The Mythological Landscape of Rodik: Oral Tradition and Archaeology of a Village on the Fringes of Karst

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1 The oral traditions of the village of Rodik on the eastern fringes of the eponymous Karst plateau between Kozina and Divača, and the archaeological site of Ajdovščina above Rodik1 stand out among the extraordinarily rich ethnological and archaeological heritage in the region. We first recorded archaeology related oral traditions there back in the 1970s and then discussed it in our study on the potential of settlement studies in the Kras/Carst region.2 In 2000, Jasna Majda Peršolja, schoolteacher originally from Rodik published an important book of oral traditions collected in the village,3 and this gave a further boost to scholarly analysis. We published two articles jointly with my former student Katja Hrobat Virloget,4 at the time PhD student in ethnography, who then took the subject over and made important breakthroughs in interpreting mythological topics involved in the context of Slavic and Balkan/Mediterranean mythologies, and published on them extensively.5

1. On the Ajdi of Ajdovščina

2 The Ajdovščina site in itself is notable for its preservation and the preservation of its fossil agricultural landscape, unique in these parts. Situated on the westernmost peak (802 m) of the flysch sandstone Brkini ridge, some 250 m above the village of Rodik, it was left to woodland and in part pastureland after abandonment, and was never depleted for building material by the villages that inherited its territory. Its surface
morphology reveals clearly the layout of a para-urban settlement to be dated to Late Antiquity. The site was originally a prehistoric hillfort equipped with massive stone walls, and was continuously occupied well into the Roman period as documented by the 1st–2nd c. A.D. cemetery excavated there. A new development ensued in the context of the new importance of the wider zone as massive state investment was launched into the military defence system Claustra Alpium Iuliarum stretching between Kvarner-Quarnaro (Rijeka) and the Alps in late 3rd–early 4th c. A.D.; the occupation of the site may have continued for some time into the Early Middle Ages. The fossil fields on the eastern slopes fit the land use pattern of the existing Brkini ridge villages, and they still bear names related to their original function: Štihterca (tilled land), Nogradi (vineyards), Njivice (small fields). The site catchment as reconstructed in the 80ies based on the diachronic settlement analysis, however, includes, at the peak of its strenght, the whole village territory of Rodik and of the two small neighbouring villages of Kačiče and Slope.

The other outstanding feature is that the name of the village clearly continues the name of the community that inhabited its territory in the 1st c. A.D., noted as Rundictes (a Rundictibus) on the inscription marking the border of their territory as re-established by emperor Claudius after dispute between them and the senator Caius Lecanius Bassus, who apparently owned lands to the East. The findspot of the inscription (Materija) coincides with the south-eastern limit of the Ajdovščina site catchment as reconstructed. Given the well documented occupation of the Ajdovščina site in the time of the inscription, we can arguably say that this site was the main settlement of the Rundictes and the name of the site may well have sounded very much like that of the modern village.

This observation finds interesting illustration in local oral tradition on Ajdovščina. The name of the site is generic and refers to Ajdi—pagans (Heiden), normally described as giants who built monumental old structures. Only exceptionally, there is reference to contact and cultural transfer, typically of cheese-making and alpage: in such cases, the usual interpretation is survival of pre-Slavic population in remote areas, specialized in pastoralism. In the case of Rodik, however, the oral tradition on the Ajdi of Ajdovščina is not just about contact but cohabitation, and that is unique in these parts. Anthropologically, the Ajdi would be different from “us”, smaller and darker, and they would engage mainly in smithing. Now these parts of the stories told, although recorded repeatedly, must be taken with some caution. They differ so drastically from the normal descriptions of the Ajdi, that we cannot exclude intervention by educated individuals such as the priest Matija Sila in the 19th c. or local teachers, who were well aware of the dating of the site to the Roman period, especially after the discovery of the inscription with the name of Rundictes, and may have in their educational sermons and teaching of local history modelled the anthropological difference on the contrast between the contemporary Slavic and Italian population, while the smithing could be inferred by the locals from simple observation of the quantities of slags across the Ajdovščina site, and the same goes for the number of houses there, easily discernible in surface morphology. This is the more plausible as in contrast to the stories we recorded ourselves, in that recorded by Peršolja, Ajdi do fit the usual figure of giants, so in the stories told, they now obviously come in both sizes. But there is more deflection from generic descriptions in the narrative. The Ajdi would regularly descend from their settlement to the fields above the village called Čelevo and Maganka and if the villagers
were not vigilant, they would steal their crops there. Also, the parents would scare their children by telling them that the Ajdi would come and kidnap them if not good. Such stories cannot be so easily dismissed, and in turn make also the above descriptions more credible in terms of possible alternative memory related through generations. As with the Ajdi contact stories about transfer of knowledge of cheese-making, the temporal niche where such contact would be imaginable in the Rodik case is the Early Middle Ages, when new populations settled in the lowland border zone between Kras and Brkini, which have best agricultural land, so the Ajdovščina community would have retracted to the Brkini ridge settlement niche.

But the oral tradition might suggest also mixing of populations. Speaking of the end of the settlement on Ajdovščina, the recurring narrative is that it was destroyed by fire and the settlers moved to three locations: to the villages of Rodik and Slope, and to the area of Njivice north-east of Ajdovščina on the Brkini ridge. Njivice are the farthest part of the Ajdovščina fossil agricultural landscape, and may also have traces of architectural remains. Other stories speak of a blacksmith who had his shop there and would invite passengers to stay for the night and then cut off their members in a Procrustian manner and buried them nearby. The other two target sites for the refugees are current villages, so Ajdi from Ajdovščina would either be their founders or were accepted among “us” and integrated there. Oral tradition is not explicit there, mixing of populations can only be inferred if we insist to make a coherent (hi)story from various accounts: if there was indeed contact between the villagers of Rodik and the Ajdi of Ajdovščina, then only the second scenario of the post-destruction story makes sense, so there was mixing after exodus. However, this is not how oral tradition works, stories may well contradict each other. While mixing is a possibility, it cannot be argued by combining these stories.

On the other hand, transfer of settlement location is a common topic in oral tradition in this region. In some cases, more than two sites are connected in a sequence of “old villages”: as a matter of rule, these are archaeological sites within the village territory, and the narrative is a constructed memory, integrating as it does recognizable traces of old settlements into “our” history. Clearly, actual former locations of the village or even relatively recently abandoned parts of the village have no problem fitting into the overall narrative. Inversely, the stories of “old villages” are a welcome indicator of archaeological sites, and are duly recorded in archaeological surveys. There again, the Rodik oral tradition stands out for its complexity, for involving more than one village territory (but all within the catchment of the Ajdovščina settlement as reconstructed), and for the specific reference to the flow of the population after destruction.

This very much concludes the part of the oral tradition, which constitutes a “historical” narrative related to the site of Ajdovščina. It goes without saying that the site is endowed also with a mythical figure, an enormous snake guarding the treasure there, very much like the other archaeological sites within its territory and in the region: besides snakes and dragons as guardians of treasures of all kinds, including golden calf, golden bell, Attila’s grave, also enchanted princesses or fairies. Last but not least, there are mythicized stories of locals searching for the treasure on Ajdovščina.
2. On the Lintvern of Jezero

Just south below Ajdovščina, there is a lesser hill called Čuk (possibly pre-indoeuropean Kuk, Monte Cucco in Marchesetti), site of the Ajdovščina cemeteries—prehistoric on the north slope (Sedlo) and Early Roman on the south-east slope (Pod Jezerom). There is a pond on the top, which looks very much like other ponds across Carst and in Brkini providing water for cattle, and could be just functional in this narrow strip on the Brkini ridge, until relatively recently used as pastureland. However, while the pond is man-made as it should be, large limestone blocks are used to secure its exposed east part, which is unusual. Furthermore, it is not called kal or lokev as typical of such ponds, but Jezero (lake), so it was clearly perceived as of natural origin (locals also speak of a source there within Jezero), and certainly there is no memory of it being adapted/constructed by the people of the actual villages. The most interesting part, however, is that Jezero is believed to be inhabited and guarded by a demonic figure called Lintvern (Lindwurm), a crawling creature widely known in Slovenia and across Europe, interchangingly described as snake or dragon (same root word in most Slavic languages, e.g. zmija / zmaj in Serbian). Here, it is described also as kačon, green snake with red cock’s crest spitting venom and producing whistling sounds, which is the image of basilisk, molovar in the Italian speaking/impacted coastal parts. Lintvern is sometimes confused with the snake guarding the Ajdovščina treasure, but basically, it controls water and weather: the Čuk hill is believed to be hollow and full of water, and the people of Rodik feared that Lintvern might split the hill, release water and thus destroy the village. On the other side, Lintvern was responsible for bad weather, rain, tempests and lightning: fog raising from Jezero would announce bad weather and Lintvern would make tempests there. People feared being hit by Lintvern with lightning, especially if wishing someone else be hit by lightning, which is a common curse in these parts. While not all perpetrators got necessarily hit, practically all old oak trees on Ajdovščina bear scars of Lintvern’s lightnings.

People feared the Lintvern of Jezero also in the nearby village of Brezovica, located in the first of the series of “sunken valleys” in the contact zone between the Karst of the Matarsko podolje (dry valley) and the sandstone range of Brkini. The valleys are actually former caves carved by water streaming from Brkini into the karstic underworld, which then collapsed. There, it was feared that our Lintvern might clog the estavelles at the end of the valley where the stream disappears in karstic geology, so the whole valley would be flooded. The church responded by organizing, in the frames of ius paludinis benedictendi, processions on a monthly basis (or even more frequent, even over 20 per year) from both Brezovica and Rodik to Jezero, conceived as the Way of the Cross, with stations of the cross marked by stones. Up to 20 cross bearers would be in the procession, and at Jezero, next to a stone cross erected there, the priest would perform a ritual to anathematise “the devil that dwells therein”. The maidens in white mentioned as part of the procession in a story noted by our team in the 1970s may be an invention of the informant since they do not figure in the 19th c. description of the ritual, and that by a highly credible author, historian and local priest in Rodik Matija Sila. The processions were formally prohibited by the bishop of Trieste some time around the establishment of the parish of Rodik, before the end of the 18th c.
The intensity of the reaction by the church to Lintvern is intriguing. While helping the community to overcome the fear of Lintvern’s possible malignous impact on their lives is an obvious dimension to it, Christian censure of a powerful demonic figure translated as devil is equally clear. Such procedures were common in repressing places of pagan cult by the Church, and in the case of Jezzero, the question is only whether the figure of Lintvern is the end point in these transformations, or it translates, as a generic creature of oral tradition, some specific divine power related to water and heavens/weather, possibly in the context of Slavic religious and cosmogonic system, so the people of Rodik performed rituals there before it was taken over by the Church. Looking further back in time, Jezzero was a sacred place for its very position in the midst of the Ajdovščina cemeteries: however, we do not have any direct evidence of ancient cult there, so the question must remain open.

3. On Baba

Baba (old woman, hag, crone) is an orthostate monolith relatively recently destroyed, which stood on slightly elevated karstic terrain next to the best agricultural land south of the village. The related narratives are about its female attributes, filth/earth, humidity, snot, obscenity, fertility, and about weather controlled/caused by Baba (bitter breath/fart/winds, bitter bodily water/rain); when she raises her skirt showing whatever is there to show, the skies will clear; young boys on their first trip to Trieste must kiss Baba’s ass, blow in its direction and bite the snot off her—all this sounds like quite an initiation ritual. The local idiom for the child that fell on the ground is that he “kissed the snotty Baba”, which would mean kiss the earth. Stone Babas in the wider region (in Italy on the border of the town of Trieste at Opčine-Opicina, in Slovenia Ajdovščina, Ilirska Bistrica, in Croatia in Istra and Kvarner-Quarnaro) have similar narratives and rituals attached. In Grobnik, the Baba monolith is sculptured in the form of female body, and water is flowing over her from a source above. In some cases, stone Babas are also presented with offerings—in crops (Velebit), wreath (Soča valley), or water, ashes/charcoal and earth (three elements) in three consecutive days (Golac).

Babas as mythical beings are also linked to caves, they will help women in childbirth or even deliver babies (symbolism of the cave as woman’s womb), but also take dead babies/children, and cook and eat them (caves as passage to the other world), occasionally they would also kidnap children. And they, too, control weather. While such Baba’s caves exist in the vicinity of Rodik (e.g. Lokev), there are no recorded sites and related narratives within the territory of the village. In the vicinity of Rodik, there is also the cave of Triglavca, where the people of the village of Prelože would pray for fertility to Deva, possibly the fertile seasonal manifestation of Baba, in the form of a stalagmite with the top naturally formed as female genitalia, which would receive water drops from the phalic stalactite representing Devač, Deva’s mate and according to the same interpretation the seasonal manifestation of Dec, the male counterpart of Baba. The three stalactites in front that gave name to the cave would be the “three heads, three deities in one god”, namely Triglav, one head watching the skies, the other earth, and the third the underworld. Offerings brought to caves for fertility rites are recorded in several caves, say the Divja (wild) or Babja jama uder Vrtiče in western Slovenia. Phalic stalagmites are revered in other caves, e.g. in Muževna jama in
Padence; in another cave at Gorenja Trebuša, the stalagmite is all polished from people touching it.14

Oral traditions on Babas are found all across the Slavic world, related to water and humidity, earth, fertility and weather, features often compared to the goddess Mokoš of the syncretic pantheon by prince Vladimir of Kiev Rus’ in late 10th c. Some weather phenomena are named after her (e.g. sleet – babje pšeno in Slovenian), and so are localities where bad weather is believed to originate (Babin kot). Mountains may bear her name, typically when they have double peaks suggestive of genital parts, or features suggestive of bodily parts (Babin kuk – Baba’s heap, Babni zob – Baba’s tooth).

Strikingly similar narratives and rituals as noted above and related to the Baba of Rodik are known also from other parts of Europe (la vieille, la vecchia…), and may well represent fragmented survivals of some old common female deity in control of the forces of nature, worshipped in the form of natural stone.

4. On the goblins of the caves

Two caves within the territory of Rodik stand out as points of passage to the worlds beyond, controlled by goblins.15 According to one story, the Cik cave was created by Jesus when competing with St Peter in throwing stones, and it was so deep that is opened way directly to hell. In another story, however, the Cik cave was inhabited by a goblin, a small, merry, old-looking man with a long white beard and wearing green pants. He lured a young shepherd into the cave, where he found himself in “the other world”, kind of a wonderland, idyllic landscape with a lake and streams and meadows and trees and animals. He was entertained there by the goblin and richly fed, but after a while he got homesick and returned home, either with the help of the goblin or, in another story, carried by a hawk. Back to the village, he realized that his family and everybody he knew were long dead, and that the passing of time in the goblin’s world was different from that in the world above. On the other side, the goblin at Globoka (Deep) cave unerstood human soul and would counsel people, especially women in distress. So a woman from the village went to the cave and complained about her marriage and her unfaithful husband. After a long conversation, which apparently brought no relief he invited her to jump into the cave where he would take good care of her. She did that and was later found dead at the bottom of the cave. But before jumping, she tied her headscarf to a branch, hoping that she would later take it on the way to heaven, as one version of the story goes.

The symbolic and ritual aspects of carstic caves in Slovenia have been given due attention in scholarly publication.16

5. Further sites of mythological interest

The four sets of accounts presented above are only part of the oral traditions related to specific sites within the territory of Rodik and constituting the mythical landscape of the village. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we should at least mention some further stories. Snakes, often as guardians of treasure, are a recurring narrative in the region at abandoned settlements and ruins such as our Ajdovščina or Tabor on Robida above Rodik, while the “old village” of the neighbouring Slope was reportedly
Snakes are also seen as guardians of village borders, often at places haunted by the dead killed, dismembered (and recomposed) and/or buried there. At the border point between Rodik and two other villages at Križen drev on the Brkini ridge, the story is that the place was both guarded by snakes and haunted by a giant headless man hanging from the sky on a rope, with body parts falling off and then recomposing on the ground. Further down the line of the north village border, there are two more stories of dismemberment: cutting off the members and burying of visitors at the blacksmith's shop at Njivice noted above, and dismemberment (sparagmos) of the mythical Vedamec by witches at Kobilja glava (Mare’s head). While these stories may well be defined by their position and can be interpreted as reflexes of human sacrifice at borders as proposed, their context is more complex and the meanings of the sites as parts of the village mythological landscape may reach beyond the recurring narratives on borders: Njivice, haunted place where people would see small lights and believed these were spirits of the dead, is referred to not just as the blacksmith’s shop where the dismemberment took place but also as the village where part of the Ajdi settled when they abandoned Ajdovščina, and as the cemetery of the Ajdi and the place where they had their fields. Kobilja glava, on the other hand, is named after the skull of a mare killed by a wolf there: the skull was mounted on a stick and at summer solstice, women would gather there to dance, wearing horse masks; according to another account, it was witches that gathered and danced there, and at first full moon after Easter they surprised the mythical Vedamec searching for treasure there: they dismembered him and buried him next to the treasure. Alternatively, the grave was of a child buried under a large stone. At Prelovec, another haunted place north of the village of Rodik, tracks cut in the rock are believed to be traces of Šemblja, a demonic figure often connected with such tracks on abandoned, possibly ancient roads across the Karst. Šemblja was first accounted for by our survey in the 1970s, it drives on an iron wagon with great speed and much noise, in flames, and is accompanied by or identified with devil, or the wagon driven by the devil is called šemblja. While the name can be confused with Sybil (Šembljine bukve – Sybilian books) or Saint Elias (with his charriot it shares some elements of description), the narratives are specific and distinct: at one place, Šemblja is described as the cultural hero of the blacksmiths since it, however unintentionally, revealed to them the secret of welding the wheel rim. Last but not least, fairies figure in the stories related to one of the small secondary prehistoric hillforts in the border zone of Karst and Brkini, called Bilen vrh (arguably Vilen vrh, Hill of the fairies). During our 1970s survey we were warned that the place was taboo and we should refrain from climbing the hill because controlled by these beings. Fairies also appear in the stories at the richest source of fresh water in the area, the spring of Šturke at Njivce, not far from Ajdovščina. They would bathe there and the boy from the village who watched them was punished of course.

Christian legends related to specific sites within the village territory add to the picture. They, too, can refer to archaeological sites, or to sites inhabited by mythical beings. The two prehistoric hillforts, Gabrova stran just north of the village, and Debelo griza further south of it, are correctly identified in oral tradition as abandoned settlements, and the demise of both is attributed to the punishment by Jesus and St Peter for failing to offer them hospitality/food when travelling through. At Debelo griza, locals were just cooking fish from the nearby lake but to avoid sharing it with visitors, they told them that it was stones they put in water. Enraged, Jesus and St Peter left the place and when at some distance, St Peter threw a stone which destroyed the village, carved the
cave of Remeščica just under the northern rempart, drained the water from the lake, and made big stones grow all over. At Gabrova stran again, they could get neither water or food, nor place to stay over night. In punishment, St Peter struck a rock with a wooden stick, so all buildings collapsed. While both stories fall into the category of folk narratives about punishment by divine beings (Christian, obviously) for not observing established norms and rules (of hospitality), there is also an aetiological dimension to them. The massive fortification of the lowland hillfort of Debela griža is actually not attributed to the settlement referred to, the stones accumulated there in monumental cairns are rather described as the effect of the punishment by St Paul, which completely changed the environment and deprived the people of their main source of livelihood: the lake in the story may well be a conjecture by the anonymous author to explain the existence of (abandoned) settlement in this barren, high carst area, unfit for agriculture. Gabrova stran on the other side is a regular hillfort stretching over three peaks on a narrow ridge. St Peter’s punishment resulted in an earthquake which completely destroyed the king’s castle on the third peak and all the structures on the other two, which is consistent with the fact that only very faint remains survive of the prehistoric site—its fortification has very much collapsed down the steep slopes. The aftermath of the punishment is interesting as well. While the people of Debela griža were “different from us, at least they spoke a different language” and there is no mention in the story about their whereabouts after the destruction, the people of Gabrova stran, very much divided and quarrelling all the time (the two groups were named “snakes” and “hornets” for their venomous character), moved to the locations of the neighbouring modern villages: “snakes” to Kačiče (kača – snake), and “hornets” to Rodik. So according to oral tradition, Rodik received not just part of the population of Ajdovščina as described above, but also part of those from Gabrova stran.

19 Jesus and St Peter are protagonists of yet another aetiological story concerning the four major caves in the village territory. They were throwing stones from the hill above Rodik and competing who can make a deeper cave. St Peter made the large Remeščica cave noted also in the Debela griža story above, while Jesus threw three stones and made the Fuk, Globoka and Cik caves: the latter was so deep that it opened passage all the way to hell. The interesting thing is that the three caves created by Jesus feature in other stories as inhabited by mythical beings: goblin in the Cik cave, goblin or alternatively dragon in the Globoka cave, while in the Fuk cave, witches and their male counterparts would gather in numbers and had orgies there, at one point involving a boy from the village. Like in the cases of the Debela griža and the Gabrova stran stories, there is nothing specifically Christian about them, except for the names of the protagonists: but they fit well the relative topoi of folk tradition.

20 As amply documented, Christian worship often took over older religious sites. In the nearby village of Lokev, the oral tradition has it that the small gothic church of Mary Help of the Christians was built over the ruins of a Roman temple, which would be part of the Roman site of Merišče there: we must be cautious though, this may well be some recent educated intervention: in their Sunday sermons, priests like Virgil Šček would, especially under fascism, regularly include references to local and national history. This (unsubstantiated) claim never made it to academic and school publication, so today, it is part of the (hi)story told by the locals. Churches built over archaeological sites, prehistoric or Roman, may fit such sequence of ritual places (e.g. the church of St Cross at Slope), and so do the churches in caves. Besides being reported in oral tradition as inhabited by mythical beings, the caves in the region are also documented...
as prehistoric (e.g. Mušja jama – Fly cave at Škocjan), or Roman ritual sites (e.g. the cave near Brestovica with the altar in Greek dedicated to Heracles, or the Mithraeum cave near Devin-Duino). Caves have traditionally been used for very much pagan fertility rites, and some are today places of Christian worship, whether in continuation of older ritual use or not (e.g. Sveta jama – Holy cave at Socerb/San Servolo, with Late prehistoric finds, reportedly hermit’s cell of Saint Servulus, then church).

The outstanding example, however, of ritual continuity, actually of Christian censure of an old ritual site, remains Jezero on the hill of Čuk just below Ajdovščina discussed above. The image of the supernatural power there controlling waters and weather comes to us distorted through a double prism, that of the folklore (the topos of Lintvern, the big snake with features of a basilisk) and the Christian interpretation (“the Devil that dwells therein”). Whether it reflects some divine power in some other religious system, Slavic or pre-Slavic is a matter of speculation and contextual consideration (vicinity to the Ajdovščina site, location in the midst of the Prehistoric and Roman cemetery there).

6. Mythical landscape: spatial matrix and mythourgy

The sites to which the extraordinary Rodik oral tradition presented here refers constitute a spatial matrix, a network of points in space charged with meanings beyond natural and rational, which make the totality of the village territory with all its anomalies and peculiarities intelligible and manageable through sets of related rules, caveats and taboos. The concept is compatible with the notion of “emplaced”, but intends to underline the interchangeability, volatility and creativity in the mythurgical process.

The stories told include elements of cosmology (this world, wonderland / heaven, hell) and the passage is controlled by powerful beings (wonderland —goblin of the Cik cave; heaven —goblin of the Globoka cave; passage to hell opened by Jesus by creating the Cik cave), and that can include a different passage of time (controlled by the goblin of the Cik cave). The cycle of life, fertility and initiation of young males at first passage to town is controlled by Baba. The weather, notably the tempests and lightning, and the undersurface waters are controlled by the Lintvern of Jezero.

In most stories told, the supernatural, mythical beings appear in interaction with the village people. The goblin of the Globoka cave counsels women in distress and if not successful, lures them into jumping into the cave in hope of passage to heaven. The goblin of the Cik cave takes best care of the village boy that fell into his idyllic wonderland and wants to keep him there: when he finally escapes and returns to the village, he realizes that generations had passed in the meantime. The Lintvern punishes villagers who curse their neighbours wishing them to be struck by lightning, by striking them by lightning, and threatens to destroy the whole village by releasing water from the Čuk hill. The fairies of the Šturki spring at Njivce punish the village boy for watching them bathe naked. The witches and their male counterparts involve a local boy in their orgies at Fuk cave. The White Snake, enchanted princess guarding the ruins of the castle at Tabor/Robidišče attacks a villager. Villagers hide in horror while Devil races on Šembilja around the village, with much noise and in fire. Unlike the mythical figures focused here, Devil is not confined to one place and can appear anywhere, and the same goes for werewolves and to some degree witches. So interaction
is the main reason why for these stories: mythical figures share the village territory with people and while they control spots invested with special powers and meanings there, their being confined to those spots gives an edge to people. We should note, however, that in the stories told, the contact and interaction with those figures often results in insanity of the people involved, possibly for the length of their life (e.g. the fairies of the Šturki spring at Njivice, the witches at the Fuk cave).

Settlement history and interaction/continuity with other populations has an important place in the Rodik oral tradition. Certainly, there is ample reference to settlement dynamics within the village, but importantly, abandoned (archaeological) settlement sites are involved in these narratives as well. According to our analysis, the site of Ajdovščina was a central place within the regional settlement system in Late Prehistory, continuing well into the Roman Imperial period, to be then reoccupied in Late Antiquity. Within its site catchment as reconstructed, there are secondary hillforts, which all figure in the stories (Kačiče, Gabrova stran, Debela griža, Sv. Križ in Slope, Bilen vrh). Only in the case of Bilen vrh, there is no reference to people, the site is the domain of the fairies (vile) and is taboo for the locals. In other cases, the inhabitants are either referred to as “different from us”, speaking a different language (Debela griža, also engaged in a different economy – fishing) or physically different (giant/small and dark Ajdovščina), or the sites are just put into the sequence of settlements from which people moved to the present villages. At Debela griža, there is no reference to the fate of the inhabitants after their village was destroyed and the lake drained. At Slope, the people originally living on the Sv. Križ hill(fort) were driven out by snakes and then settled in the plain. The inhabitants of Gabrova stran moved partly to Kačiče and partly to Rodik after the destruction by St Peter. The Ajdi of Ajdovščina abandoned the settlement after it was burnt down in war, and settled partly at Njivice, partly in Slope, and partly in Rodik. So if we combine these stories, the present villages got settlers from more than one abandoned site—Rodik from Gabrova stran and Ajdovščina, and Slope from Sv. Križ and Ajdovščina. Contact is explicitly noted only in the case of Rodik and Ajdovščina: the Ajdi would come down to the fields of Čelevo and Maganka nearest to them to steal crops, so if we were to take the stories at face value, the two settlements would have coexisted for some time before Ajdovščina was destroyed and the refugees settled at Rodik.

The stories about abandoned villages are an attempt to make sense of those special and mysterious places in the village territory that we know as archaeological sites there, and that in terms of the topoi of oral tradition (chthonic snakes chasing the inhabitants out, destruction as punishment for not observing traditional values and related rules such as hospitality, destruction by war and fire), thereby establishing a pseudo-historical timeline and proposing continuities between those sites and modern villages. There is more to it, however. For one thing, we should not overlook that the locals correctly identified all the known prehistoric hillforts as settlement sites, sometimes adding a castle as part of them: king’s castle in case of Gabrova stran, or count’s castle in case of Slope. Furthermore, parts of the stories witness to the locals’ acute observation of the sites and their context, and include related interpretation. In the case of Ajdovščina, observation of surface morphology permitted them to include the number of houses, while from surface scatters of slags they concluded that smithing was the main occupation of people there. Also, fossile fields on the east slopes are rightly indentified as such and named Štihterca (tilled land) and Nogradi (Vinyards), while such features on the ridge to the North-East are called Njivice (Small fields).
At Debela griža, the site is correctly identified as settlement (from surface cetamics?), but since there is no land suitable for agriculture around and the terrain is high carst, this called for some interpretation: so the story has it that there was a lake there and the villagers were fishermen, till it was drained by St Peter; the monumental cairns over what we now now are prehistoric fortifications are interpreted as accumulation of stones resulting from St Peter’s intervention: apparently, massive walls would be seen as unfunctional for such lowland fishermen’s site. On the other hand, the poor state of preservation of the Gabrova stran hillfort is accounted for in the story by the earthquake caused by St Peter in punishment. It is precisely the observational and contextual detail that transcends the topoi of oral tradition and justifies our understandig that description and interpretation of the sites in question is an integral part of the stories told. Would it be exaggerated to say that anonymous story tellers were also lay archaeologists? In yet another story, two villagers decided to level the barrow at Krvice known as Attila’s grave, to make the field easier to plough, and possibly to find the treasure there. What they found was some poorly preserved iron and five skeletons, which the local priest said were pagan and ordered to be re-burried deep at the spot. The story is a fair description of the excavation of a grave barrow, possibly Late Prehistoric. On another level it is about disproving the story of Attila’s grave.

Last but not least, there can be more than one story told about a single site, the stories may vary considerably between them, and the mythical figures involved can be different. The Globoka cave was inhabited by a counseling goblin or in another story by a dragon; in the Cik cave there was either the Yonderland controlled by a goblin, or the passage to hell opened by Jesus; Litvern is described either as a big snake or a basilisk; Šembilja can be the iron wagon driven by the Devil as in Rodik, it can be a woman figure driving with the Devil on the wagon, or just a woman figure driving on a wagon; Ajdi can be normal people, just different as in case of our Ajdovščina, or they can be giants as in many other parts of Slovenia. So, while the sites are fixed, there is quite some freedom in the choice of mythical figures, their attributes and related stories captured from the treasury of oral tradition. We would suggest this is a normal mythourgical procedure, where the story teller knows the spatial matrix and the meanings attributed to the sites within, knows a wide range of topoi of oral tradition he can use in his narrations, and then constructs the story to suit his audience observing the common knowledge among them. The variants of the story are not more or less “correct”, but rather reflect the creativity and rhetoric capacity of the storyteller.

Modern media have impacted the procedure drastically, and the publication of the Rodik fairy tales and stories, as well as the scholarly publication on them stand at the end of a centuries long mythurgical tradition.

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NOTES

1. Marchesetti (1903, 79); Bolta (1975, s.v. Rodik); Slapšak (1978; 1985; 1997); for spatial analysis Slapšak (1988); Slapšak (1995); Student Seminar (2001); for Roman cemetery Istenič (1987); for on-site survey Mušič, Slapšak & Perko (2000); Mušič (2001); for ceramic finds Istenič (1988); Perko (1997); for historical aspects Slapšak (1977; 2003).
2. Slapšak (1995); see also Slapšak (1997).
5. Hrobat Virloget (2007; 2010), and further works listed in the bibliography and quoted below in the text.
11. Peršolja (2000, 43 and following, 47 and following); Slapšak & Hrobat Virloget (2005a; 2005b); Hrobat Virgolet (2004), with further references.
16. Hrobat Virloget (2015b; 2015c), with further references.
24. In our previous publications, as well as in publications by Hrobat Virloget and Peršolja, the Globoka (Deep) cave is noted as Šlavrova jama (Šlaver cave) because our local informer, while locating the cave correctly, mistook its name. I owe this information to Katja Hrobat Virloget.
26. We are using the term mythourgy proposed by S. Slapšak because we believe the principles of story telling are basically the same as analysed by her on ancient material: Slapšak (2010; 2017); such principles have been extensively studied on oral epic poetry, most productively after the seminal study by A. Lord (1960) and M. Perry.
31. And we know that these observations were made by the locals and not some educated person from outside, because Matija Sila, the historian and priest in Rodik in mid-19th c. reported that he was informed about all these details when visiting the site with a local man.
33. For mythourgical process, see n. 25.
ABSTRACTS

The article discusses the rich oral tradition of the village of Rodik (Slovenia), notably on mythical figures such as Ajdi, Lintvern, Baba and goblins. The stories told are emplaced, together they represent the space matrix, a network of points in space charged with meanings beyond natural and rational, which make the totality of the village territory with all its anomalies and peculiarities intelligible and manageable through sets of related rules, caveats and taboos. The concept is compatible with the notion of “emplaced tradition”, but intends to underline the interchangeability, volatility and creativity in the mythourgical process. Not all of these spots are documented as archaeological sites, but all known archaeological sites in the village territory are accounted for in these stories.

INDEX

Keywords: oral tradition, archaeology, mythical landscape, emplaced tradition

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