

Dragon and Hero or How to Kill a Dragon – on the Example of the Legends of Međimurje about the Grabancijaš and the Dragon

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“The Dragon is probably the best-known but also the most
unfortunate fantastic animal.”

Jorge Luis Borges: *The Book of Imaginary Beings*¹

Through interpretation of oral legends about the Čakovec pozoj, or Dragon, the emphasis is placed in this paper on the differential determinant in relation to the final status of the Dragon (live status/cosmic renewal – dead) in proto-Slavic legends, in the oral legend about the Čakovec pozoj and in the legend of St George, who slays the Dragon. Namely, Christianity installs a once-only saintly finishing off of the Dragon, while it is a matter of cyclic killings in the Indo-European myth of the conflict between, for example, Indra and the so-called Cosmic Monster (Vrtra, Vala) the Snake/Dragon.

In the conclusion of this article, the Međimurean legends of the meteorological binomial, made up of the grabancijaš and the pozoj, are interpreted by way of the ecofeminist key as legends in which an effort is made to conceal inconvenient historical truths (Christianisation, colonialism). In other words, the legend of the Čakovec Dragon – as is the case with all similar legends of the vanquishing of so-called monsters – demonstrates what Roland Barthes differentiated in mythic structure: that the myth can be very simply modified into a tool of political demagoguery that confers a “natural” appearance upon a particular ideology. True enough, the case of the legend of the Čakovec Dragon is a weak myth, which Barthes denotes in relation to the strong myth. Namely, in the former the political quantum is immediate, the depoliticisation is abrupt, and in the latter, “the political quality of the object has faded like a colour, but the slightest thing can bring back its strength brutally”. Needless to say, the slightest thing, trifles, are not at all unimportant.

Myth – oral legend – the legend about the dragon-like so-called monster

On the basis of reconstructed Indo-European, and particularly Proto-Slavic, sacred texts and/or their fragments, which tell of the cosmic struggle (the *agon*) between the *Gromovnik*, or Wielder of Thunder (Indra, Perun) and the Snake/Dragon (Vrtra/Vala,

¹ Because of my boundless affection for this quotation, I am using it again as a motto in my (second) text on the theme of mythic *dragonology* (cf. Marjanić 1997/1998:82).

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Volos/Veles),² one is able to commence reconstruction of the oral legend of the Čakovec *pozoj* (dragon).³

By so-called “Pantheonic” reconstruction (cf. Kovačević 2006:47), and on the path of the semiotic-philological research by Vjačeslav V. Ivanov and Vladimir N. Toporov, the semiological-etymological approach of Radoslav Katičić and the ethnological-philological (hermeneutic) research of Vitomir Belaj, it can be established that one finds the main heroes from the Proto-Slavic myth in the mythic legend of the Čakovec *pozoj* – where Perun and Volos/Veles are replaced by their alopersonages: the *grabancijaš*⁴ with the attributes of the Thunder God Perun and the *pozoj* with the attributes of Volos/Veles and/or the Snake/Dragon as rulers of the Netherworld – *Vyrej/Virej* – the mythic world of Eternal Spring. In other words, Perun and Volos/Veles are the only two Proto-Slavic deities whose relationship can be partly reconstructed and we arrive at the following scheme on the Proto-Slavic level of that mythic cosmic drama: Perun kills/chases the Veles/Snake with thunder (Belaj 1988:65-69). This is, as Calvert Watkins emphasises in his book *How to Kill a Dragon*, the basic formula of *the hero killing the serpent* (Watkins 1995:301). In that way, we can assume that we have the fragments of a ritual text in the oral legend of the Čakovec *pozoj*, a myth that was given a Christian foundation (Christianisation, colonialism) throughout the centuries, which is *underpinned* by a mythic story (a *pagan one*, a Proto-Slavic matrix) of the conflict between the Thunder God – of the heavens – and his opponent as ruler the Netherworld – *Vyrej/Virej*, or if we invert the mythic matrix in an ecofeminist manner – of the conflict between the so-called *monster* and his opponent.

Since a fragmentary mythic legend is in question here, where the basic heroes are the *grabancijaš* and the *pozoj*, who figure on the Proto-Slavic level as the Thunder God Perun (= the *grabancijaš*) and the *serpent-like* Veles/Volos (= *pozoj*), it is necessary to emphasise that this is not a matter of the aspects of Good and Evil of the deity since, in the comprehension of the cosmic conflict in natural religions, by which the fructiferous water is liberated from Veles’s Netherworld (*Vyrej/Virej*) as the mythic world of Eternal Spring, both deities possess the determinants of a well-intentioned and of a dangerous deity. However, that gives no indication that the Proto-Slavs had a dualistic conception of a God of Good and a God of Evil (Belaj 1988:87). Apart from that, the so-called monster gathers within himself a divine-demonic duality, as was emphasised by the psychologist of childhood, David Beaudet; for example, the Babylonian Tiamat figures simultaneously as

² In comparison with Vala (the *grotto*), which imprisoned cows in the *grotto* or *cave* (Ježić 1987:81), Vṛtra is denoted as a *snake/dragon*, which imprisoned water and thus, unlike Vala, had theriomorphic characteristics (ibid.:71, 208-209). Namely, Vṛtra is sometimes called *áhi budhnyà* – *Dragon of the Deep*, a snake from the bottom of the waters (Belaj 1998:80). The two main myths connected with Indra speak of his conflict with Vṛtra and the opening of Vala who are sometimes equalised in the *Rgveda* (Ježić 1987:73,80-81). Mislav Ježić is of the opinion that the myth of Vṛtra, thus, the myth of killing the Dragon and liberating of Water, probably relates to the part of the year when the world lacks water, and when the Sun is high in the sky – around the time of the Summer Solstice – while the myth of Vala denotes the period around the Winter Solstice (Ježić 2006:59).

³ Čakovec is a city located in the northern part of Croatia, in the central part of the Međimurje County. As indicated in the abstract, the Međimurean legends of the meteorological binomial, made up of the *grabancijaš* and the *pozoj*, are interpreted in this article.

⁴ In the further text, it will be shown that this is a mythic creature (*grabancijaš*, Wandering Scholar) who, among other supernatural powers also has the capability of calling up storms and hail, which is linked with the mytheme of *driving dragons* upon which those wizards *ride* and *glide* through the air.

a divine (symbolisation of the sea) and a demonic creature, where she denotes primordial chaos in an evil and negative context (Gilmore 2003:193).⁵

Furthermore, according to the “Pantheonic” reconstruction, Perun was modified in the process of Christianisation into St Elijah the Thunder-Wielder, and Veles into the Lord of the World of the Dead, and, due to theriomorphism as the Serpent/Dragon, he is transformed in Christianity into the figuration of Satan, the Devil (*V/vrag*, *đavao* in Croatian) – if we include all the basic Christianity-demonised synonyms (Belaj 1998:67-69; Jagić 1948:183). I would like to point out that Veles/Volos’s name along with the Vedic name Vala and the Lithuanian Velionis is derived from the Indo-European **wel-* meaning *grazing land, meadow, and land of the dead* (Belaj 1998:81). The foregoing Christianised attribution shows that the process of demonisation is carried out more easily with those pagan deities who contain the morphology of a monster (Durand 1991:85) that is connected with the Netherworld; thus, Veles’s Netherworld of Eternal Spring (*Vyrej/Virej*) is transposed into Hell in the Christianised interpretation. Veles’s location is by water or in water (by the roots of the Tree of the World – the *arbor/axis mundi*), which corresponds to the attribution of the Čakovec *pozoj* as a water dragon.⁶ Thus, a legend of the Podravina [Drava River Basin] in Hungary speaks of St Elijah riding on a *šarkanj* – a *Great Demon [veliki vrag]*, a *pozoj* or dragon (Franković 1990:131), which can confirm the above connection between the *grabancijaš* and the *pozoj*/Dragon as a personages of St Elijah/Perun and the Devil/Veles/Volos.

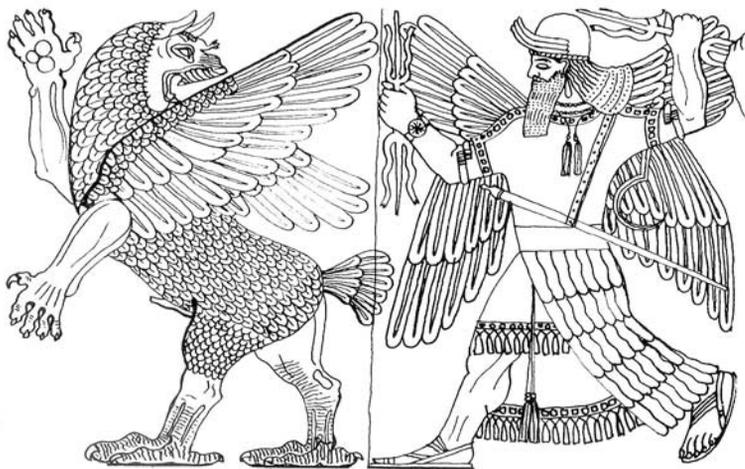


Figure 1: Ninurta as the Sumerian warrior Storm God expelling the serpent-like eagle Zu, a relief in the temple consecrated to Ninurta, Kalah, around 870 BC (Uehlinger 1995:91)⁷

⁵ So the Sumerians speak of the conflict between the dragon Asag and the god Ninurta, and the Babylonians of the defeat of Tiamat, who was overpowered by Marduk (Višić 1993:55, 57).

⁶ Andrija Dolenčić (1909-1983), parish priest and catechist, who notated and studied Međimurean popular customs and beliefs during the 1940s, defined the *pozoj* as a water dragon (Dolenčić 1952:356). About local dragons being identified as local springs cf. Fontenrose 1959:548.

⁷ Since there are two versions of the myth, the Storm Bird Zu defeated either Marduk or Ninurta or even Lugal-banda (Fontenrose 1959:148).

The dyadic location of the *pozoj*'s body, a threat of danger from earthquakes and storms...

The following are three versions of the mythic legend of the Čakovec dragon: the first is taken from the *Tourism Club: Međimurje* web-page, the second fragment is from Gönczi's book *Međimurje – ljudi, vjerovanja, običaji* [Međimurje – People, Beliefs, Customs] (1895) while the third fragment is from Andrija Dolenčić's manuscript collection (1952) referred to above.⁸

The Green Pozoj in Čakovec

"A legend connected with Čakovec is that of the green *pozoj* whose head is situated below the Old Town of Čakovec, while its tail is under the Church of St Nicholas; some say that it is the other way round. Only a student *grabancijaš* [Wandering Scholar] could liberate [the town] from the Dragon. To disturb the Dragon underneath the Old Town would be dangerous; it could lead to an earthquake and tempest." ("Predaja o zelenom *pozoju* u Čakovcu" [Legend of the green *pozoj* in Čakovec])

The Pozoj in Čakovec

"The people of Čakovec and its surroundings constantly speak of such a dragon, whose head is under the parish Church of St Nicholas, and the tail under the Old Town. In other words, he is lying beneath the town of Čakovec itself. Only a student *grabancijaš* (Black Student, *črnoškolec*) could remove him, but, in such case, part of Čakovec would come crashing down. (...)" (Gönczi 1995:122-123)

The Pozoj under Čakovec and the Watery Abyss

"So it was that a couple of decades ago they still believed that a *pozoj* was lying under Čakovec, with its tail under the Old Town (the castle and the Zrinski Fortress), while the head was under the 'monks' church'. As there are no longer any *grabancijašes* to extract it from there, a danger lurks that 'all of Čakovec will collapse beneath the ground (into the watery abyss)'" (Dolenčić 1952:358)

It can be seen that these versions do not present the same information on the position of the *pozoj*'s head and its tail; still, the locations are the same – the Old Town (the castle and the Zrinski fortress) and the parish church of St Nicholas.⁹ Another feature in common is the fact that the *pozoj* can be extracted only by a student *grabancijaš* (a Black Student), as is stressed in the second legend, that is, version, and both legends point out

⁸ I am providing the sources concerning the legend according to the order of their accessibility to the possible reading public.

I would like to point out that I am attempting in this text to follow the distinction between the words *variant* and *version*, as is done by Joseph Fontenrose. He stresses that a *variant* is the same story told with other protagonists (gods and people) as well as in different settings; while a new *version* emerges when the details are changed – "when a theme or episode is given a somewhat different expression, when something is added or subtracted, when the sequence of episodes is shifted – but the personal and place names remain unchanged" (Fontenrose 1959:5-6).

⁹ For example, according to Nodilo's interpretation, St Nicholas appears as an alternative name for Veles, by which, bearing in mind the *pozoj*'s location under the Church of St Nicholas, one can establish his possible link with Veles (Nodilo 1981:391).

that it would be dangerous to disturb the dragon, since an earthquake and a tempest could follow and/or, as the second version tells us – in that case, a part of Čakovec would come crashing down. In his literarily styled notation, Ferencz Gönczi continues that when the *grabancijaš* harnesses the dragon and when the dragon rises up, a storm ensues, which indicates that we are speaking of a meteorological hybrid creature. The third version warns, thus differing from the former two, that since there are no longer any *grabancijašes* now, a danger lurks that “*all of Čakovec will collapse beneath the ground (into the watery abyss)*”, which introduces the attribution of the water dragon.

If we attach to this version the legend of the Štrigova Dragon, *pozoj* [Štrigova being a village and municipality in Međimurje] which, unlike the version of the Čakovec dragon legend, introduces a temporal deixis about Spring as the period of the awakening of the young *pozoj*, that can be paralleled with Mislav Ježić’s tenet that the myth of Vrtra, that is, the myth about the killing of the Dragon and the liberation of Water, most probably refers to the time of year of the Summer Solstice (Ježić 2006:59). Namely, the point of reference about Spring in the Štrigova legend introduces the deixis about the beginning of the Proto-Slavic New Year that began in Spring – around the date of today’s Christian Easter and/or St George’s Day as the beginning of the Summer part of the year. St George’s Day is situated in a very important position in the calendar system between the Summer and Winter halves of the year (Belaj 1998:120, 169) and is often seen in the folklore conception as the beginning of Spring, but also as the beginning of the year, that is, the economic year when the *livestock* is first taken out to pasture after Winter.¹⁰

The Legend of the Štrigova Pozoj

“*The legend of the pozoj is also connected with Štrigova. It is said that the dragon is on the high ground under the Church of St Jerome, while its tail is in the lowlands – near the Church of St Mary Magdalene. It is dangerous to disturb the pozoj. In Štrigova they say that the young dragon beats around with its tail every Spring, when high water rises in the lowlands.*” (“Predaja o štrigovskom pozaju” [Legend of the Štrigova Pozoj], [http](http://))

So we have emphasised again in the legend the *pozoj*’s physical dyad – head and tail, with respect to its subterranean location under one of the churches in Štrigova, as well as the information that this is a water dragon, as also emphasised in the legend noted down by Dolenčić. So it is characteristic to both Čakovec and Štrigova that the *pozoj* is linked with the location of the local town church, while in that process it should be added that the *pozoj*’s physical dyad is also noted in individual legends from Croatian Zagorje – for example, in the Ivanec region (cf. Šantalab 2008:39).

Let us pause briefly on the subject of the etymology of the words *pozoj* and *pozojak* that one encounters in Međimurje, Prekomurje, Podravina, Croatian Zagorje and Prigorje, and in Slovenia (Dolenčić 1952:359; Radenković 2006:206; Kropelj 2008:117).¹¹

¹⁰ As far as Croatia is concerned, St George’s Day processions with the Green George personage are known only in North-western Croatia (in a largely Kajkavian-speaking region) while they are also known in North-eastern Pannonian Slovenia (Belaj 1998:172-173), which we can also view as a link with the legends about the *grabancijaš* and the dragon (*pozoj*), that are largely connected to the Kajkavian areas in Croatia.

¹¹ According to Fran Miklošič’s dictionary *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der slavischen Sprachen*, Nodilo notes that, apart from to Croatian Kajkavian speakers, the word *pozoj* was also known to the Ukrainians (Nodilo 1981:436).

I would mention that the Academy's *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* [Dictionary of the Croatian and the Serbian Language] defines the word *pozoj* as *zmaj* [dragon] and as *aždaja*/Azi Dahaka and does not differentiate between the two words, as Natko Nodilo does, for example, in his study *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata* [The Old Faith of Serbs and Croats] (1885-1890). Furthermore, the etymology of these words in the Academy's *Dictionary* is interpreted from *po-zoj*; "the second part comes from the root, which is located in the verbs *zinuti*, *zijeovati* [to gape, to yawn]" and mentions the word *pozojica* (a female *pozoj* or dragon), of which it is later stated that it is mentioned in Ivan Belostenec's dictionary, the *Gazophylacium* (1740) – in *dracaena* (*Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* 1935:325).¹² In addition to the word *pozoj* the word *pojzija* was also in use in the Ivanec area (in Croatian Zagorje) (Šantalab 2008:38-39).¹³

We could also mention Nodilo's interpretation of the *pozoj* from Kajkavian and Slovenian legends, as noted down by Matija Valjavec Kračmanov and interpreted by Vatroslav Jagić, which Nodilo defines as being a fiery dragon, that is, the opposite of Dolencić's definition of water dragons mentioned here.¹⁴ Namely, in Nodilo's interpretation that sets a differentiating definition between *zmaj* (dragon) and *aždaja* (Azi Dahaka), the *pozoj* as it appears in Kajkavian legends is not an anthropophagic dragon, which is the basis of each *teratology* (Gk. *téras*, G *tératos* – monster, wonder; *lógos*; in the sense of researching the so-called monster or "freak"), but rather a *stormy* dragon, symbolising the *lightning-packed Fire*, Agni – the Vedic deity of fire. In that process, Nodilo refers to the *Rgveda*, where it is noted that Agni consumes trees (RV I, 58, 5; RV I, 143, 5; Nodilo 1981:436-437).¹⁵ Apart from that, the *Rgveda* (RV I, 79,1) defines Agni as a *snake* (usp. Macdonell 1974:153), which is the source of Nodilo's euphemisation of the dragon as the deity of fire, while he inscribes only the *teratology* of the *aždaja* (Azi Dahaka)¹⁶ into the term demonic monster (*monstrum horrendum*).

¹² We should also mention the plant called *Dracaena* [the Dragon Tree, or *Drakon* Tree], whose name is the Romanised form of the Ancient Greek *δράκαινα* – *drakaina*, "female dragon" (cf. *Wikipedia* – "*Dracaena* plant").

¹³ In the framework of etymology of the word *pozoj*, it should be remembered that the word *zmaj* [dragon] has the same origin as the word *zmija* [snake] and is connected with the *earth* [zemlja] (Skok 1973/III:649-650). Both snakes and dragons are termed with the same word in Latin – *draco* (Sax 2001:233). The formation of the Greek word *drácon* is motivated by the verb *dérkomai* (to look). It is probable that the Greeks, as a result of fascination with the uncomfortable rigidity of the snake's gaze, named that creature with the descriptive syntagm *the animal with the frozen gaze* – *drácon* (Jöckel 1995:29).

Vitomir Belaj points to the Macedonian-Bulgarian adjustment of the meaning of the word *zmaj* [dragon] that was originally the male form of the word *zmija* [snake] – the dragon being the *snake's male mate* (Belaj 1998:44). So it is that on the island of Korčula, as well as in some other places in Dalmatia, they say *zmaja* instead of *zmija* for snake, which confirms the original meaning of the word *zmaj* [dragon]. And in Smokvica on the island of Korčula they say *guja* for all snakes, but call only poison snakes *zmaja* (Hirtz 1928/I:179).

¹⁴ In his study about the *grabancijašes* (1877), Vatroslav Jagić starts out from the stories or legends collected by Matija Kračmanov Valjavec, who accumulated the major part of his material while working as a teacher at the high school in Varaždin, having it published in part in the Slovenian journal *Slovenski glasnik* (Jagić 1948:177).

¹⁵ In one of the Rigvedic hymns (RV II, 4.5), *tree-eater* – *van-ád-* (Loma 1997:158) is given as an epithet for the god Agni.

¹⁶ Maja Bošković-Stulli points out that, to the Croatians, „the juxtapositioning of the terms *zmaj* (dragon) and *aždaja* (Azi Dahaka) is unusual; among the Croatians the term *zmaj* (dragon) denotes the same wicked monster as *aždaja* (Azi Dahaka) among the Serbians, but they, too, use the term *zmaj* in that sense” (Bošković-Stulli 1969-1970:182). However, cf. the differential determinant between *zmaj* and *aždaja* in keeping with the belief in Zaostrog (in Dalmatia) according to which the *aždaja* was *more terrible* than the *zmaj* "because it

In addition to etymology, we can also devote a brief time to the etiology of *pozoi*. Nodilo points to the legend in Valjavec's notations from Bednja (Croatian Zagorje), which speak of the dragon being a large winged horse (a hippogriff) that emerges from a fish, frog or even a snake (Nodilo 1981:227; Jagić 1948:177-178).¹⁷ And we must also mention the legend from Prelog, not far from Čakovec, which links the dragon with earthquakes, as is the case with the Čakovec *pozoi* (Jagić 1948:178). In addition to that etiological legend from Prelog, which stresses that the dragon develops from a fish that digs itself deep into mud (Jagić 1948:178), according to Međimurean legends, the *pozoi* can also come from old snakes, frogs and roosters, "older than seven years",¹⁸ and it also feeds on soil. This metamorphosis takes place when the animal that is predestined to become a *pozoi* fasts for a few days, "and then squeezes into some 'ditch' or puddle full of water and starts gradually eating the soil around it. (...) When it makes such a large and wide hole in the earth that it can no longer hold itself up and falls into the water, then they say in Međimurje: the earth vjezerila [meaning to collapse]. In that way, after having been devoured by the *pozoi*, the earth beside it can collapse and/or 'whole cities' can collapse" (Dolenčić 1952:357-358).

According to notated legends,¹⁹ the Podravina Croats in Hungary believed that a *šarkanj*, which develops from an old catfish and denotes a *dragon* or a *fat snake*, brings ice and hail to the villages (Franković 1990:115).²⁰ What is interesting for our theme is the fact that there is a connection in certain legends between the *šarkanj* (the *pozoi*) and the *grabancijaš*. One of the determinants that is typical for the *grabancijaš* is the fact that he drinks (soured) milk; namely, when he enters a village, he asks for soured milk from the head of the household. It is intriguing to note that the above determinant also appears in

devours people. St George kills the aždaja. It has more than one head. Now our people here think that the zmaj is only the King of Snakes" (Banović 1918:213).

¹⁷ To mention another etiology of the dragon from Valjavec's notations about a legend noted down in Ludbreg, which speaks of old frogs and snakes transforming into dragons. Another legend that was noted in Zamladinec not far from Križevci points out, in the Christianised key, that the Devil can transform into a dragon (Jagić 1948:179-180), which is only one more confirmation of the fact that Satan figures as an evil spirit who does not have his own body but occupies other bodies as a parasite, so that his morphology is incalculable (Levanat-Peričić 2008a:537).

¹⁸ Concerning the beliefs that link the genesis of the *pozoi* with a rooster cf., for example, Dolenčić 1952:361-362; Lang 1914:150; Stojković 1931:87. It is evident there that Milan Lang noted only beliefs about the *pozoi* in Samobor under the heading "monsters and 'freaks'". On the ancient nature of beliefs about the origins of the dragon from particular animals, cf., for example, Radenković 2001:207; Bandić 2001:165.

¹⁹ It should be emphasised, as pointed out, for example, by Ivan Lozica and Ljiljana Marks, that mythic (demonological) legends in ethnological literature are often equated with beliefs, by which it is forgotten that they are still merely *stories* (Lozica, Marks 2001:454).

²⁰ The term *šarkanj* in the meaning of *zmaj* [dragon] is witnessed to in the Charter of Herceg Stjepan (15th century), while this is a term that has been retained by both Serbians and Croats, among the Hungarian Slavs and the Bulgarians of Banat (Radenković 2006:206). Otherwise, the large winged dragon from the Trans-Carpathian part of the Ukraine is called a *šarkan*. The belief is that, where it flies, a tempest is raised that pulls up trees by the roots (Gura 2005:219). Tekla Dömötör noted down that "the word *sárkány* was borrowed by Hungarian from the ancient Turkish, and it is found in written sources from the twelfth century onwards, mainly in place-names" (Dömötör 1985:73).

Đuro Franković grouped separately the legends of the *zmaj* (dragon), *šarkanj* and *aždaja* (Azi Dahaka) among the Podravina Croats in Hungary, even though these terms are sometimes interchangeable. Thus, a legend about St George, which was notated by Franković, uses the terms *šarkanj* and *zmaj* as synonyms, mentioning that these dragons have a *ružica* (a crest) like a rooster (Franković 1990:147). Dolenčić points out that in the majority of the paintings that depict the mytheme of "St George Killing the Dragon", the dragon has the head of a rooster and not of a snake, frog or, for its part, a crocodile-lizardly head, as the dragons who are struck down by the spear or sword of St George are sometimes depicted (Dolenčić 1952:361-362).

certain legends in connection with the *šarkanj*, which obviously figures in those examples as the *grabancijaš's alter ego/ego alter*: for example: “That *šarkanj* drinks a lot of milk. Yes, that is a *šarkanj*. The one who came into the village like a tramp and begged for milk, yes, that was a *šarkanj*” (Franković 1990:129).²¹ So, according to the legends, the *grabancijaš* lives modestly and often seeks the help of others (a bed for the night and soured milk), and, if he is refused either of these, he largely takes revenge on those inhospitable villages by bringing down hail – and/or mounting the *pozoj*, urges it on and destroys their fields and their harvests (Dolenčić 1952:359; Jagić 1948:181).²²

The meteorological binomial *pozoj* – *grabancijaš*

After interpretation of the links between the Čakovec and Štrigova *pozoj*, we can turn our attention to the reconstruction of the mythic legend of the Čakovec *pozoj* in conjunction with legends about *pozojs* from other Kajkavian dialect areas (Valjavec 1866; Jagić 1877; Marks 1994; Šantalab 2008). In that way, we can separate the mythemes of mythic legends that are mutually connected by theme in associative sequences in which one of such associative links detaches the meteorological binomial of the *pozoj* – *grabancijaš*, which can be seen as a remnant of cosmogonic myths that contain the meteorological mytheme of the conflict between the Wielder of Thunder, and his opponents – the Water *behemoth*: for example, Indra – Vṛtra/Vala, Perun – Veles/Volos (Snake/Dragon).

Vatroslav Jagić established that the legend type featuring the *grabancijaš* and the *pozoj* as its main protagonists appeared among the Hungarians and the Croatians; and/or that the *grabancijaš* was restricted to only one part of Croatia – the area between the Mura, Drava and Sava Rivers – where he was known as far back as from Ivan Belostenec's time (as shown by his dictionary *Gazophylacium* dating from 1740) – the Croatian region that was once called *pars adnexa Regni Hungariae*.²³ In that process, Jagić interpreted the Croatian-Hungarian connection²⁴ by the fact that Northern-Croatian and Hungarian priests often attended the same institutions of learning in Budapest, Vienna, Bologna and Trnava (Jagić

²¹ It seems that the description of the *šarkanj* as a dragon that drinks (soured) milk in the legends of the Po-dravina Croats in Hungary can be linked with the snake known under the term *kravosac* or *kravosas* in Croatian [*Elaphe quatuorlineata quatuorlineata*], that was widely believed throughout Croatia to suck the milk of cows. Hirc noted that Croatian popular beliefs about the *kravosac* snake that sucks milk from cows are connected with three types of snake: the snake known by the Latin name *Callopetlis Aesculapii*, which was dedicated to Aesculapius among the ancient Greeks; the snake known by the Latin name *Elaphis cerrone* (*Coluber quaterradiatus*) and lives in Dalmatia; and further, the snake known along the Littoral, the Quarnero Bay islands and Istria as *crni gad*, *črnec* or *crnčina* [all these terms alluding to its dark, almost black scales] (*Zamenis carbonarius*) (Hirc 1896:17-18).

²² This piece of information about milk can be linked with the Lithuanian custom of feeding house snakes with milk (Orbini 1999:117-118). Confirmations of that totemic zoology can also be found in the Southern Slavic regions (Nodilo 1981:431). One could, of course, speak of Illyrian influences, since the snake as a totemic animal played a pivotal role in the mythological and religious system of the Southern Illyrians (Stipčević 1981:149, 152). On the connection between snakes and milk cf. Gubernatis 1872:407-408; Huxley 1997:8.

²³ Leopold Kretzenbacher pointed out that the *grabancijaš* was known among the South-eastern peoples of Europe – among the Slovaks, Hungarians, Croatians (the Kajkavian-speaking Croats) as well as among the Hungarian Slavs (a part of the Štokavian-dialect Serbians) (Kretzenbacher 1968:102-103). One does, of course, have to add the legends of the *grabancijaš* notated in eastern Slovenia and among the members of the Slovenian ethnic group in Porabje (Šmitek 2004:209; Kropelj 2008:175-185).

²⁴ In relation to the foregoing footnote, it is also possible to speak of Croatian-Slovenian links in which there are descriptions of expelling the Dragon mentioned in the same way in legends (Kropelj 2008:180).

1948:188-190). Is it not a little ironic that the Bologna Declaration – the joint declaration of European education ministries – was signed right in Bologna (19th June, 1999)?

In addition to the term *grabancijaš* and *student of the thirteenth college* one also encounters the following names – *black student*, *student of the black school*, and *black school student* (*črni dijak*, *dijak črne škole*, *črnoškolec*),²⁵ which were derived from the black robes worn by such students (Jagić 1948:190).²⁶ So one finds that Adam Baltazar Krčelić noted down early on that the seminary in Zagreb was called the *black school* by ordinary folk (Jagić 1948:190; Marks 1994:24-25). He is encountered among the Hungarians under the terms *garabonczás*, *garabonczás-diák*, and *garabonciás* (Jagić 1948:189; Dömötör 1985:133), and has the same meaning as he does in Croatian oral legends – a person with supernatural capabilities, a travelling student who became a wizard on completion of the Thirteenth School²⁷ and is able to exert influence on the weather, or, to put it more precisely – to call up storms and hail, which is linked with the mytheme of *mounting dragons* upon which those wizards *ride* and *glide* through the air (Jagić 1877:177; Dömötör 1985:73).

In addition to Jagić's philological interpretation, we can give brief attention to Nodilo's mythological interpretation of the *grabancijaš*, where the *witches' dance* (the Wheel of Fortune to the Witches' [Virgilian] Circle) with twelve spokes and twelve students is interpreted by the sunny twelve-spoked wheel in the *Rgveda* (Nodilo 1981:228).²⁸ Nodilo departs here from the concept that the Rigvedic hymn (RV I, 164, 12) described the annual Sun as *a wheel with twelve spokes* – "*a wheel of eternal order trundles around the sky*,

²⁵ The role of expeller of the *pozoj* in Slovenian legends is taken by the mythic Slovenian hero, Kresnik, described by Šmitek as "the Lord and Master over Fire". Šmitek stresses that the Dragon can be vanquished only by a hero who himself has some "dragon-like characteristics"; he can thus be a blacksmith, a charcoal burner, or some other person who knows how to handle fire (cf. Šmitek 2009:176). I would remind readers that the shaman is the "Master over Fire" in Eliade's definition (cf. Eliade 1974:474). Otherwise, it should be pointed out that Monika Kropelj defines K/kresnik as a *student of the black school* (*črne škole dijak*, *kresnik*) (Kropelj 2008:180).

²⁶ Although the etymology of the word *grabancijaš*, as we will show in footnote 27, does not derive from the word *klerik* [cleric] or *svećenik* [priest], Ivan Grafenauer, along with Vatroslav Jagić, assumes that a *young cleric* is actually in question in the folklore concepts of the *grabancijaš* (cf. Grafenauer 1956:324; Kropelj 2008:180-181).

²⁷ Cf. Jagić 1948:186 about the Mediaeval, Jesuit concept by which a priest had to complete twelve *schools* – four of grammar, two of the Humanities, two of Philosophy, and four of Theology. The imaginary *thirteenth school* taught the subject of casting spells and magic, so that Jagić derives the name *grabancijaš* from the Italian word *negromanzia* and its abbreviated, bastardised form *gramanzia*, meaning magic spells – thus, the *grabancijaš* is the bearer of *gramanzia*, and is a *negromant* [necromancer] (Jagić 1948:186). Molnár's *Dictionarium latino-ungaricum* (Nürnberg, 1604) gives the following links: *garabontsa-magia*, *necromantia*; *garabontsás-magus*, *necromanticus* (Kretzenbacher 1968:108). Tekla Dömötör also points out that the Hungarian word *garabonciás* is regarded as a bastardised borrowed word from the Italian word *negromanzia*, which entered the Hungarian language through Slovenian and Croatian, and mentions that Dezső Pais assumes that this word could possibly derive from the word *Brabantia*, "the Mediaeval Latin name for the province of Brabant" (Dömötör 1985:133). To look at another interpretation: Milan Budimir (1966:272) expressed the opinion that Jagić's linguistic connection between the word *grabancijaš* and the Italian word *negromanzia* "had no link" with that Italian word but rather with the Greek word meaning *scribbling*.

²⁸ Here, Nodilo (1981:230-231) starts out from two studies that have the mytheme of the *grabancijaš* as their themes: these are the study by Oskar Ásbóth (1880:611-627) on the Hungarian *grabancijašes* and Moses Gaster's (1884:281-290) study on Romanian "grabancijašes" (Scholomonar, Solomonar/ú, šolomonar), which were influenced by Jagić's study. Nodilo does not accept Jagić's contextual interpretation of the mytheme of the *grabancijašes* that introduces the hypothesis that the *legends* about the *grabancijašes* are of Christian/Mediaeval origin (the *scholarly* mytheme of the *sunken* culture – of the influence of learned culture upon folk culture) (Nodilo 1981:229). Namely, while Jagić recognised only one direction of influence – that is, the influence of high culture, "the influence from above", in this case, priestly culture influences popular culture (Jagić 1948:177) – today one speaks of mutual influences (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1984:131).

but it never wears out; oh Agni, seven hundred and thirty twin sons climbed up upon that wheel” [in the sense of days and nights], “and ‘three hundred and sixty’ [days], according to another version of the same hymn” (Nodilo 1981:227, 220). Furthermore, starting out from the legend noted down by Valjavec in Ludbreg (in Podravina), according to Max Müller’s solar mythology, Nodilo interprets the *grabancijaš* as a solar deity who builds a warm year with the help of *Oganj* (Fire) – the Fiery Dragon, Agni – the Vedic deity of fire, and he calls that mytheme a *mythologeme in the wheel of the twelve-monthly Suns* (Nodilo 1981:228, 230), which is contrary to the interpretation given here that situates the *grabancijaš* – *Pozoj* binomial in the context of the meteorological binomial in cosmogonic legends about the conflict between the Wielder of Thunder, and his snake-like/dragon-like opponent as the representative of Chaos (Russell 1982:61).

Namely, Nodilo rounds out the mythological interpretation of the *grabancijašes’* role in the fruitful aspect, since they are active as the protectors of the harvest. In that process, he establishes the fact that they are known in the Romanian tradition by the name *Scholomonar* (Solomonar/iu, *şolomari*), who have their opponents – *protu-Scholomonare* [contra-*Scholomonars*, Hagelmänner] who bring hail (Nodilo 1981:231; Gaster 1884:287).²⁹ The foregoing is near to the Zagreb legend that speaks of young men who “went here to the black school, here on the Chapter [hill], to become priests. And there they learnt how to make hail, so that when two priests quarrel, they send hail to one another to destroy the crops [of each other’s parishioners]” (Marks 1994:79). Andrija Dolencić mentions that individual priests recounted how they had been accused of making hail before World War I, and even later in some cases (Dolencić 1952:359).³⁰

After having interpreted the links between the Čakovec and the Štrigova *pozojis*, we can move on in reconstruction of the mythic stories/legends of the Čakovec *pozojis* in their connections with other legends about the *pozojis* of Međimurje. I am therefore quoting in full the following legend about the *pozoj* in Čičanjska Jama (*jama* here meaning marsh, lake, river tributary) near Donji Vidovec (in Međimurje).

The *pozoj* in Čičanjska Marsh

It was long known that there was a pozoj in Čičanjska Marsh whose tail was under the Church. Namely, when the pozoj turned over in the marsh, all the candles fell off the altar in the Church.

It happened once that a young gentleman dressed in a black suit came to the village. He went to the parish house and talked at length there with the parish priest. Then the parish priest called the sacristan, who led that man to Čičanjska Marsh.

That man carried a large book under his arm. He was a grabancijaš.

When they reached the marsh, he went very close to it, and stood on the root of an alder shrub and started thus to read from the book.

²⁹ The *Lexicon Valachico-latino-hungarico-germanicum* (1825) lists the Romanian word *Solomonariu* with the following synonyms: *imbricator*, *garabanczás deak*, *Wettermacher* (the prime mover of weather), *Wettertreiber* (the driver of weather), *Lumpenmann* (raggedy person, a tramp or scoundrel) (Gaster 1987:283; Kretzenbacher 1968:120).

³⁰ There is a group of beliefs about priests being able to call up hail which, sometimes because of envy of another priest, they send to impoverish the members of his parish by crop destruction (Jagić 1948:182), linked with the mytheme of the mutual *agon* of supernatural beings and persons with supernatural capabilities (cf. Marjanić 2006:173).

The sacristan hid a little further away in the reeds and watched all that was happening.

*All of a sudden the water started to be disturbed and a **pozoj's head appeared**. The grabancijaš then grabbed a **golden bridle** and threw it over the pozoj. And he kept on **reading from the book**. When the pozoj's body was half out of the water, the grabancijaš jumped upon him and **rode him to the south**.*

The pozoj had such a long tail that he dragged one part of it along the ground as he flew.

*Suddenly a wind came up, it clouded over and **hail** began to fall, as fat as a walnut, so that it destroyed everything from the Dravica Stream to the Drava River.*

The shepherds on the upland pasture grazing their cows could clearly see the pozoj's tail as well as his rear legs.

*The reverend parish priest said later that the **grabancijaš had ridden the pozoj to Africa**.*

The pozoj has such cold meat that the Africans put a piece of it under the tongue and it keeps them cool all day. (Zvonar, Hranjec, Strbad 1987II:306–307; emphasis S. M.)³¹

This mythic, demonological legend³² once again indicates the link between the *pozoj* and the *grabancijaš* who calls up storms and hail³³ by riding on the *pozoj*; of how the *grabancijaš* – *pozoj* meteorological binomial brings fructiferous rain after prolonged periods of drought, just as Perun liberates the Water from Veles's Netherworld of Eternal Spring (*Vyrej/Virej*) in the Proto-Slavic matrix. While interpreting the meteorological *pozoj* – *grabancijaš* binomial, bearing in mind the mentioned fact that shows that there are no indications that the Proto-Slavs had a dualistic conception of the God of Good and the God of Evil (Belaj 1988:87), we can include the shaman matrix in which the *pozoj*, due to the meteorological binomial relationship, can be viewed as the *grabancijaš's* shamanic animal *alter ego/ ego alter* (Dolenčić 1952:361).³⁴ Just a reminder that the shaman's animal metamorphosis or, more precisely – metempsychosis – and his riding on animals sym-

³¹ Narrated by Stjepan Zvonar from Donji Vidovec around 1955. The notation is similar to that of Valjavec according to Jagić's example No. 12 from Haloze, Lower Styria region, Slovenia (Zvonar, Hranjec, Strbad 1987:306–307).

³² Cf. the real foundation of these stories – mythic, demonological legends (Zvonar, Hranjec, Strbad 1987:303–304).

³³ Here, the information from the legend of the *Pozoj in Čičanjska Marsh* is that only the *grabancijaš's* riding on the *pozoj* calls up the tempest and the hail, while Monika Krojež stresses from the Slovenian legends that the *black student* (the *Kresnik*) drives out the dragon because the dragon (that is, *the dragon itself*) causes the stormy weather or the serious weather predicament (cf. Krojež 2008:180). It could also be mentioned that the *garabonciás* is believed in Hungarian folk legends to be capable of whipping up storms or hail showers, or alternatively, of driving them away (Dömötör 1985:132). Absolutely the same holds concerning the dragon, too, in Hungarian popular beliefs (cf. Dömötör 1985:122).

³⁴ Vilmos Diószegi shows in his book *A sámánhit emlékei a magyar népi műveltségben* [Traces of Shamanism in Hungarian Folk Culture] (1958) that the Hungarian *táltos* differs from the seemingly similar figures that one finds in the countries neighbouring Hungary – the Romanian *Scholomonar* (*Solomonar/iu*), the Polish *planetnik*, and the Croatian *grabancijaš*, and establishes that only the *táltos* experiences the “shaman affliction”, “the second dream”, and the ritual death or the initiation dismemberment; “only the *táltos* undergoes an initiation, has a particular costume and a drum, and goes into ecstasy” (Eliade 1974:225). Cf. Dömötör 1985:132–136 for similarities and differences between the *garabonciás* and the *táltos*.

bolically express ecstasy: the temporary death is denoted by the soul's departure from the body in animal form (Ginzburg 1991:172).

Let us examine the individual mythemes as associative sequences in the legends mentioned about the Međimurean *pozoijs*.

(1) *The mytheme of the dyadic position of the pozoijs body below the ground (especially beneath the church locality) and/or in the marsh.* Otherwise, it is a feature of this Međimurean dragon whose hybrid body, as we have established, is dyadically distributed, that what is in question is a combination between a water (or marsh/swamp) dragon and a winged dragon (Jagić 1948:182-183), while, in respect of its marsh nature or, for that part, its subterranean location, we can also define it as a chthonian creature, which is connected with the Christianised ideosphere of those legends and its bimorphic structure – the capability of flight (the celestial symbolism of a bird) coupled with a snake (the chthonian symbolism of a reptile).

(2) *The mytheme that only the grabancijaš (a graduate student of the 13th School) is capable of liberating the community from the pozoijs, which represents an imminent threat to it, and that with the help of the magical book or even by magic spells – reading prayers from that book (Jagić 1948:180-181, 193).* In that process, in addition to the book, there is mention of a means of mastering the dragon in the legend of the *pozoijs* in Čičanjska Jama by way of the *golden bridle* that enables the *grabancijaš* to control and to ride upon it.³⁵

(3) The so-called *mytheme paradox* indicates that the *pozoijs* can be *extracted* (from its subterranean location or, for its part, from the marsh) only by the *student grabancijaš (the black school student)*, but that Čakovec would come tumbling down in that case, as the legend tells us in the version of the Čakovec *pozoijs* written down by Ferencz Gönczi (Gönczi 1995:123). In other words, it would be dangerous to disturb the dragon underneath the Old City; an earthquake or a terrible storm could ensue, as the first legend says in the version about the Čakovec *pozoijs* (“Predaja o zelenom pozoijsu u Čakovcu” [The legend of the green *pozoijs* in Čakovec], <http>).³⁶

(4) *The meteorological mytheme and the mytheme of the earthquake.*³⁷ According to the belief, an earthquake resulted from the *pozoijs*'s movements in the bowels of the earth, while its flight led to extremely bad weather (a tempest and hail). It should be noted that both types of movement on the part of the *pozoijs* (beneath the ground and in the air) come about because of the *grabancijaš*'s activity, that is, at the moment when the community wants to drive out the dragon. Examining the dragons connected with *grabancijašes* in Hungarian legends, Sándor Erdész, found that this was a case of the *dragon/snake*-type dragon by which people used once to explain natural catastrophes (Erdész 1971:103, 106).

³⁵ It should be borne in mind that Bellerophon, who appears otherwise as the first Greek melancholic (Crnojević-Carić 2008:228), managed to master Pegasus with a *golden bridle* given to him by the goddess Athena, and was able with the help of the winged horse to kill the Chimaeras – the monster who lived deep in an abyss near to the main city of Lycia and killed everyone who come near her. Otherwise, Zamarovský points out that Bellerophon was obviously of Asia Minor descent. Namely, in the beginning he figures as a personage of the Lycia Sun god, who travelled through the heavens on a winged horse and tamed with his arrows Humankind's natural hostile forces, primarily volcanoes and earthquakes, of which the Chimaeras became the personification (Zamarovský 1989:52).

³⁶ The legend noted down by Valjavec in Hum in Lower Styria in Slovenia states that if the dragon is located under the church or some castle, people beg the black student to *drive* the dragon “since it would cause great damage destroying the church or the castle” (Jagić 1948:181).

³⁷ In a nutshell, the *grabancijaš* can drive the *pozoijs* out by the *wet method* (a terrible hail storm) or by the *dry method* (an earthquake) (cf. Jagić 1948:179; Marks 209:324).

The belief was that if the *grabancijaš* succeeded in *mounting* the *pozoj*, the *pozoj* would fly off with him and, by way of the waving of its tail, cause a storm that was often accompanied by heavy hail-stones that were interpreted in Međimurje and some parts of Croatian Zagorje as the dragon's excrement (*kumer*) "since everywhere it flies the *pozoj* leaves 'dropping of hail' (hail = excrement)" (Dolenčić 1952:359).

(5) *The mytheme of the end of the grabancijaš's flight to the south or the east* (usp. Kropfej 2008:180) or even the west of the Globe, where he kills the *pozoj* – selling its meat, which means that the cosmic cycle of revitalisation is interrupted. So we are speaking of the *grabancijaš's* flight to the south (Africa) on the *pozoj*, as recounted in the legend of the *pozoj* in Čičanjska Jama: "The *pozoj* has such cold meat that the Africans put one piece under their tongue and then cool themselves with it all day",³⁸ and/or, in addition to Africa, another destination to which the *grabancijaš* drives the dragon is in the east – Arabia (Jagić 1948:178, 181, 195),³⁹ while Dolenčić emphasises as a particularity of the Međimurean *pozoj* that the *grabancijaš* rides it to western India, where it is killed and its meat sold to the local inhabitants, who place the meat of this cold-blooded hybrid creature under the tongue in order for it to cool them (Dolenčić 1952:359). In other words, the dragon has to be driven out into non-Christian regions, the regions of the *Other*.

Cosmic and Christian slaying of the Dragon

Finally, let us emphasise the differential determinants in relation to the final status of the Dragon (live state/cosmic revitalisation – dead) in the Proto-Slavic legend where Perun *pushes* Veles/Volos/the Dragon/Serpent *below* (to the roots of the Tree of the World), and in the legend of the Čakovec *pozoj*, as in the legend of St George, who transfixes and finishes off the Dragon in a single instance.⁴⁰ In other words, Christianity inaugurates the single instance of saintly slaying of the pagan dragon, while, in the Indo-European myth of the conflict between, for example Indra and the so-called Cosmic Monster (Vṛtra, Vala), it is a case of the cyclical changes in the seasons of the year. So, for example, Vṛtra/Vala, Veles/Volos, Azi Dahaka, Fenrisúlfr (Fenris, Fenrir),⁴¹ and Leviathan will be enslaved again at the end of each cosmic cycle (Gaster 1987:76). It is to this group of cosmic dragons that the dragons from Međimurje belong, although it is obvious that the Christian legend of the Dragon Slayer has taken supremacy over the legends of the Međimurean *pozoj*.⁴²

³⁸ Nonetheless, on the other hand, Ferencz Gönczi mentions that the *grabancijaš* always flies on the dragon towards the setting Sun, where he butchers it and sells its meat to the local inhabitants, who buy it because it is very hot there and the inhabitants of that clime refresh themselves with the meat of the marsh dragon (Gönczi 1995:123).

³⁹ As regards East as a cardinal point of the compass, it is worth remembering that the Chinese dragons represented that direction – the point of rising of the Sun, Spring and fertility (Huxley 1997:87).

⁴⁰ Admittedly, we should add here Belaj's differential determinant in which he stresses that the *folklore* George (Green George) figures as Perun's son and decapitates the Snake with a forged sword (not to be confused with the one-off Christian slaying of the Dragon), while that decapitation is quite contrary to the embedded Christian iconographic depiction in which St George transfixes the Dragon with a spear (Belaj 1998:206), and finishes the battle with a flourish of his sword (*Leksikon ikonografije...* [Lexicon of Iconography] 1990:310).

⁴¹ According to the Iranian legend, the mortal hero Thraetaona killed the Azi Dahaka, which had three heads and six eyes (Watkins 1987:464), while according to *Edda*, Fenrisúlfr, a monstrous wolf fettered by chains will open wide its huge jaws in order to swallow the entire world at the end of days (Ragnarök).

⁴² As we are located textually and regarding interpretation in the Međimurean region, just a reminder that the coat-of-arms of the commune of Sveti Juraj na Bregu [St George on the Hill] shows St George as a knight who

Namely, it is obvious that the oral legends of the Čakovec *pozoj* contain a twofold matrix – pagan and Christian. The pagan, cosmic matrix, that is, the matrix of natural religions, shows that, prior to the arrival of the *grabancijaš*, the dragon is located *below*, *underneath* the particular localities, that are largely ecclesiastical or, for their part, marshlands. Furthermore, the *grabancijaš* and the *pozoj* act initially as a meteorological binomial; the *grabancijaš* *extracts the dragon* (from beneath the ground or the marsh), by which an earthquake or hail is created (the liberation of fructiferous water). Thus, in comparison with the Christian legend of St George, the *grabancijaš*'s supremacy over the *pozoj* was originally conceived to operate within the framework of the meteorological binomial: the *grabancijaš* does not defeat the *pozoj* as, for example, St George does with his sword or a spear, but rather with a book (*The Bible* obviously) as well as by magic spells (reading selected prayers from the *book* in question) just as he takes control of him with a *golden bridle*, as in the case of the legend of the *pozoj* from Čičanjska Jama, referred to above. Some versions emphasise the fact that *The Bible* appears in the function of the *grabancijaš*'s necromantic book, by which direct symbolism is established of Christianity suppressing paganism (cf. Novak 2007:252). True enough, one can also set up a differential determinant in the mastery over the dragon in the fact that the *grabancijaš* figures in the folklore conception as a young cleric (Grafenauer 1956:324), while St George is a saint-warrior.

The Christian matrix of the Čakovec *pozoj* legend, in addition to the mentioned established supremacy over the *pozoj* by magic spells and *The Bible*, shows that it is more appropriate to keep the dragon *below*⁴³ and not to waken it, so as to avoid its cosmic renewal, just as the *pozoj* is killed in the end in the Međimurean legends, as is shown, for example, with the *pozoj* in Čičanjska Jama, which concludes with the mytheme of the sale of the *pozoj*'s meat in Africa.

Although the pagan and Christian matrices imbue the Međimurean legends of the *pozoj*, it is quite evident that the Christian legend of the Dragon-Slayer and of the permanent conquest of the so-called monster is what is paramount since, in the end, the *grabancijaš* in the south, east or even west of the Globe kills the *pozoj* – and sells its meat, which means that the cosmic cycle of revitalisation is interrupted. Thus, when the position of the monster in physical space is in question, it always happens that an effort is made to remove what is heterogeneous to a neighbouring, hostile and distant space, just as the Cosmos is ostensibly *populated* today by extra-terrestrial intelligence that is largely represented as a hostile *Other* in the cinema imaginary.

Apart from that, as Dolenčić noticed, those *pozojis* were not at all dangerous or warlike as in certain other civilisations; they “*submit to the magical sayings and prayers of an impoverished, modest and ‘preškolanoga’ (slightly kinky! = crazy, quirky) grabancijaš and end up in ‘Indian’ butcher shops so that their meat can save the lives of others*” (Dolenčić

kills the Dragon with his spear and his sword. There is a legend of a *black pozoj* in Sveti Juraj na Bregu that was slain by St George on a *white* horse. It is significant to note here that the old name of Sveti Juraj was, in translation, St George *over* or *among* the Waters, which definitely indicates the privileged high position of the settlement and the church, from which there is a broad vista of all of Međimurje County and the Drava and Mura River flatlands (“Sveti Juraj na Bregu” [St George on the Hill], [http](http://)).

⁴³ The Proto-Slavic word *zmbjъ* or *zmbja* denotes, as the words say, “the one who belongs to the Earth” and those words are derived from the word *zemlja* (*zemlja*). That force that belongs to the earth (*zemlja*), as Katičić mentions, was equalised by the Christianised Slavs with the *vrag* (Devil), the Christian Satan (Katičić 2008:185-186, 269; cf. footnote 13).

1952:362).⁴⁴ About the fact that in the pagan matrix of popular tradition – with the exception, of course, of *behemoths* that symbolise the initial chaos in the cosmogonic myths – the *pozoj* is more a docile hybrid creature as is also shown in this illustration of a dragon from the manuscript of Mediaeval bestiary known as *MS. Ashmole 1504*.⁴⁵

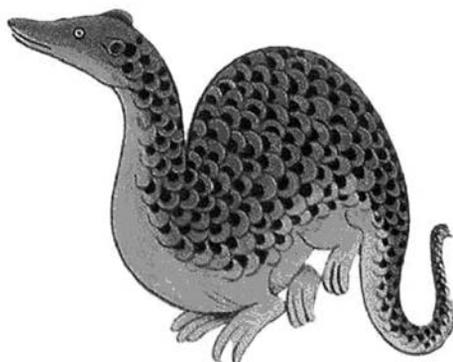


Figure 2: A Dragon (*MS. Ashmole 1504*, Bodleian Library)

Let us pause briefly on another St George legend that tells of how the city of Selene/Selena (in Libya today) had to pay tribute to the Dragon – in the form of virgins and children (Huxley 1997:49).⁴⁶ When it was the king's daughters turn, George killed the Dragon and thus saved the princess. That legend has been interpreted in several ways; the interpretation that marks it as an allegory of the victory of the Church over Paganism is interesting for our inconvenient historic truth of the eternal conflict between the true faith and heresy.⁴⁷ Thus, the most frequent depiction of the St George and the Dragon motif since the 13th century, which was adopted from the East (Belaj 1998:169-170), is the customary iconographic one in which St George mounted on his steed pierces the gaping jaws of the Dragon with his spear, while the Dragon is lying on the ground with his tail wrapped around the horse's rear legs; the spear often breaking from the blow, so that George has to bring the fight to a finish with a flourish of his sword (*Leksikon ikonografije... [Lexicon of Iconography]* 1990:310). In other words, the heroic gesture exists only in relation to the

⁴⁴ However, a saying that still circulates in Međimurje is „You are as unsightly as a dragon“ (“Grdi si kak pozoj”) meaning “You are as ugly as a dragon” (“Legenda o šaranu bez repa” [The legend of the carp without a tail], [http](http://)).

⁴⁵ What is evident is that the dragon is attributed a snake-like body with hybrid grafts of diverse morphology and combinations of certain other animals (Sax 2001:233). These are some descriptions of dragons: Ad de Vries mentions that the dragon is usually described as a snake with two or even four feet, to which are added a head with a crest, bats' wings, scales, terrifying claws, a barbed tail (or only some of those) (De Vries 1974:145). J. Baltrušaitis has monitored the iconographic evolution of the *dragon* in European visual art and emphasised that it was a “snake without wings or legs, or a bird with the tail of a lizard in Romanesque art. In Gothic art it had wings with membranes. (...) A dragon with the wings of a bat started to appear more often towards the second half of the 13 century” (Baltrušaitis 1991:135-137).

⁴⁶ Victory over a monstrous Dragon that besets the land or even imprisons princesses or demands virgins is a standard motif in heroic legends.

⁴⁷ Cf. the Croatian variant of the modification of this legend into a dragon legend (more precisely, a legend of an *aždaja*/ Azi Dahaka with seven heads) from Klanjec Lake in Croatian Zagorje in: Đurić 1996:161-162.

blood-thirsty strategy of conquering the enemy. Or, as Campbell observes: “The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today” (Campbell 2007:370).

The inconvenient historical truth

At first glance, there would not seem to be any element of a *dangerous* story in the oral legend of the Čakovec *pozoj*. However, if the legend is read off through the instruments of political anthropology, the mythic legend of the Čakovec *pozoj* can be interpreted by the allegorical key as the process of suppressing *paganism* – the Proto-Slavic religious matrix (symbolised by the *pozoj* that is incarcerated, concealed and even *interred* deep under the ground: we recall the iconography of the *Dragon* as the Devil or *Satan*, the *political enemy* in the Christian interpretation, as well as the Hebrew word *Satan* in the meaning of *opponent*) in the name of the Christian religious matrix (symbolised by the *grabancijaš*). Namely, because pre-Christian Europe was packed with its visual imaginaries of dragons, Mediaeval Christianity made use of the dragon as a symbol of the pagan world, so that the slaying of the dragon was transposed from the gods and heroes to the Christian saints (Kramer 1972:77). Otherwise, there is an entire series of variants of similar events connected with popes and bishops who, by slaying dragons, annihilate pagan enemies, being given the telling name of *cultura draconis* (Cambi 2003:42; Boyle 1978:25).

In this process, one should also point out the transfiguration of history in the myth (Eliade 2007:55), that is, great rulers were regarded as imitators of primordial heroes: so, for example, Darius saw himself as the new Thraetaona, the Iranian mythic hero of whom it was said that he slew the three-headed monster, the snake Azi Dahaka (cf. Eliade 1974a:37; Fontenrose 1959:209). For example, in Darius’s case it is a matter of an elite interpreting contemporary history by way of myths, in which one can read off political propaganda. However, Eliade points out that such reading of the transfiguration of history into myths as political propaganda is erroneous, because it does not take into account the structure of the archaic mentality that derives, among other, from the fact that “popular memory applies a strictly analogous process of articulation and interpretation to historical events and personages” (Eliade 1974a:38). In other words, man in traditional cultures recognises himself as being real only if he stops being himself and in that process imitates and repeats (*imitatio*) a particular archetype.

In the framework of the political *set of monsters*, in each epic culture, the hero is an idealised, deified, god-like Utopian personification of society (in the legend of the Čakovec *pozoj* this is the *grabancijaš*), suitable therefore for identification, while mastering the monster is usually the only mission upon which that heroic identity is founded (Levanat-Peričić 2008:44-45; 2008a:532).⁴⁸ Manipulation with fear – fear of any type of so-called monsters, and/or *something* that is outside of the homogeneous community and thus denoted as the *Other* – heterogeneous, different, dissimilar, *detached*, has as its objective a closing of ranks among the frightened potential victims, which contributes to the

⁴⁸ Let us include an interpretation of analytical psychology: in other words, Jung stated that the snake in myths is often a double of the hero and that there are numerous stories about their closeness. So the hero can have, for example, eyes like a snake’s or can transform into a snake after death or even be venerated in the form of a snake, or his mother may have been a snake, etc. Thus, the presence of a snake almost always indicates a myth about a hero (Jung 2004:252).

homogenisation of the threatened community (Levanat-Peričić 2008:44-45). The history of the monotheistic religions (Christianity in our case) developed as a history of demonisation of the *Other*, while this demonisation concept can be seen in Christian iconography, the attribution of the dragon/*pozoj* as a symbol of evil and demonic aspirations – the *Devil* (Satan). Just a reminder that Satan is shown in Christian iconography as a serpent (the original sin), a dragon (the Apocalypse), a *deformed* animal hybrid, a lion, or a basilisk (*Leksikon ikonografije...* [Lexicon of Iconography] 1990:54).

Apart from that, since the mythic beginning of the world, a battle has been waged between the hero and the monster for territory and distribution of natural resources. In ancient cosmogonic myths, that struggle was connected with the liberation of fructiferous water; in any case, the Čakovec legend stresses that disturbing the *pozoj* could lead not only to earthquakes but also to *stormy weather* (hail). A myth of this type often conceals a certain inconvenient historical truth, such as, for example, forced colonisation, the seizure of territory and the plunder of original settlers' treasure (Levanat-Peričić 2008:44-45), while the dragon is denoted in numerous legends as the guardian of hidden treasure, of gold, whereas his opponent – the *hero* – tries to snatch away those natural resources. For example, the dragon in Greek mythology is the guardian of the Golden Fleece, which Jason manages to capture in the end. All over, snakes and dragons represent the masters of places, they are *autochthonic* and have to do battle against newcomers, conquerors – they who must give form, create and capture territory (Eliade 2007:58).

We must underscore that Marti Kheel's ecofeminist interpretation points out that it is usual in such processes that the slain monster is a deity from an earlier matriarchal world. Within the framework of the subjugation of that ostensible Other, according to feminist historians, patriarchal mythology transformed the serpents, dragons, and horned gods, who were once (in matriarchal mythology) worshipped as divinities, into devils and monsters that must be slain (Kheel 2008: 42). Thus, snakes were connected in the ancient world with the great goddesses, for example, the Greek Athena (who had a snake – a *draco* – as a female help-mate), the Mesopotamian Ishtar, the Egyptian goddess Buto – the snake goddess and provider of the Nile – the Babylonian goddess Tiamat – the primordial goddess from whose blood the world came into being (Sax 2001:228-229).⁴⁹ However, as the patriarchal gods came to power, there was also a revolt against the snake cult, which also caused the attribution to the snake of symbolic destructive, and evil and negative energies in numerous mythologies and/or religions. So, the Egyptians, for example, believed that the snake Apep (Apophys) tried to swallow the boat of the god Ra as he travelled over the land every night. As has already been pointed out, in the structure of the monomyth (in Campbell's definition, which he developed on the basis of the matrices of heroic biographies) the so-called monsters – snakes – were killed by almost all the great heroes. So, for example, the Babylonian Marduk killed the goddess Tiamat, the great whale – a dragon or a cosmic dragon – from whose body the Universe was created; Zeus killed the original snake, Typhon; Apollo, the son of Zeus, finished off the Python, Geia's constrictor, in order to gain the shrine at Delphi, formerly sacred to the goddess Geia (Sax 2001:228-229). The death of the Beasts in symbolisation of the original Chaos in natural religions is often in-

⁴⁹ With Freud's interpretation of the snake as a phallic symbol, the snake came to be thought of as a male creature (Sax 2001:234).

terpreted as an augur of the birth of Light and Order, either at the beginning of the World or at its end (Kheel 2008:42).

Additionally, Christianity, too, continues the tradition of slaying dragons. Thus, according to the well-known words of St John the Evangelist – at the end of the world, an angel with a key will overcome the Dragon, the old Snake that represents the Devil, and Satan – “*And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.*

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (King James Version: *Revelation* Ch. 20, Verses 2 and 3)⁵⁰ There is intervention in the faith and the deities in those myths of violence and conquest by new dragon-slayers, in the hope of establishing a new order in the world (Kheel 2008:42-43).⁵¹ So, according to Marti Kheel, it is necessary to establish a differential determinant in the pagan matrix between the matriarchate, where the cult of the snake dominated, and the patriarchal era, which destroyed the snake goddesses of the matriarchate. In that process, as we have pointed out above, from the pagan slaying of the Snake/Dragon, which – in relation to the concept of the changing seasons of the year – was cyclic and cosmic, Christianity moved on with its saintly dragon-slayers to establish the single instance slaying of the Snake/Dragon.⁵²

Apart from that, it should be mentioned, as Nancy Hathaway observed that the Greeks, nevertheless, kept the most exciting adventures for the males, and that particular prejudice has continued up until the present day, something that can easily be proven in a cinema near you, as the above mythologist mentions (Hathaway 2006:232). It is really rare for a heroine to slay the monster: we can, however, give one example – the Hittites spoke of the defeat of a sea snake/dragon called Illuyankas (cf. Fontenrose 1959:121-125), this having been achieved through the combined forces of the goddess Inaras and a mortal hero, or, for its part, in co-operation with the Storm God, Teshub (Matasović 2000:141-144; Višić 1993:83). And it was some three hundred years after Homer and Hesiod wrote about heroes that the word *heroine* first appeared in literature, which shows the secondary position of female heroes, that is, heroines (Hathaway 2006:231).⁵³

In conclusion, we may say that this legend about the Čakovec *pozoj* – as, for that matter, do all similar legends about the subjugation of the so-called monsters – shows what was differentiated by Roland Barthes in relation to mythic structure: that the myth can very easily be modified into a tool of political demagoguery which confers a “natural” appearance to a particular ideology (Meletinski 1985:95). True enough, in the case of the

⁵⁰ Here, the pagan matrix about the cyclic slaying of the dragon has been retained; however, that cyclical nature is reduced to the Christian, saintly single event slaying of the Dragon, the old Snake, something that will happen only once – after which Satan will once again be free. In other words, the destruction of the Dragon-Satan takes place in four stages: Satan is bound, shackled, and imprisoned for a thousand years; during that time Christ’s „thousand-year kingdom“ will flourish; Satan is once more set free; after that, the Last Judgement follows and the „new Heaven and the new Earth“ begins („Uvod i napomene – Novi zavjet“ [The New Testament – Introduction and Remarks] 1990:1272).

⁵¹ On Christian dragon-slayers cf. Gould 1995:198-199.

⁵² The anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn stresses that the monster-slaying motif appeared in 37 of the 50 cultures included in his research (Kluckhohn 1963:163). Cf. motif type AT [ATU] 300 *The Dragon Slayer* (according to Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson).

⁵³ Christian saints (e.g. St Margaret), unlike the warrior-like saints on steeds, do, of course, employ a different practice in slaying dragons (cf. *Leksikon ikonografije...* [Lexicon of Iconography] 1990:393).

Čakovec *pozaj* what is in question is a *weak* myth, which Barthes denotes in relation to a strong myth. Namely, in the former the political quantum is immediate and the depolitisation is abrupt, and in the latter, “the political quality of the object has *faded* like a colour, but the slightest thing can bring back its strength brutally” (Barthes 1972:143-144). Needless to say, the slightest things, trifles, are not at all unimportant⁵⁴



Figure 3: Painting of a dragon-snake on the pannelled ceiling of the Reformed Church at Csengetersima (Hungary) (adopted from the book: *Tezla Dömötör: Hungarian Folk Beliefs*. Budapest, 1985)

Translated by Nina H. Antoljak

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⁵⁴ Namely, in Barthes's definition of the myth, its function is to empty reality: „it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence. (...) *myth is depoliticized speech*” (Barthes 1972:142).

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Zmaj i junak ili kako ubiti zmaja na primjeru međimurskih predaja o grabancijašu i pozaju

Suzana Marjanić

Interpretacijom međimurskih predaja o čakovečkom pozaju u članku je istaknuta razlikovna odrednica u odnosu na završni status zmaja (stanje živ/kozmičko obnavljanje – mrtav) u praslavenskoj predaji (mitu), u predaji o čakovečkom pozaju i konačno u legendi o svetom Jurju koji ubija zmaja. Naime, kršćanstvo ustoličuje jednokratno dokrajčivanje zmaja, dok je u indoeuropskome mitu o sukobu između npr. Indre i tzv. kozmičkoga *čudovišta* Zmije/Zmaja (Vrtra, Vala) riječ o cikličkim ubojstvima. Upravo ovoj skupini – skupini kozmičkih zmajeva pripadaju međimurski zmajevi, iako je očito da je u međimurskim predajama o pozaju nadjačala kršćanska legenda o zmajoubojici, o trajnom svladavanju tzv. *čudovišta* jer u završnici grabancijaš na jugu, istoku ili zapadu Globusa (odnosno, kako zapisuje Andrija Dolenčić – u *indijskim mesnicama*) pozaja ubija – prodaje njegovo meso, što znači da je kozmički ciklus, ponavljanje prekinuto.

Završno su međimurske predaje o meteorološkome binomu, koji čine grabancijaš i pozaj, interpretirane u ekofeminističkom ključu kao predaje kojima se nastoji prikriti neugodna povijesna istina (kristijanizacija, kolonijalizam). Naime, predaja o čakovečkom pozaju, kao uostalom sve slične predaje o podjarmljivanju tzv. *čudovišta*, pokazuju ono što je razlučio Roland Barthes u mitskoj strukturi – da se mit vrlo jednostavno modificira u oruđe političke demagogije koja određenoj ideologiji pridaje “prirodan” izgled. Istina, u predaji o čakovečkom pozaju riječ je o *slabom* mitu, koji Barthes u odnosu na jaki mit, u kojemu je politički kvantum neposredan, a depolitizacija nagla, označava kao mit u kojemu se politička kvaliteta predmeta izgubila, ali pridodaje kako ga sitnica može naglo ponovno oživjeti. Dakako, sitnice nisu nimalo nevažne.