

Aleksandar Loma

One-eyed wind and where it came from

Summary¹

Keywords: Mythology (Slavic; Comparative), Etymology; Wind, Whirlwind; One-eyedness; volcanoes; Caucasus

The Common Slavic adjective *krivъ* ‘crooked, bent’ shows in Slavic languages a variety of meanings, such as ‘wrong; guilty; lame; cross-eyed’, etc., and also ‘blind in one eye’. The latter meaning it is attested only in Russian (*krivoj*), but it seems to have been known to the ancestors of South Slavs too, for the name **krivъcb* for a stormy, dangerous, ‘evil’ wind, common to Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian and Slovenian, can hardly be separated from the South Slavic folklore notion of the one-eyed south wind (*Jug*), who, according to a widespread tale, lost one of his eyes in the struggle with the opposite north wind (*S(j)ever*); the Russian *lešij*, one-eyed and revealing himself through a whirlwind, assures his Common Slavic pedigree. In Serbia, by *krivac* is usually designated a strong and often violent east wind (also called *košava*) blowing upstream from the mouth of the Danube into the Black Sea. The Old Russian “Tale of Igor’s campaign” mentions the winds, “the scions of Stribog” (*Striboži vnuci*), blowing from the (Black) sea and carrying hostile arrows against the Russian army; their obviously negative role questions the interpretation of *Stribogъ* as a god of winds in general; in the context, his name is isofunctional with *běsi* ‘demons’ and *Divъ* < Old Iranian *daiva-* ‘demon’ and clearly opposed to *Daž(d)ъbogъ*, the Russian princes being designated as *Dažъboži vnuci*. Thus the attribution of the hostile winds to Stribog seems to be based on a distinction between the good and the evil, i.e. harmful winds, as it is made by Hesiod, Theog. 868 ff., who traces the latter back to Typhon. Unknown to Homer, this distinction, as well as much in Hesiod, may be due to an oriental influence, in this case Iranian, for the only divinity (yazata) in Zoroastrianism, who is dual-natured, simultaneously angelic and demonic, is precisely the god of wind Vayu, with his two hypostases, “the good” and “the bad Vayu”. The dichotomy in question has its prehistoric roots, because it is observed also among Vayu’s Baltic namesake, Vejas or Vejopatis. Among the north-western Slavs, the East-Slavic pair of opposites *Dažъbogъ* : *Stribogъ* seems to have been matched by *Bělobogъ* : *Čъrnobogъ*, i.e. the ‘white’, good god opposed to a ‘black’, evil one. The motif of the one-eyedness as applied to a destructive wind can be easiest explained as a symbolic representation of the whirlwind with its calmest central part (cf. engl. *eye of the hurricane*). On the other hand, it may hint at a volcano with its crater, as in the case of the Cyclopes, and outside the tropics the idea of an “evil wind” seems to have arisen in connection with the volcanic eruptions, accompanied by hot stormy winds distributing ashes into the atmosphere and over the land, eclipsing the sun, destroying crops and cattle, causing “years without a summer” in large parts of the world. This may be the reason why the mythical personage of the one-eyed wind is sometimes elevated to the rank of an archdemon chained inside a mountain and threatening to free himself and burn down the world. This concept seems deeply rooted in the regions of Caucasus (Greek Prometheus and Typhon, Georgian Amirani < Iranian Ahriman), Transcaucasia (Armenian Mher < Iranian Mithra) and Caspia (Iranian Ažiš Dahakō), where it is tied to the historically active volcanoes such as Elbrus, Ararat and Demavend; it cannot be by accident that two of those mountains, *Elbrus*, the highest

¹ Александар Лома, Кривой ветер и откуда он подул. К истокам дуалистического понимания ветра и огня в индо-европейских традициях, in: П. Пипер / Љ. Раденковић (edd.), *Етнолингвистичка проучавања српског и других словенских језика. У част академика Светлане Толстој* (САНУ Одељење језика и књижевности, Српски језик у светлу савремених лингвистичких теорија књ. 3), Belgrade 2008, pp. 199–226

peak of Caucasus, and *Elburs* with its highest peak Demavend, bear names derived from Old Iranian **Harā Bṛzatī* (Avestan *Harā Bərəzaiti* 'the high Harā'), the holy mountain of Iranian mythology. According to Russian scholars (Mačinskij, Vasiljev), there is some iconographic evidence tracing this mythological complex back to the Bronze Age Maykop-culture in North Caucasus, whose bearers are identified, by some archaeologists, with Indo-Iranians. Consequently, there are good reasons to resurrect the hundred years old Axel Olrik's hypothesis on the origins of Ragnarök by considerably deepening its chronological perspective. Olrik assumed that, in the early first millenium AD, the Ants, whom he falsely identified with the Cherkess, may have transmitted their eschatological beliefs to the Goths in North Pontic area, and the latter forwarded it northward to their Scandinavian kinsmen. Now it appears that the transmission may have started as early as 4th millenium BC, in what still was the late Proto-Indo-European continuum, and in the 1st millenium BC it was pursued by the Scythians and the ancestors of the Balto-Slavs.