Mountain, and the legendary ruins of Trojan's city on it. In one of these, the population of Trojan's city are said to be pagans, worshiping an idol of silver and gold (Petrović 1970:10). This could, of course, be a common storytelling cliché, but the significance of gold in the cult of Triglav has been noted above. Another legend tells of a dragon living in a lake beneath Trojan's city, who had to be appeased with regular sacrifices of animals, and, sometimes, women. (Petrović 1970:11) That this dragon might indeed be another form of Trojan is further supported by an East Slavic tradition. Compare the opening lines of Serbian tale with the beginning of this Novgorod legend from Russia:

> "In Novgorod, they say, in the place of Peryn monastery, there once lived a serpent-beast Peryn, who every night went to sleep in Ilmen, to a cowgirl [on river] Volhov..."
> (Katičić, 2008b:245).

We see the same underlying structure in both narratives, with merely the names reflecting local conditions: a monstrous being traverses the dichotomy of sanctuary/hill/day - village/river/night, in order to reach his riverside girlfriend(s). While in the Serbian version, this monster is three-headed, in Russian it is described as a "serpent-beast", i.e., a dragon. The implication is that Trojan – and, if we follow Čajkanović equation, Triglav as well – might have originally been understood as some dragon-like being. Moreover, the tricephaly of Slavic dragons is a well-known motif from folklore. Among the East Slavs, Zmey Gorymc was often imagined with three heads (Ivanov

& Toporov, 1990:672). Among the South Slavs, dragon-like or serpent-like beings of conclusively chthonic nature usually bear foreign names, such as Turkish *Aždaja*, which is also most often imagined as being three-headed (Petrović 1970:9). However, both Gorymc and Aždaja can have more than three heads: five-, seven-, nine- or even twelve-headed dragons are also known from folklore. But tricephaly seems to be by far the most prevalent, and most ancient theme. We can observe this in the following Bulgarian song, where St. George overcomes a three-headed dragoness called *Lamja*. Despite this name being a recent loan-word from Greek (λάμια), the song itself contains a very archaic motif:

"Търгнал ми е свети Георги — свети Георги, божне ле, с аляна коня! —да обижда зелен синор... На път среща сура ламя, трооглава, шестокрила, път му пречи, ход не дава, затворила шест планини, заключила шест извори, та не дава капка вода. Извади се цветен Георги, извади се остра сабля, та замахна и отсече, та отсече до три глави, та бликнали, та потекли, то потекли до три реки: първа река жълто жито, друга река ройно вино, трета река мед и масло..."

"Forth went Saint George – Saint George, my God, with a scarlet horse – around green meadow... On the way he meets dire Lamja, three-headed, six-winged, she blocks his path, not letting him pass, she closed six mountains, locked six springs, not a drop of water will she give. Saint George draws forth, he draws a keen sabre, he brandishes and then cuts, then he cuts off three heads, then burst, then flowed, then flowed three rivers: first river of yellow grain, second river of red wine, third river of honey and butter..." (Katičić 2008:98).

Here we have preserved elements of the ancient Indo-European mythic structure, in which the dragon blocks, and the hero releases rivers, through "slaying obstacle", *vr̥tra-han-* as the Vedic hymns glorify their thunder-god Indra. This brings us to the final part of this study.

Tricephaly in other Indo-European myths

We will now compare elements of Slavic mythic traditions with the overall structure of more ancient Indo-European myths about three-headed monstrous beings. One of more infamous of these is the dragon-king of Iranian mythic and epic poetry, *Aži Dahāka,* from whose name, via Turkish, originated the South-Slavic term "aždàja" for dragons in general (Katičić, 2008:99, footnote 57). In the Iranian myth, he is slain by the hero *Thraētaona,* who himself prays in Avesta:

"*avat âyaptem dazdi-mê vanguhi sevishte aredvî sûre anâhite ýat bavâni aiwi-vanyå azhîm dahâkem thrizafanem thrikameredhem xshvash-ashîm hazangrâ-ýaoxshtîm ashaojanghem daêvîm drujem akhem gaêthâvyô drvañtem ýâm ashaojastemām drujem fraca kereñtat angrô mainyush aoi ýâm astvaitîm gaêthām mahrkâi asha-*

"Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Aredvî Sûra Anâhita! that I may overcome Aži Dahāka, the three mouthed, the three-headed, the six-eyed, who has a thousand senses, that most powerful, fiendish Druj that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu created against the material world, to destroy

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he gaêthanām, uta-hê vañta azâni sang-havâci arenavâci ŷôi hen kehrpa sraêshta zazâitêe gaêthyâi-tê ŷôi abdôteme.”
(Yt. 5.34)

the world of the good principle; and that I may deliver his two wives, Savanghavak and Erenavak, who are the fairest of body amongst women, and the most wonderful creatures in the world”
(translation: Darmesteter, 1883:61-62).

However, Avesta also describes Aži Dahāka as piously praying to the goddess Anâhita (Yt.5.29), sacrificing to her a "hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, and ten thousand lambs" (Darmesteter, 1883:60-61). As Skjaervø (1987) points out, Aži Dahāka behaves more or less "like the other heroes and non-heroes of the Avestan mythological prehistory, and it is not clear whether he was originally considered as a human in dragon-shape or a dragon in man-shape." In Firdausi's masterwork *Shah-nameh*, an Iranian national epic written around 1000 A.D. and based on ancient royal and folk legends, Aži Dahāka appears as *Zahak*, a tyrannical but definitely anthropomorphic ruler who for a thousand years enslaves the entire world. Though the epic tradition transformed him "more strongly into a pseudo-historical person, he is still described as having two snakes growing from his shoulders". (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 1987). Thus, his enduring attributes – draconic or (partly) serpentine nature, tricephaly (three heads, or one human plus two serpents') and kingship – all show parallels to the mythic structure we have thus far explored in connection with Slavic Triglav.

The Avestan name, Aži Dahāka has a cognate in Vedic as *áhi dāsá*. The Avestan *aži* and Vedic *áhi* both mean "serpent, snake". The Avestan *dahāka* is more obscure, but a possible Vedic cognate, *dāsá* or *dāsyu* means "foe, infidel, demon" (Puhvel, 1987:107). The Indic form is indeed alluded to in Vedic hymns concerning the monster named *Viśvarūpa*. He is slain by *Trita*, sidekick of the storm god Indra, who himself boasts:

"tritāya gā ajanayam áher ádhi”
(RV.10.48.2)

"For Trita I brought forth the cows from the serpent" (translation: Watkins, 1995:315).

Later on, it is said again of Indra:

"sa id dāsaṃ tuvīravaṃ pátir dán ṣaḷakṣan triśīrṣāṇaṃ damanyat”
(RV 10.99.6)

"This lord in the house overpowered the loud-roaring, six-eyed, three-headed dāsa" (translation: Watkins, 1995:315).

The names and ancestry of this adversary, who thus figures both as *áhi* and *dāsá,* and is described with the exact phrase as the Avestan dragon-king (three-headed, six-eyed), are revealed only after he is slain and his cattle taken away:

"tvāṣṭrasya cid viśvarūpasya ghonāmā cakraṇas trīṇi śīrṣā parā vark.”
(RV 10.8.9)

"Having driven off for himself some of the cows of Viśvarūpa, son of Tvastr, he twisted off the three heads" (translation: Watkins, 1995:464).

The name Viśvarūpa means "having many forms", but this creature is also known as *Triśīrṣás*, "Three-headed". Interestingly enough, this Indic Triglav was believed to be a chief priest of gods, and his murder was later considered a grave offence attributed to Indra (Puhvel, 1987:53).

A very similar myth, often compared to Indic one, occurs in Ancient Greece, where Heracles in his tenth labour, has to travel to the fairy island of Erytheia on the westernmost reaches of the world, and there slay the three-headed giant *Geryon*, together with his herdsmen *Eurytion* and his hound *Orthos* (the two-headed brother of the more famous, three-headed Cerberus) in order to retrieve giant's fabled cows. The oldest preserved account of this exploit is found in Hesiod's *Theogony*:

"Χρυσάωρ δ᾽ ἔτεκεν τρικέφαλον Γηρυονῆα μιχθεὶς Καλλιρόη κούρη κλυτοῦ Ὠκεανοῖο. τὸν μὲν ἄρ᾽ ἐξενάριξε βίη Ἡρακληείη βουσὶ παρ᾽ εἰλιπόδεσσι περιρρύτῳ εἰν Ἐρυθείῃ ἤματι τῷ ὅτε περ βοῦς ἤλασεν εὐρυμετώπους Τίρυνθ᾽ εἰς ἱερὴν διαβὰς πόρον Ὠκεανοῖο Ὄρθον τε κτείνας καὶ βουκόλον Εὐρυτίωνα σταθμῷ ἐν ἠερόεντι πέρην κλυτοῦ Ὠκεανοῖο." (Th. 287-294)

"Khrysaor, married to Kallirhoe, daughter of glorious Okeanos, was father to the triple-headed Geryon, but Geryon was killed by the great strength of Heracles at sea-circled Erytheis beside his own shambling cattle on that day when Heracles drove those broad-faced cattle toward holy Tiryns, when he crossed the stream of Okeanos and had killed Orthos and the oxherd Eurytion out in the gloomy meadow beyond fabulous Okeanos" (translation: Theoi; Geryon, 2012).

Fontenrose (1980:335) notes various parallels between Geryon and various Greek dragons, most notably Delphic *Python* and multi-headed *Ladon,* and concludes that this Greek Triglav was in fact a god of underworld, "a king of dead, a form of Thanatos or Hades". He also notes the overall similarity of such chthonic deities with the heaven-bearing titan Atlas (1980:346). In the mostly fragmentary poem *Geryoneis*, composed by poet Stesichorus during the 7th or 6th century B.C., Geryon appears much less as a monster and more as tragic hero, who stoically accepts his fate after a touching farewell with his mother. This is despite the fact that the physical description of giant here is by far more monstrous than in Hesiod's account. According to Apollodorus (Bibliotheca 2.5.10), Steischorus described Geryon with "the body of three men joined at the waist, which became three form at the flanks and thighs" (Watkins, 1995:466).

Watkins (1995:467) concludes: "Stesichorus in the Geryoneis described the adversary of Heracles as THREE-HEADED and SIX-somethinged. ... We may regard this as a poetic and mythographic formula common to Indo-Iranian and Greek, and resting on the semantic equations:

tri-śīrṣán-   ṣaḷ-ákṣa
tri-mūrdhán-

thri-kameredhem   xshvash-ashî-

τρι-κέφαλο-   ἑζ(α)-".

To these we may add the example from Slavic tradition, with the Bulgarian song of St. George describing his adversary, dragoness Lamja, as:

трооглава (three-headed)   шестокрила (six-winged)

Of course, such a formula, as Watkins notes, is rather easy to develop. However, that we are not dealing with a mere coincidence, but that the Slavic textual tradition is really anchored in wider context of Indo-European sacred poetry, is shown by the similarity in overall structure of the four mythic narratives. The slaying of the tricephalic adversary in Indic and Greek tradition results in releases of cows: in Iranian tradition, of women; and in Slavic tradition, rivers of wealth. And in all four myths, this monster has certain sacrosanct qualities: Avestan Aži Dahāka is a king, Vedic Viśvarūpa a high priest, Greek Geryon a tragic hero lamanted by a poem, and the Slavic three-headed dragon, in all probability, represents the great god Triglav.

Instead of a direct conclusion, we shall first offer a bit of trivia: the word *trivia* comes from Latin expression *tri vium*, "three ways". The name originally designated the junction of three roads or streets, and got its current meaning because these were places of idle chatter and gossip, where one could hardly expect to hear anything of reason or importance. In the Roman Empire, shrines of certain deities where placed at such crossroads, and these bore epithet *trivius*. The 10th century Byzantine encyclopaedia Suda mentions that the pagan god presiding over such three-way junctions was Hermes, depicted there with three heads, and called Τρικεφαλος, i.e. Triglav (Theoi; Hermes, 2012).

Now Hermes, even though considered an Olympian in Classical Greece, was still in many ways a chthonic deity. In his more benevolent role he appears as a guide of the dead and a patron of the shepherds, god of music and commerce, protector of athletes and travellers, and a helper of Zeus in his fight against monstrous Typhon. In his darker aspects, however, Hermes was also a trickster and a thief, a god of sorcery and mischief, a cattle rustler and an enemy of Apollo, appearing essentially on the side of the dragon Python in Delphic myths (Fontenrose 1980:432-433). Hermes' Roman counterpart – Mercury – was described by Caesar (de bello Gallico, 6.17.1) as the chief god of Gauls. This Gaulish Mercury was depicted with, among other things, sacred trees, horses, wolves, roosters, snakes, bags of gold and, most notably, three heads. Three-headed reliefs ascribed to this deity were found in Paris, Reims and Soissons (Rokus 2011). The Germanic version of Mercury was Wodan or Odin, who among his many functions was also a god of dead, a sorcerer, a wanderer and a night rider, depicted with horses, wolves, ravens and sometimes a snake. He was also somehow connected to the world tree of Norse mythology, *Yggdrasill,* whose name translates as "Odin's *(Yggr's)* steed" (Simek 1993:375). In *Gylfaginning,* first part of Prose Edda, three chieftans appear, seated on royal thrones and named *Hár, Jafnhár, Þriðji* ("High, Just-as-high, Third"). Later in the text, Odin reveals these are actually his alter-egos:" "I call myself [...] Third, [...] High, [... and] Just-as-high" (Rokus 2011).

Conclusion

All this indicates that triplicity in various Indo-European mythologies tends to be tied with gods of death, magic and netherworld, and the Slavic Triglav should, in all probability, be considered as belonging to this bunch. The darker aspects of such chthonic deities may indeed appear as enemies of mortal heroes and heavenly gods, and in such cases mythic narratives may be more likely to portray them as destructive and sometimes three-headed monsters.

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Htonski vidiki pomorjanskega boga Triglava in drugi triglavi liki v slovanski mitologiji

Luka Trkanjec

Članek raziskuje zahodnoslovanskega Triglava, ki ga opisuje *Vita Otonis*, življenjepis sv. Otona Bamberškega, škofa iz 12. stoletja, kot troglavega boga pomorjanskih Slovanov ob obali Baltika. Članek dokazuje, da je troglavost značilnost podzemnega božanstva. Podrobno analizira opis Triglava v Otonovem življenjepisu in njegove lastnosti primerja s podatki iz etnografskih virov. Tako razkriva primarno mitično strukturo, ki močno kaže na htonični značaj. Povezana je z zmaji in kačami kot arhetipskimi bitji podzemlja, ki so sama pogosto opisana kot triglava ali trojna. Nadaljnja primerjava z izbranimi etnografskimi viri vzpostavlja povezavo med vzhodnoslovanskim in južnoslovanskim mitičnim likom Trojanom in zahodnoslovanskim Triglavom. Nazadnje avtor pokaže vzporednice z različnimi triglavimi bitji v starih indoevropskih mitih (Iran, Indija, Grčija). Avtor ugotavlja, da je triglavi bog podzemlja praslovanska in verjetno indoevropska mitična tradicija.