

MIKOŁAJ JARMAKOWSKI

University of Gdańsk

Faculty of History, Institute of Anthropology

e-mail: mikotor@wp.pl

ORCID: 0000-0001-8652-0848

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The semantics and etymology of Proto-Slavic lexemes of sacredness and their continuation in Polish folk rituals*

Abstract. The article deals with some aspects of the problem of the participation of Iranian peoples in the process of formation of the Proto-Slavic cultural and linguistic community, which has been discussed for many years. By taking as a basis the methodology of semiotic study of language and culture in its diachronic aspects, an attempt was made to reconstruct the cultural contexts in which Proto-Slavic tradition incorporated, in the form of the words **bogъ* and **svęto* – elements of Scythian mythology. By juxtaposing historical, linguistic, and ethnographic materials, a corpus of several motifs (“mythologemes”) was reconstructed, which could have accompanied the processes of the so-called “Iranian inversion”, which are very well known for Slavic philology, but less for anthropological and mythological reconstructions.

Keywords: Proto-Slavs, etymology, Slavic mythology, Scythian mythology, folklore.

Foreword and methodological context

An anthropological reconstruction of past cultural processes and phenomena, especially in the sphere of their emic meanings, evokes numerous epistemological problems. In contrast to the classical field of ethnography and, therefore, anthropology based on knowledge taken directly from living people, researchers

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of historical cultures have few opportunities to verify their reconstructions. In this context, the question of the methods and eventual purview of a hermeneutic understanding of the past, especially “archaic” societies, and the reconstruction of the processes of change in their oral traditions that have taken place throughout history is a visible one. The so-called “archaeology of meanings” is made here for two lexemes, “god” and “sacred” (ps. **bogъ* and **svętъ*), both important in the nineteenth and twentieth century oral folk traditions. The main thesis of this article asserts that the etymological roots, processes of derivation, semantics, and pragmatic use of the researched lexemes can show their importance and meaning in cultural spheres other than language, e.g., mythology, worldview, and religion. This statement is based on the works of N.I. Tolstoy, V. Toporov and J. Bartmiński which till today are fundamental for Slavic ethnolinguistics (Bartmiński, 1986; Tolstoy, 2003; Toporov, 1989a). Similarly to them, Lévi-Strauss thought that the *bricolage* process through which myths are created is based on the structures and meanings given by natural language (Lévi-Straus, 1969, p. 34).

The words, myths, and equivalent rituals selected for the study are not accidental. Both the words **bogъ* and **svętъ* are considered to be the Proto-Slavic lexemes broadly influenced, in the sphere of semantics, by the Iranian languages, most likely by one of the Scythian dialects. Researchers used to talk in this context about the wide process of so-called “Iranian inversion” which took place among the Proto-Slavic peoples approximately 2500–2000 years ago and was fundamental for the separation of the Proto-Slavic dialects and tribes from the earlier Balto-Slavic group (Toporov, 1989, 1989a; Trubachov 2004, pp. 26–103; Gołąb, 1975; Jasiński, 2020). We assume that along with lexical derivation, a similar process must have taken place in sphere of “symbolical” ideas, practices, and beliefs that were associated with these words. Therefore, the main purpose of the study undertaken here is to reconstruct the cultural context in which the above lexemes were incorporated into the Proto-Slavic lexis.

First, a few words need to be mentioned about the relationship between language semantics and mythological worldview. As it was noted by the Polish researchers of this problem, namely J. Kmita and A.P. Kowalski, in “archaic” societies, deeply rooted in mythical ontology and a pre-literate reality that was not yet discovered as something external to the subject, all content that is understood today as “semantic” or “symbolical” was based not on convention but on experience and practicalities (Kowalski, 1999; Kmita et al., 2001). In other words, it can be said that “symbolism” was not an object of mental discourse based on metaphors but rather on “ontological” (i.e., magical) perpetration founded on the metonymies. The meanings present in certain lexemes were mystically evoking certain divine powers. Both in the anthropological reconstructions of the Proto-Indo-European or Proto-Slavic cultures as well as in the later ethnographic materials, the strong faith of our ancestors in the “causative power of the word” is visible (Kowalski, 1999). Based on the example of the folk symbolism researched below, the golden plough was not a “symbol” of the God-Plougher, but it was mystically “revealing” God through the act of ploughing which was felt in the folk tradition as a sacred one.

The Proto-Slavic *svęťǫ “sacred” – etymology and semantics

As it was stated in the Foreword, we will start from the linguistic, etymological and semantical research of two lexemes basic to the study of mythological images.

The Polish word *święty* “sacred” is derived, according to W. Boryś from the Proto-Slavic *svęťǫ (Boryś 2008, p. 623). This lexeme is based in turn on the pie. *k’uēn-to- < pie. *k’uēn- – “to celebrate” – from which were also created and used by peoples living around the Slavdom—lith. *šventas*, “sacred” opers. *swenta* “sacred”, av. *spənta* “sacred”, latv. *svinet* “to celebrate”, and av. *spanah* “sacredness”. R. Derksen quoted the old form bsl. *šwentos, common for both Slavic and Baltic peoples (Derksen, 2008, p. 476). M. Vasmer drew attention to skt. *çvāntās* “prosperous”, showing, like many other researchers, the core of understanding of sacredness in the context of fertility, which was common for the Indo-European people (Vasmer, 1987, p. 585). Very basic in Slavic languages is the etymological and semantic connection between the words for sacred (pl. *święty*), world (pl. *świat*) and light (pl. *światło*): ps. *svęťǫ “sacred” and ps. *světǫ “world, light” < bsl. *šwoit < pie. *k’uoit-o- > skt. *śvetá* “white, bright” (Derksen, 2008, pp. 466–467); ps. *světǫ “world” ~ skt. *çvētās* “bright, white”, av. *spaēta* “bright, white”, lith. *šviesti*, *šviečia* “to shine”, opers. *spiŷra* “to shine”; pie. *k’uoit-o- > ps. *květǫ “flower understood as something white and bright with fertility power” (Boryś 2008, p. 278; Vasmer, 1987, pp. 575–576; Toporov, 1995, pp. 470–479). A.P. Kowalski links this etymological relation and semantic proximity with, known from oral traditions, the myth of diving, in which the world was drawn from the dark sea as sand and sown by God like seed under a luminous sky (Kowalski, 2011, p. 16). The most advanced linguistic explication of ps. *svęťǫ was made by V.N. Toporov. Deriving this lexeme from bsl. *svent- < pie. *k’uēn-to- he extensively researched the ways of development of words derived from Proto-Indo-European in other languages (Toporov, 1989). Lexemes built on the foundations of pie. *k’uēn exist in Sanskrit, among others in the context of Rig Vedic hymns I.167.9, VI.19.2, X.61.21: skt. *śū-*(*śvā-*) “to swell, to inflate, to grow, increase in size”, skt. *śávas* “power”; *śāva* “young animal”, *śavira* “powerful”, *śuná* “growing, blooming, happiness”, skt. **śvam-* “to calm” > skt. *śvānta* “helpful, friendly”. Iranian vocabulary, very important in the study of Slavic traditions because of the long-duration of the Iranian (Scythian) influence of Proto-Slavs, *inter alia* contains: av. *spənta* “sacred *spəništa*, “more sacred”, *spəntōtəma* “the most sacred” (this adjective refers both to gods and humans): *Spəntā*, *Spəntō Mainyuš* “sacred, sacred man”, av. *spanah* “sacredness, good power”, av. *spanahvant* “sacred”; further development: av. *spənta* “sacred” > opers. *sfand* > *fsand* “sacred” (Toporov, 1989, pp. 12–28). Iranian lexemes show the relation between the idea of sacredness and biological, mystically understood, fertility, which is typical for many branches of the Indo-European traditions: av. *spā(y)-* “to swell, to grow, to increase”, av. *spayaθra* “flowering, flourishing, prosperity, happiness”. Divine, sacred powers were invoked and aroused by the ontically causative word: av. *spənta* “sacred” > opers. *sfand* > *fsand* “sacred” ~ oset. *wac* “word, news, announcement”, oset. *horz* “good news”, oset. **fsəndwac* “sacred word”. Ossetian lexemes are derived from av. *vāk*, *vaćah* ~ skt. *vāk/vāc*, *vācas* “sacred ritual speech” > skt. *Vać*, *Vacaspati*

“gods of the sacred word” (Toporov, 1989, pp. 12–19). Taking all these language data into account and comparing them with the oldest known uses of derivatives based on ps. **svetъ*, Toporov reconstructed a hypothetical semantic field of this lexeme, active and productive (in the words of anthropology: present in the oral tradition and worldview). This semantic field included, among others, such collocations as: **svetъjb kolsъ* – “sacred rye ear”, **svetъjbo žito* – “sacred rye”, **svetъjb skotъ* – “sacred cattle”, **svetaja korva* – “sacred cow”, **svetъjb rodъ* – “sacred family”, **svetъjbo polje* – “sacred field”, **svetъjb čelověkъ* – “sacred man”, **svetъje slovo* – “sacred word”, **svetъje dѣlo* – “sacred work”, **svetъjb životъ* – “sacred life”, **svetъjb bogъ* – “sacred god” (Toporov, 1989, pp. 36–37).

The Indo-European lexemes listed above show the historical background of the formation of the Proto-Slavic concept of sacredness and the contexts of its syntactical and pragmatical functioning in the form of the collocations mentioned above. Particular attention should be paid to the Iranian lexemes, which could be the source of Proto-Slavic vocabulary or parts of its semantics. Considering all the above materials, the following reconstruction of the semantic relations of the Proto-Slavic lexeme **svetъ* “sacred” may be proposed: “prosperous, celebration, light, morning, world, to swell, to grow, to increase, power, blooming, happiness, helpful”. The myths or rituals historically connected with the word **svetъ* should therefore be partly related to the above-mentioned phenomena.

Proto-Slavic **bogъ* “god” – etymology and semantics

From the research of folklorists, we know that, both in the old Slavic beliefs (in a polytheistic or henotheistic context) and in the later syncretic folk culture, the main “owner” of the power of sacredness (ps. **svetъ*, pl. *święty*) was God. He was ritually, that is to say through rituals, imparting to people a sacredness that manifested itself as nurture, fertilizing crops, feeding cattle, and sustaining people (Bartmiński, 1986; Niewiadomski, 1999, pp. 47–107). This participation in birthing power was called *dola* by all Slavs and, according to Kazimierz Moszyński and Natalia Hobzey, among villagers, this word was sometimes used interchangeably with the derivatives of ps. **bogъ* (Moszyński, 1934, p. 71–715; Hobzey, 2002, pp. 105–107). Thus, it can be concluded that God, in the folk understanding rooted in Slavic beliefs, is the provider of the “possibility” of growth and multiplication of life, and he himself manifests in the exuberance and fertility of life. The above statement, based mostly on the oral texts collected by nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographers, is confirmed in the linguistic material. According to lexicologists, the lexeme **bogъ* had in the Proto-Slavic language two meanings: 1. “god, deity” and 2. “happiness, abundance, prosperity” (Sławski, 1974, pp. 296–297). There are two main theories regarding the origins of the Proto-Slavic word “god” in its personal meaning.

The first assumes the etymological continuation of pie. **bheH₂g-* > pie. *b^heg-* “to share, part of something, to participate, to divide” > ps. **bogъ* “happiness, abundance, prosperity (*dola*)” with early Proto-Slavic semantical innovation that transferred the

name of the action (and its effect – wealth, success, etc.) to the definition of god: ps. **bogǫ* < earlier form **bǎgiŭ*. It is a common statement that the source of innovation was the religious influence of the Iranian tribes (Rix, 2001, p. 65; Łuczyński, 2020, p. 104; Boryś, 2008, p. 36).

The second theory indicates the direct Iranian etymology from old or middle Iranian *bay* “god, deity, lord” which was formed in VI–V c. BC on the basis of olir. *bag-* “to give and receive gifts” (Derksen, 2008, p. 50; Zimmer, 1984).

The scarce information concerning the Scythian languages and the lack of written sources do not allow us to settle this matter. However, the theory of the “inversion”, which assumes a major role of the Iranian tribes (Scythians) in the formation of the Proto-Slavic social and religious institutions, is confirmed by the common Slavic and Iranian change in earlier religious terminology. Both the Iranians and the Slavs depreciated the older Indo-European name for “god” and replaced it with a name motivated by the same semantics of “giving and receiving gifts”. Earlier term for god, derived from pie. **Déiγos* “Father-God of the Sky; the term for god”, was changed by the Iranians in its semantics into known from Avesta *daēuua* and *daēva* which mean “demon; wild giant”. A similar change is visible in the Proto-Slavic language: **divǫ* “astonishment, miracle; something wild; evil spirit, demon” (Derksen, 2008, pp. 108–109). The primary semantic meaning “god” was preserved by the Balts, who have not been influenced and inverted by the Iranian peoples: lith. *dievas*, latv. *dievs*, oprus. *deywis/deiws/deiwas* all with the meaning “God of Sky; god” (Derksen, 2015, p. 128).

Derksen traces ps. **bōgǫ* “god” (related with ps. **bogātǫ* “rich”) from LAv. *baya* “lord, god” ~ skt. *bhāga* “prosperity, good fortune” (Derksen, 2008, p. 50). Similarly, Vasmer: ukr. *бог*, bulg. *бог*, sr. *бог* sl. *bōg*, cz. *bůh*, pl. *bóg* < ps. **bogǫ* ~ av. *baṣšaiti* “participates” ~ opers. *baga-*, olir. *baya* “lord, god” ~ skt. *bhāgas* “endowment, lord, name of Savitar and second of Aditias” ~ skt. *bhājati*, *bhājatē* “gives, divides”. The basic semantic form of these lexemes pointed out by Vasmer is “endowment, giving”; it can be compared with skt. *bhāgas* “endowment, happiness”, av. *baya* “fate, participation” (Vasmer, 1986, pp. 181–182). Franciszek Sławski paid attention to ps. **bogǫ* “god” ~ skt. *bhāga-* “the one who allocates, giver, lord, name of some gods” ~ opers. *baga-*, av. *baya* “lord, god” and also noted that the Iranian influence theory can also explain the similarity between ps. **svētǫ* “sacred” and av. *spənta* “sacred” (Sławski, 1974, p. 296). Trubachov was also a proponent, but moderate, of the Iranian influence theory and was pointing to many areas that still require thorough research – e.g., problem of regional and temporal contexts of Iranian influences (Trubachov, 1975, pp. 161–162; Trubachov, 2004, pp. 26–103). On the other hand, the theory of the wide influence of the Iranians on the Proto-Slavs was proposed, through the study of language and folklore, by V. Toporow (Toporov 1989, 1989a).

According to the opinions of the above-mentioned researchers, the following semantic reconstruction of the lexeme can be proposed **bogǫ*: “one who gives participation in Power-Force (**bogǫ*), talks, gives signs, is happy, determines *dola* (“participation, destiny, success”), sometimes is identical with it, manifests himself in grains and growing, spreading of life”. In all Slavic languages, there is a deeply

rooted relation between cereals and god (its giver): ps. *svbožje* “cereal” (pl. *zbože*) means directly “what is good from God”. This indicates a deeply agrarian way of understanding the presence of God in the world among the Proto-Slavs. According to the materials of the XIX and XX century syncretic folklore, God is the one who created the grains and ensures the growth of grains in the fields (Niewiadomski, 1999, pp. 47–54). The Proto-Slavic lexis reconstructed by philologists shows, most likely motivated by the Iranian influence, the image of God as the disposer of wealth, herds fertility, and the power for plants to grow. This power, associated with the concept of the sacred (ps. **svętŏ*), is related to the epiphany of light, has a cosmogonic character, and is the basis of that which is created – the **světŏ* (world). This reconstructed by philological research mythopoetical image of God (ps. **bogŏ*) and his powers was shaped, due to the “inversion” theory, within the centuries of relationship between the Proto-Slavs and the Iranians.

Such a deep inversion made by Proto-Slavs in the sphere of religious lexis must have had other aspects. In other words, changes made in sphere language had to be connected with similar transfers of ideas, myths, and practices through which relevant semantics might have been realized in linguistic pragmatics. Are there, in the corpus of the oldest sources documenting Slavic culture, any materials that could be seen as traces of Iranian inversion?

Scythian and Slavic myths about the “golden gifts of sky”

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote down the following genealogical myth of the ancient Scythians, this Iranian tribe that, according to the “Iranian inversion theory”, influenced Proto-Slavic tribes:

The first man born in this land, when it was still uninhabited, was named Targitaos. They say that the parents of this Targitaos were Zeus and the daughter of the River Borysthenes, though that does not sound credible to me. Nevertheless, that is their claim. From such stock, then, came Targitaos, and to him were born three sons: Lipoxais, Arpoxais, and the youngest of them, Coloxais. While they reigned, certain objects made of gold fell from the sky: they were a plough, a yoke, a battle-axe, and a cup. When these objects came to the rest on Scythian ground, there were seen first by the eldest son, who, wanting to take them up, approached where they lay. But as he came near them, the gold caught on fire, so he left them there... but when the third and youngest son approached, the fire stopped burning and went out, so he carried the gold home, and the elder brothers reacted to this event by agreeing to surrender the entire kingdom to the youngest. (Herodotus, 2009, pp. 283–284)

From Persian and parallel Vedic sources, we know about the mythical blacksmith Kavi who was the progenitor of the Keyanid royal family, and himself was associated, according to Dumézil, with the mythological god-ruler-sorcerer (Kowalski, 1999, p. 54). Similarly to other Indo-European genealogical myths, the three brothers, who were sons of Targitaos, were ancestors of the three tribes of Scythian people. Due to the research of D. S. Raevskiy, mytheme of the three brothers was associated with

the tripartite social structure (priests, warriors and farmers) which was common in the Indo-European world, especially among Indo-Iranians. This socio-functional division was related to cosmology: priests represented the starry sky, warriors represented airspace, and farmers were tied to the earth. The golden artifacts, according to this researcher, were also the signs of the social division. The golden cup signified priesthood, the battle axe, warriorhood, and the golden plough, farmerhood. Due to a lack of space, we will not analyse here the equivalents of the above myth that are present in Iranian traditions. Let's only point out that the mytheme has parallels both in Šāhnāme and in Zoroastrian texts; it is present in Ossetian epic poetry and is perceived as a part of pan-Iranian mythological motifs (Raevskiy, 1993, pp. 24–57). Mythemes of “three brothers” and “gifts of the sky” were known in other Indo-European traditions, but only among Iranians did they develop specific variants related to “golden artifacts” (Łuczyński, 2022, pp. 215–222, 326–345).

A pre-Christian Slavic counterpart story as in the above was written down in the early-Rus interpolation (X–XIII c. AC.) to Malala's chronicle:

During the reign of this Hephaestus [...], at the time of his reign, tongs fell from the sky, and he began to forge weapons, as before that they beat each other with sticks and stones. This Hephaestus established the law that women should marry a single man and behave in a chaste way, and he ordered that those who committed adultery should be punished. For this reason, he was also called the god Svarogъ... And after him reigned his son, called Sun, who was known as Daždbog [*Dažbboгъ*]. (Álvarez-Pedrosa, 2021, p. 295)

Considering other sources, namely the etymology of the names of these deities and comparative sources (mainly Baltic and folk), it is assumed that Svarogъ was a blacksmith, the god of the high sky, considered by Slavs as a living fire, and Dažbboгъ his son, the divine sun (Łuczyński, 2022, pp. 61–62). The mythological motif of gifts falling from the sky was preserved in later oral tradition and then written down in the XIX century not only among eastern Slavs (Łuczyński, 2022, pp. 219–222) but also in Poland: “When the Earth was empty, golden tolls fell from the sky: a plough, a yoke, an axe, and a pitcher. The youngest of all people took them and became a king...” (Piątkowska, 1898, p. 415). Another similar tale talks about a young boy who was hailed as a king when the crown fell on his head from the sky (Derwich & Cetwiński, 1987, p. 165).

The connection of divinity and sacredness with blacksmithing among the Western Slavs of the early medieval era is indicated by the numerous forges founded in pre-Christian cult places (Dulinicz, 2000, p. 94; Cieślík, 2010). We do not know what exact function in the sphere of religious imaginations of West Slavic peoples they had, but what is evident is the relation between rituals performed in these cult places and the phenomenon of the blacksmith's work, and the symbolism of gold seems to reinforce and extend this blacksmith symbolism. The motif of the golden divine gift is also present in XIX and XX century Polish folk ritual winter songs related to the custom of “winter carolling”, an example and a description of which are below:

Our dear host, our dear host;
We will tell you something;

That on your field, that on your field;
 The golden plough is ploughing...;
 There will be sheaf on a sheaf;
 And we will go around, we will go around;
 Between sheafs, between sheafs;
 Like the Moon between the stars;
 Like the Moon between the stars. (Bartmiński, 1986a, pp. 89–90)

Oh, look out, look out, Mister host;
 We will tell you something;
 And we will make you happy with it;
 That on your ploughland;
 The golden plough stands;
 And by this golden plough;
 A pair of grey horses;
 And on these horses;
 The golden the saddle is. (Bartmiński ed., 2003, p. 233)

This is quite a popular motif and can be found in many other, not only Polish, “carolling” songs and it used to be regarded by folklorists as the one of the most archaic (Niewiadomski, 1999, pp. 56–57). Let us therefore look more broadly at the rites in which these songs were sung.

The ritual of “winter carolling” (pl. *kolędownie zimowe*) as a possible pragmatic continuation of the above semantic field

Traditions of annual feasts and celebrations known mostly from XIX and XX c. ethnographic sources have been studied by many scholars for many years. The analyses presented below are based on the works of J. Bartmiński, who outlined the christianization of old oral Slavic traditions and the parallel process of a “folklorization” of Christian religion, which was introduced into, and may be isolated in many aspects of, village culture from the medieval era. This „double” process of christianization and folklorization also took place in the context of the rite studied here, which, despite its pre-Christian origins, has got some Christian elements. Both the research of J. Bartmiński and historical studies made on the development of the parish network and written sources, mostly from the XII–XVI c., show that cultural and religious change among Polish villagers was slow (Bylina, 2002). Therefore, scientific discourse using 19th and 20th century ethnographic materials in the reconstruction of pre-Christian beliefs is acceptable. Of course, this is with full awareness of the multifaceted character of the christianization and folklorization processes that finally constructed the XIX and XX c. „syncretic” folk tradition as an independent and distinct phenomenon (Tolstoy, 2003).

The first mentions of the ritual of so-called „winter carolling” come from the XIII century. Pope Innocentius III wrote a letter that was sent to European bishops,

including the Archbishop of Gniezno, Henryk Kietlicz, in which he reprimanded the folk practices of masking and dancing to celebrate the new year; less educated clergy participated in them. A similar letter was sent by pope Gregor IX in which he also mentioned some folk traditions of the new year's celebration (Wojciechowska, 2000, p. 38). These letters are good examples of the process of folklorization that took place towards Christian officials, especially in the medieval era. Analogical relations were written down by the Kievan Rus clergy concerning mostly rural traditions of processions in animal masks. Another source from Poland comes from the year 1326, from the document *Statuty uniejowskie*, in which we can find information that people who were dancing and organizing feasts in the time of New Year's Eve and Christmas (*Gody* in the old Polish language, coming from *godzenie* – “concluding a peace, arrangement, alliance, relationship”) were subject to ecclesiastical excommunication (Wojciechowska, 2000, pp. 39–40). At the turn of the XIV and XV centuries, we hear about this custom from a Czech priest, Jan from Holešov, who wrote about the processions of singers, the worshipping and feeding of deities and ancestors' spirits, and many other practices still alive in the XIX and XX c. folk traditions; analogical descriptions come from the XV c. Polish documents *Cyzojan płocki* and *Ludycje wiesne* and many others at a later date (Wojciechowska, 2000, p. 35–40).

Folklorists agree that the traditions of winter “carolling” rituals, based on the tramping of houses by singers wearing masks and costumes with animals accompanying them, are a pan-Slavic custom (Vinogradova, 1982, pp. 5–36). Ludmila Vinogradova and Petru Caraman reconstructed, by researching a huge number of ethnographic materials, mostly from East and West Slavdom, the main core of the ritual of “winter carolling”. In the opinion of Vinogradova, the main structure of this ritual (as it can be seen from its songs) was based on the relationship between two spheres of reality understood by villagers in mythological categories (Vinogradova, 1982, pp. 135–140, 231–232). The first sphere is the household (pl. *obejście*, which directly means “something that people used to walk around in a circle”), which represents the central part of the universe described in folk songs mostly as a tree. The second sphere is that from which the singers are coming. An indefinite and distant place, located beyond the bridge, beyond the forest, the distant and of ancestors. The image of this “otherworld” is sometimes mixed in the songs with other mythopoetical spheres, for from the distant land ancestors can come, but also saints, the Sun, Moon and Rain, and even God Himself. Therefore, the main element of the “winter carolling” ritual is a reversible relation established at the threshold between the households (family) and the singers, who are representing divine beings or, speaking in a language closer to folk ideas, are “mediating” with them. The singers demand from the households *kolęda* i.e., a gift of the so-called *szczodroki*, round-shaped bread, specially baked for this occasion. They sing, however, that these *szczodroki* are not for them but for God or the saints, who will come down to the field or to the cowshed of the household and “do well” (Vinogradova, 1982, pp. 136–149). In this context, the Polish folk name for this period and the rituals, *Gody*, *Godnie święto*, is clearly understandable: it is a „peaceful relation” (pl. *ugoda*, *zgoda*) between people and divine beings, which is confirmed by the gift (*szczudrok*) and (from the singers)

the word of songs-blessings bringing God, saints, celestial deities, and their sacred powers. P. Caraman mentioned in turn, as the oldest of such rituals, the rituals of *polaženik* (the visiting of houses by children screaming wishes, perhaps related to the reborn sun) and *vlačiti* (men “tramping” around the village with a plough) (Caraman, 1933, pp. 527–537, 554–563).

The influence of God and the saints (pl. święci) on household fertility is a motif of many songs of the carollers:

New year, generous year;
 New evening, generous evening;
 Come out, come out, host;
 God is spreading (pl. “*Bóg się szerzy*”) in your yard;

Your cows gave birth;
 Three hundred bulls born;
 And those bulls – white legs;
 White legs, golden horns... (Bartmiński, 1986a, pp. 85–86)

For the new year, give birth, God, to the rye;
 To the rye, wheat, peas and lentils. (Bartmiński, 2003, p. 239)

And give here, oh God, all sorts of grain;
 blades of brass, and ears of gold... (Bartmiński 2003, p. 236)

Conclusions

The main question posed by this article, outlined in the Foreword, concerned the cultural contexts of the “Iranian inversion” process. We were looking for the mythological content that, in parallel with Iranian vocabulary, was adopted by the Proto-Slavs in the era of “inversion” (i.e., approximately between 2500–2000 years ago). The assumption of the necessity of such transfer was deduced from the statements of anthropologists who, through studying the rules of language use among archaic peoples, recognized its magic-evoking function as fundamental. Thus, we conclude that the words **bogъ* and **svętъ*, influenced by the Iranian traditions, must have been associated with certain mythological meanings, and as such, the powers related to them. Through etymological and semantic analyses, basic phenomena related to the above terms were reconstructed. These were, most of all, the growing of cereals and all phenomena related to the expression of life and the power to give birth (cf. phrase *Bóg się szerzy*), as well as brightness and light (associated with shining gold) as primary marks of sacredness. Considering the fact that the Proto-Slavic words **svět* “world”, **svętъ* “sacred”, and **svět* “light” have, not coincidentally, a close semantic structure and a convergent etymological origin, we can assume that in Proto-Slavic cosmology the world was understood as a space defined by being illuminated and ending where light ends. Therefore, the God (Gods) was a being that, through shi-

ning, was making the Earth sacred. It is also necessary to mention the visible image of God as a Donator of Wealth (pl. *bogactwo* < ps. **bogatŕ* “one who has many gifts, who is happy”) with similar colocation in av. *bayō.baxta* “given as a part; distributed by gods”, pahl. *farn-bay* „sacred fire, distributor of farn power” (Zimmer, 1984). As we know from XIX c. ethnographic descriptions, peasants understood God as being in some way identical or closely related to *dola* the power of wealth and longevity given by God, and its connection to the fate of every person (Niewiadomski, 1999, pp. 47–80, 261–267).

The above lexicon, built on the Iranian fundamentals, shows some basic functions, and features that God (Gods) had in Proto-Slavic beliefs. Therefore, we come to the question of the presence in the oral tradition of „texts”, through which the above meanings were transmitted and maintained as living and semantically coherent. Having in mind the semiotic theory of culture, note that lexemes studied here are part of that same sphere of culture, which was defined by J. Lotman as “the core of the semiosphere” (Łotman, 2008, p. 35). It is a set of the most constitutive and enduring concepts in culture that, at the level of structures and meanings, are characterized by a long duration in time. Conclusions presented here, on the one hand, indicate the importance of “Iranian inversion” among Proto-Slavs and on the other, allow us to look for traces of this inversion in relatively late materials, namely in XIX and XX century “syncretic” folklore. Taking as a basis **svetŕ bogŕ*, a collocation with partly semantic roots in Iranian tradition (previously analyzed above), we can find a set of mythological and ritual motifs that originated from Scythians and being visible through the ages, permanently penetrated Slavic oral tradition. The diachronic continuation of these motifs is presented below:

a) V century BC, the Scythian myth of origins written down by Herodotus: Three sons of Targitaus, who was the first man who ever lived in Scythian land, are gifted by the sky with golden implements: a plough, a yoke, a battle axe, and a drinking cup (Herodotus, 2009, pp. 283–284).

b) X–XIII c. AC.: Early Rus’ interpolation into Ioannes Malala “Chronography”: During the role of pagan deity Svarogŕ people were given with blacksmith’s tongs that fell from the sky... “and since then they have begun to forge weapons, as before that they beat each other with sticks and stones. This Hephaestus [Svarogŕ] established the law that women should marry a single man and behave in a chaste way, and he ordered that those who committed adultery should be punished” (Álvarez-Pedrosa, 2021, p. 295). Chronologically convergent with the above relation are archaeological finds of the forges located in the pre-Christian cult places, which archaeologists associate with the sanctity of the function of the blacksmiths among the Slavs (Dulinicz, 2000, p. 94; Cieřlik, 2010).

c) For XIX and XX c. “syncretic” folk traditions of West and East Slavs, we have several sources confirming the persistence of the above mythological motifs. Apart from the tales quoted above, we can point to the popular Ukrainian folk tradition mytheme of “Kuzma and Damian” (or “Kuzmodemjan”, ukr. *Кузьма-Дем’ян*). According to folk mythology, these two Christian saints had been walking through the earth and teaching people how to farm; they had created the plough and gave

it to the people. By ploughing the earth with a dragon that they had defeated and harnessed to the plough, they created the so-called Serpent's Wall, an earthen and wooden defensive rampart from antiquity or the early Middle Ages (ukr. *Змієві вали*). This motif is understood by researchers as a trace of the old-Slavic cosmogony, once based on the mytheme of the defeat of a dragon by a Thundergod (Ivanow & Toporow, 1974, p. 173). As a context, we should also indicate the huge number of stories in Slavic folklore that concern such motifs as God as a ploughman, a sower, a teacher of agriculture, and a distributor of goods (Niewiadomski, 1999).

d) From the lecture about the relation between myth and ritual, we have learned that every mythical story was understood in "archaic" societies as a living and practiced pattern of life activities (Eliade 1998). Such ritual "actualizations" of mythemes presented above should also be present in the traditions studied here. Focusing on two basic collocations: God as a donator and God as a plougher, let's remind ourselves of the motif of „God is spreading” (pl. *Bóg się szerzy* < ps. **Bogъ širitъ sę*) which is documented in winter ritual songs of kolędownie. We have pointed out the related themes in which God causes the crops to grow and the livestock to multiply. As for the "golden plough", despite the examples of songs and rituals of **vlačiti* which were mentioned above, let's mention that it was known to the eastern and western Slavs in the rituals of "ploughing the borders of the village". This ritual was practiced for protective purposes; it was believed that the act of ploughing the village borders would protect against the spreading plague (Moszyński, 1934, p. 200). The above examples indicate a very likely set of mythological and ritual motifs and practices that, together with the Iranian linguistic influence, shaped the essential elements of the Slavic spiritual culture.

Language abbreviations

av. – Avestan; bsl. – Proto-Balto-Slavic; bulg. – Bulgarian; cz. – Czech; latv. – Latvian; LAv. – Late Avestan; lith. – Lithuanian; olir. – Old Iranian; opers. – Old Persian; oset. – Ossetian; pie. – Proto-Indo-European; pl. – Polish; ps. – Proto-Slavic; skt. – Sanskrit; sl. – Slovene; sr. – Serbian; ukr. – Ukrainian.

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