

## INTERVIEW WITH MONIKA KROPEJ TELBAN AND KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET, EDITORS OF *STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA*, AFTER TWO DECADES OF THE JOURNAL

*Interviewer Mare Kõiva*

### **What motivated you to establish *Studia mythologica Slavica*?**

The initiative came from our colleague Prof. Dr. Nikolai Mikhailov, who was one of the most distinguished philologists and scholars in the field of historical and comparative linguistics, with an exceptional aptitude for languages. He was inspired by the Russian school of mythosemiotic studies promoted by Vladimir N. Toporov and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov. After finishing his studies in Moscow and research in Lithuania, he was employed by the University of Pisa. He contacted us and propounded to publish an anthology of articles on Slovene mythology and folklore in the book series under the heading *Studi Slavi*. At that time mythosemiotic studies were at their summit: philologists, folklorists, and archaeologists were making new discoveries which proved that Slavic mythopoetic traditions were rich and needed to be researched more thoroughly. It was time to overcome the scepticism of the scientific positivism and the enthusiasm of national revival. So after a long period of standstill in mythological research it became important again.

**Monika Kropelj Telban:** At the time when we first met in Ljubljana in 1995, we already agreed that it was time to start publishing a journal which would be dedicated to Balto-Slavic mythology and would at the same time present also mythopoetic tradition and mythosemiotic studies of other nations and countries. We decided that the journal had to be interdisciplinary and plurilinguistic. An important fact is also that the Publishing House of the Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) was well disposed to the idea to support the establishment of this journal. So the first issue came out already in 1998, edited by N. Mikhailov and me, with the help of Vlado Nartnik and Andrej Pleterski, who were co-editors of the journal. It was published under the supervision of the ZRC SAZU and the University of Pisa. Later on we made a coediting contract with the University of Udine since Nikolai Mikhailov became professor of Slavic languages there.

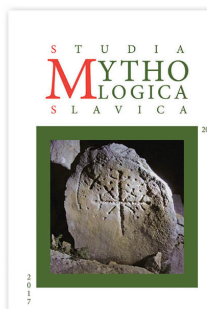
STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA

In the course of the last two decades since the journal *Studia mythologica Slavica* was first published, there have been many changes in the fields of methodology and research focus of the disciplines which deal with folk belief, mythology and intangible heritage, such as anthropology, ethnology, folklore, history, archaeology, linguistics, and literary studies. Scholarly publications that are a product of interdisciplinary approaches, which go beyond the insight and methodology of a single discipline, are rare, and greatly extend cognitive horizons.

Although the journal was created in the desire to establish rapport between the previously unconnected scholarly research on Slavic mythological traditions, which was in full momentum due to new

methodological discoveries, twenty years later its original ambitions and aims have not only been fulfilled but also exceeded. The term 'Slavica' originally marked the journal's provenience, nowadays we strive to bring closer to our readers the culture and traditions of nations, or peoples, from the entire European continent and beyond.

The present terminological incompleteness of the concept of mythology may, on one hand, encourage a sceptical view of these themes, but on the other it allows for a broader concept of this journal since studies of contemporary myths, beliefs, cultural phenomena, and life practices are becoming increasingly relevant. We wish to draw additional attention to them and encourage these studies even more than before.



Published by the Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Editors in Chief:  
Monika Kropf Telban and Katja Hrobat Virgolet;  
monika@zrc-sazu.si; katja.hrobat@th.upr.si

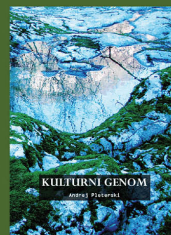
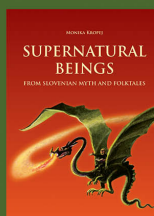
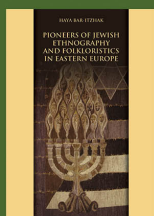
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DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE,  
COMUNICAZIONE, FORMAZIONE E SOCIETÀ, UDINE, ITALIA



The accompanying book series: *Studia mythologica Slavica – Supplementa* has been designed for monographic studies, with a focus on contemporary and past belief traditions, customs, linguistics, and cultural or historic phenomena.

### Can you give us a brief summary of this series?

During these twenty years of editing *Studia mythologica Slavica* we have undergone many changes that have occurred in this field of research. At first we were oriented more towards the reconstructions of Balto-Slavic mythology and towards semiotic interpretations of mythopoetic traditions. It was the time when two main streams of research into Balto-Slavic mythology were leading – one was the already mentioned mythosemiotic studies promoted by Vladimir N. Toporov and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov, who reconstructed the primary Balto-Slavic myth (Perun – Veles – Mokosh) that was at the time followed by many researchers – among them also Radoslav Katičić and Vitomir Belaj. The other was oriented towards archaeo-ethnological studies of cultural or mythical landscape with the reconstruction of locations of the cult sites of the three main gods (and also other types of mythical landscapes). At the same time studies of comparative and cognitive mythology as well as current folkloristic, ethnological, literary, and historical studies were regularly published in our journal.

Many famous researchers published their articles in *Studia mythologica Slavica*, among them Vladimir N. Toporov, Svetlana Tolstaia, Niko Kuret, Michał Łuczynski, Emily Lyle, Haya Bar-Itzhak, and others. The merit for this goes also to Nikolai Mikhailov and to the members of the editorial board, who had good connections not only in Moscow but also in other European countries. Later on the journal became well renowned so that even after the unexpected and too early death of Nikolai Mikhailov in 2010 many prominent authors published their articles in *Studia mythologica Slavica*. We are also indebted to Roberto Dapit who has since then represented the University of Udine, and to the later co-editor Andrej Pleterski.

### **Slavic mythology or also general mythology?**

*Studia mythologica Slavica* was already at its very start dedicated not only to Slavic mythology but also to the mythology of other peoples and regions – at first mostly from the comparative point of view, but later on also to explore other mythologies, both European and non-European. During the twenty years, since the first issue of *Studia mythologica Slavica* was published, a great number of authors from all parts of the world have contributed with their findings (see Bibliography *Studia mythologica Slavica*, Vol. 10 and 20).

Actually we are thinking about changing the name of our journal into *Studia mythologica*. In this way the title would clarify the aim of the journal to publish studies into different mythopoetic traditions. We have even thought of expanding the title to embrace folklore studies (*et folklorica*) to make it clear that also studies of traditional and contemporary folklore can be published in it, but for now we have decided to retain only the word *mythologica* as the journal is already well renowned under this title. Currently it is one of the rare journals dedicated to mythopoetic traditions, and not only to folklore.

### **Other areas?**

The study of myth is a very complex field and therefore we are determined that *Studia mythologica Slavica* is a multidisciplinary journal. Ethnolinguistics, archaeology, folkloristics, and anthropology are fundamental; other domains are included according to the topics of the articles.

Actually one of the great advantages of our journal is its interdisciplinary concept. Scholarly publications that are a product of interdisciplinary approaches going beyond the insight and methodology of a single discipline are rare, and significantly extend cognitive horizons.

### **Are you publishing also other forms of mythology?**

Yes, we include everything in the area of folklore, not only ancient mythic traditions, but also contemporary mythology, mythological elements of computer

games, and contemporary popular culture, internet folklore, and all other fields from folklore and religious studies, such as contemporary and ancient beliefs, life practices, and other cultural phenomena. In addition, the journal presents new interdisciplinary insights and interpretations from the fields of historical sources, material culture, current fieldwork research from different disciplines, etc. We also offer an opportunity to those who wish to publish scholarly findings that may deviate from the current research norms and trends, presenting new approaches and discoveries.

***Studia mythologica Slavica* also has *Supplementa*. What was the reason to start it?**

It was an idea that we had talked about already from the very beginning, since many thorough studies in mythology cannot be limited only to short articles but they need to include plenty of material and in-depth research. Therefore, in 2004 we launched the first book in the series *Studia mythologica Slavica – Supplementa*, dedicated to Mordvinian folklore. Until now we have published already 12 volumes.

**Why do you think mythology is important in contemporary society?**

The contemporary society is very materialistic and technocratic, and therefore people also need the spiritual part of understanding our culture and aspects of our life. This is also one of the reasons why mythological studies and interest in mythology have increased considerably in the last decades. In this globalized world people search for anchors of identity in their local and ancient roots.

**What is your background in mythology?**

When researching folk narrative and proceeding with folk belief studies, we have often come across mythological perceptions in these topics. It was crucial to understand more clearly the origins of our intangible cultural heritage, so this is what urged us to delve into this research. On the other hand – just like every historical period opens up some horizons and closes some others – at the turn of the century we have been witnesses to radical changes that followed the year 1989. The collapse of former political institutions and paradigms proposed new questions to scientists. Among novel topics there was also interest in the spiritual background of contemporary cultures. All countries of the so-called Eastern Block developed an interest in mythology and Slovenia was no exception. So it was small wonder that here in Slovenia, on the border of the Eastern and Western worlds, something had to be done to encourage research into mythology and intangible heritage. This position has encouraged us to cross the national borders, and at the same time also to surpass the intellectual ones by introducing interdisciplinary research across different territories.