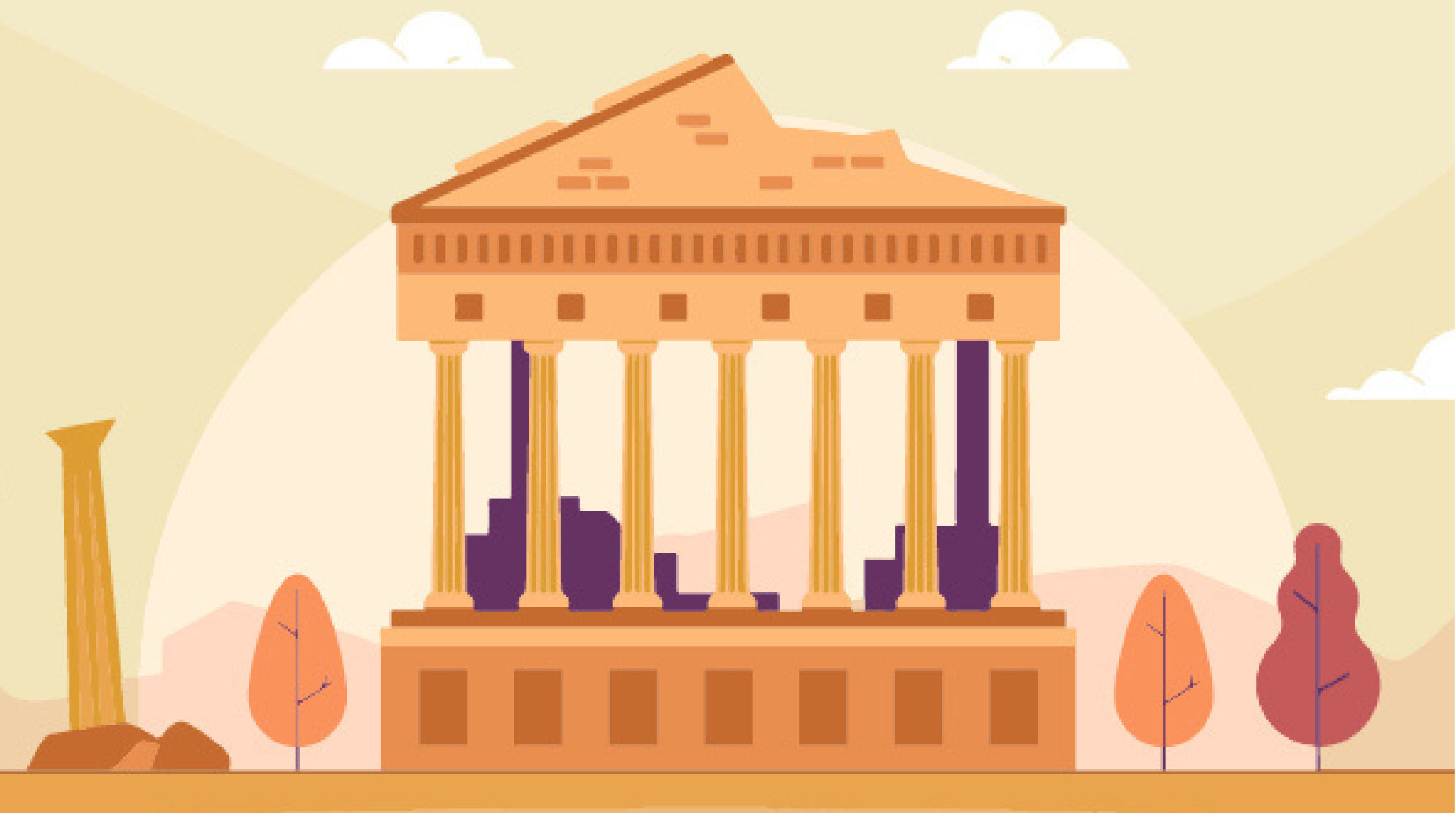




WORK WITH MATHS

BOOKLET



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MSK:



Introduction:

Today, we know much more about Greek and Roman mythology than about Slavic mythology and Polish legends. Slavic mythology was largely supplanted by Christianity in the 10th century, leading to the disappearance of many traditions. However, since the 1990s, there has been a revival of interest in these beliefs, with a growing number of studies and cultural initiatives. Slavic mythology is not taught in schools, yet mythology serves as a source of inspiration and knowledge about history—cultures, the lives of ancient peoples, their fears, entertainments, and ways of thinking. Though created long ago, myths remain fascinating and continue to attract new generations.

Mythological stories symbolize various human desires— love, power, beauty, wealth, and more—revealing that dreams and aspirations are universal across epochs.

Slavic mythology pertains to the beliefs of our ancestors before Christianity arrived in Polish lands. Even much later, some myths and heroes remained alive in Polish folk imagination, forming the basis for literary motifs.

For young people, mythology offers fascinating stories with fantastic heroes that ignite imagination and serve as entertainment while conveying important messages. Myths help to understand values, good and bad choices, and lay the groundwork for cultural education of younger generations.

Goals of the Publication:

The brochure "Work with Myths" is an encouragement to explore Polish and Slavic myths, legends, figures from demonology, and fairy-tale heroes. Exploring these myths and legends is a fascinating journey to the roots of our culture. The goal of the publication is to stimulate the imagination of young people by expanding their knowledge about the history and culture of their region. Selected fantastic stories and characters can inspire contemporary entrepreneurial practices. The main aim of the brochure is to educate youth about their cultural heritage and demonstrate how timeless mythological themes—wisdom, creativity, resilience, and innovation—can be applied to their business ventures. Through engaging content and practical examples, the brochure encourages young entrepreneurs to draw upon the power of myths and legends as a foundation for building innovative yet culturally rooted businesses. By exploring these stories, young people can harness their heritage as a source of creativity and strength, creating ventures that are unique, meaningful, and tied to the broader cultural narrative of their region. The brochure "Work with Myths" is more than just an educational resource; it is a call to action for the next generation to embrace their cultural heritage and use it as a springboard for entrepreneurial success.

We hope it serves as a starting point for young people to undertake deeper explorations of the subject.

Sources Related to Slavic Mythology

The Slavs inhabited Europe between the Oder, Elbe, and Saale rivers, extending to the Jutland Peninsula in the west, the Balkans in the south, as well as Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, the Dnieper basin, and the upper Volga. Despite linguistic differences and regional variations, they were united by similar customs, rituals, and beliefs.

The primary period of existence and functionality of Slavic mythology spans from the 8th to the 13th century. It was later supplanted by Christianity, surviving only in folklore, legends, and rituals (you are likely familiar with some of these, such as dousing with water on Wet Monday or fortune-telling on St. Andrew's Eve).

Although no pre-Christian Slavic myths have survived directly in written sources to this day, scholars propose the possibility of reconstructing them based on preserved texts from various Slavic traditions, which retained mythological content in language and writings. Written sources from the medieval period are typically framed from a perspective that elevates Christianity while condemning paganism.

We also have archaeological sources, which, unlike written records, encompass a much broader historical timeframe.

New discoveries and advancements in archaeological research continuously expand the understanding of Slavic religion, although these findings are inherently more challenging to interpret.

Slavic Cosmology

There is no any of the Slavic myth of the world's creation that has survived. However, scholars have discovered remnants of such myths in later, folk Christian stories. The most plausible version is the so-called myth of diving.

According to this myth, the world was initially covered by a vast ocean, upon which a deity drifted in a boat. This deity encountered a devil swimming in the waters and allowed him into the boat. The deity then sent the devil to the ocean floor to retrieve some earth. From the single grain of sand retrieved, the deity created an island, forming the first piece of land above the water. Initially, the deity and the devil cooperated in this myth but eventually fell into conflict.

In Slavic mythology, so-called origin myths are common, explaining the creation of mountains, bodies of water, and animals. Slavs likely believed in a tripartite division of the world into the heavens, the earth, and the realm of the dead. However, the nature of the Slavic underworld remains unclear. It is believed that some Slavs envisioned a cosmic river, similar to the Greek Styx, which the deceased had to cross to reach the underworld. The passage between the mortal world and the afterlife was said to open several times a year, allowing, for instance, communication with spirits.

Slavic religion recognized a constant supernatural presence in nature. Various spirits and demons were believed to inhabit specific places. These entities were often divided into water, forest, and air demons, as well as those associated with the domestic hearth. The first three categories generally consisted of beings hostile to humans, symbolizing the ominous, untamed aspects of nature. Examples include water sprites, which drowned people in lakes, or noon spirits, which attacked individuals working in the fields during midday.

Slavic demons were often associated with those who died unnatural deaths, such as murder victims, suicides, or women who died in childbirth. One well-known example is the drowned spirit (topielec), born from sudden death by drowning. Similarly, women who died suddenly could become boginki or rusalki. These beings were typically depicted as eternally youthful, seductively beautiful women lingering near water bodies, luring passersby to their doom. Rivers and lakes were particularly feared in Slavic beliefs. Other demons were said to inhabit forests or the air, with uniquely Slavic motifs including death by tickling or caressing.

A distinct category of spirits was associated with households. These were often thought to be ancestral spirits living in dimly lit areas such as dark corners, beneath thresholds, behind stoves, or in attics. These so-called ubożęta required offerings of food in exchange for ensuring the household's prosperity and alerting its inhabitants to dangers.

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Demons from Slavic Mythology: Zmora, Nocnica, or Mara Senna

The Zmora, also known as Nocnica or Mara Senna, is a nocturnal demon in Slavic mythology that preyed upon people during their most vulnerable state—sleep. Zmoras were believed to be the restless souls of sinful individuals, particularly immoral or wicked women.

In some regions, especially Ukraine and Belarus, they were thought to be the souls of severely wronged individuals consumed with hatred for the living. According to legend, a Zmora fed on the breath or fear of a sleeping person. Often taking the form of a moth or mosquito, the demon would slip into a sleeping chamber to begin its feast.

During an encounter with a Zmora or Mara Senna, the victim would experience various distressing symptoms. These included difficulty breathing, excessive sweating, cold chills, unexplained terror, and a racing heartbeat. Upon waking, the afflicted individual would feel exhausted and devoid of energy, as though their life force had been drained.

A satiated Zmora needed to quickly return to its physical body or hide from the sunlight. To escape, it would often ride a nearby stable horse, galloping wildly through the night. After such a frenzied ride with the demon on its back, the horse would often die from exhaustion.

This depiction of the Zmora reflects deep cultural fears associated with vulnerability during sleep and the supernatural explanation for physical or psychological afflictions experienced upon waking.



Postać wodnika w słowackim skansenie Humenne

Wodnik: The Water Demon of Slavic Mythology

In Slavic mythology, the Wodnik was a water demon that exercised absolute dominion over bodies of water. It could inhabit virtually any aquatic environment, from ponds, rivers, and lakes to simple roadside ditches.

According to ancient legends, a Wodnik could emerge from the spirit of a child drowned by its mother.

In appearance, the Wodnik resembled a hunched old man with bulging, fish-like eyes, tangled hair, and webbed fingers. Known for its temperamental nature, it was easily angered or provoked, particularly by noise or littering near its domain. This made children playing near water especially vulnerable to its wrath.

Folk tales often attributed prolonged storms over lakes or large rivers to territorial disputes between Wodniks. These stormy episodes reflected the demon's influence and reinforced its feared status within the community.

The Wodnik symbolizes the unpredictable and dangerous nature of water, acting as a cautionary figure to respect and protect these natural environments.



*Obraz „Rusalki” Witold Ruszkowski, 1877,
Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie*

Rusalka: The Enigmatic Demoness of Slavic Mythology

In Slavic mythology, the Rusalka is a demonic being inhabiting forests, fields, and bodies of water. They typically appeared as beautiful, naked young women with long, flowing hair. Forest-dwelling Rusalki were said to have dark hair and a more mature, feminine appearance, while water Rusalki were described as golden-haired and youthful. Less commonly, they were depicted as old and hideous women, representing the souls of elderly women who drowned.

Rusalki were known for their loud laughter, clapping, and singing. They emerged during the new moon, luring young men with invitations to swing on tree branches (forest Rusalki) or to swim (water Rusalki). Those who succumbed to their allure were killed, either by tickling or through a frenzied dance.

A Rusałka was believed to be the spirit of a young woman who had drowned, often due to unrequited love or dying shortly before or after her wedding. Their presence was celebrated during the Green Week (Zielone Świątki), when they would leave their habitats and frolic, harassing people in forests and along roads. They frightened travelers by hanging from birch or oak trees by their green braids.

Despite their malevolent nature, Rusałki commanded respect among the Slavs. The Rusałczy Tydzień (Rusałka Week) was observed, during which people refrained from work and indulged in swimming in rivers and lakes. Those who ignored the customs faced the vengeful wrath of the mischievous Rusałki.

Beyond mythology, Rusałki have inspired literature and art, symbolizing both the beauty and peril of nature and human emotions.



Baba Yaga, Iwan Bilibin, 1902



Fot. Pixabay

Baba Yaga: Old Mystic Lady of Slavic Mythology

Baba Yaga, a character from East Slavic mythology, is best known today through fairy tales and folklore. Over time, her image has been caricatured and simplified, but scholars believe she played a far more significant role in the original beliefs of the Slavs. Researchers identify her as a ruler of forest animals and a figure associated with the realm of the dead, possibly even a degraded female deity. The modern portrayal of Baba Yaga as a grotesque and wicked witch is thought to result from early Christian efforts to demonize female figures of pre-Christian religions.

In myths, Baba Yaga is described as an old woman living on the outskirts of villages or deep in forests. Her body and face are covered with boils and warts, complemented by deep wrinkles and numerous scars. Her most striking feature is a large, hooked nose. She wears tattered, dirty clothing and a pointed hat. Often accompanied by a black cat, raven, owl, or snake, she resides in a crooked wooden hut, famously standing on chicken legs. Baba Yaga's primary means of transportation is a broomstick, which she uses to navigate her eerie surroundings.

Most stories portray Baba Yaga as inherently malevolent and cunning. She is known for abducting wanderers, especially children, whom she murders and devours. She is also said to inflict diseases and other misfortunes. However, some folklore occasionally presents a kinder side of Baba Yaga, where she assists those in need.

Baba Yaga's compelling and multifaceted persona has ensured her presence in literature, music, film, and even video games, making her an enduring symbol of both fear and fascination in Slavic culture.

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Południca: The Daytime Demon of Slavic Mythology

In the world of Slavic ancestors, there existed monsters undeterred by daylight; in fact, they thrived under the blazing midday sun. Południca was one such demon, initially believed to be a protective spirit of crops and agricultural yields. Over time, she became a symbol of the dangers that awaited those laboring under the scorching sun. Sunstrokes and heart attacks experienced by farmers working in the fields were often attributed to her attacks.

Południca manifested in various forms. She was sometimes described as a beautiful, young, and exceptionally slender woman adorned with a floral wreath and wielding a sickle or other tool. At other times, she appeared as a hunched, ragged old crone. The demon roamed agricultural fields, particularly during the hottest hours of the day. Her primary victims were weary farmers who, taking a midday break in the shade of wheat stacks, fell asleep. If she encountered such a sleeper, she would mercilessly beat them with a stick, breaking their arms and legs.

To avoid her wrath, farmers refrained from working during the hottest part of the day, and children were never left unattended near freshly plowed fields. Południca remained active throughout the summer, wandering fields until the end of the harvest season, after which she buried herself in freshly tilled soil to hibernate for the winter.

This figure serves as both a cautionary tale and an embodiment of the harsh, unpredictable forces of nature, emphasizing the perils of overexertion in the unforgiving summer heat.

Licho: The Harbinger of Misfortune in Slavic Mythology

Licho is a demon of misfortune and bad luck in Slavic mythology. It was drawn to human dwellings where happiness, abundance, and joy prevailed, unable to resist disrupting such harmony. By nature, Licho was a wandering demon, roaming from village to village with the sole purpose of bringing misery to people's lives.

This demon often took the form of a small, hairy creature or an old, one-eyed woman. In these guises, it infiltrated human communities, typically hiding in dark corners of homes. Once settled, Licho unleashed chaos—children would suddenly fall ill, a wife might miscarry, the most valuable livestock would perish, or all things of good fortune would inexplicably begin to deteriorate.

There was no known way to defeat or banish Licho. Those afflicted could only endure its presence and wait until the demon decided to leave on its own, which could take days or even years. Licho serves as a personification of bad luck and the uncontrollable adversities of life, reminding people of the fragility of happiness and prosperity.

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The Legend of King Popiel

The legend of King Popiel takes place near Lake Gopło in the fortress of Kruszwica, where the cruel ruler resided. Popiel was notorious for his harsh treatment of his subjects, often instigated by his beautiful but ruthless wife, Gerda. Popiel ignored the advice of his council of elders, composed of his uncles, who eventually decided to conspire against him. Seeking guidance, Popiel visited an old hermit to learn the fate of his kingdom. The hermit issued a cryptic warning: "Beware of the mice." Popiel dismissed the prophecy with laughter, mocking the idea of fearing small creatures like mice when he was unafraid of wolves or bears.

Popiel and Gerda later invited his uncles to a lavish feast at the Kruszwica castle. The table was laden with food, wine, and mead.

During the feast, Gerda poisoned a jug of mead, sparing only Popiel's drink. As the uncles succumbed to the poison, they cursed Popiel and his lineage with their dying breaths. Their bodies were thrown into the lake, and Popiel spread the false tale that they had left during the night. Despite extensive searches, their families found no trace of the uncles and assumed they had drowned crossing Lake Gopło.

Popiel and his wife continued to live in luxury, further oppressing their people. However, a horde of mice began to appear in the castle, emerging from the lake. Despite numerous efforts to combat them, the mice multiplied uncontrollably. Realizing the hermit's prophecy was coming true, Popiel fled with Gerda to a tower on an island, believing it to be safe. The mice swam across the lake and invaded the tower, leaving the king and queen with no escape.

Ultimately, the mice devoured Popiel and Gerda, punishing them for their wicked deeds. The tower has since been known as the Mouse Tower (Mysia Wieża).

This tale, chronicled by historian Jan Długosz (1415–1480) in his Annals, reflects the legendary times of Poland. King Popiel is remembered as a ruler of the Goplan people, ancestors of the Poles, in the 9th century. The legend symbolizes the interconnectedness of the living and the dead in Slavic beliefs, serving as a metaphor for a ruler's downfall due to his disregard for traditions and the vengeance of nature and ancestral spirits.

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Władysław Skoczylas, *Śpiący rycerze*, 1914,
Muzeum Żup Krakowskich Wieliczka,
licencja PD, Wikimedia Commons

The Legend of the Sleeping Knights

One of the most famous peaks in the Tatra Mountains is Giewont, whose shape is said to resemble a sleeping knight. The mountain's northern face houses numerous caves, one of which is known as the Cave of the Sleeping Knights (Jaskinia Śpiących Rycerzy).

According to legend, at the base of Giewont lies a hidden chamber where knights sleep in eternal slumber. These knights are destined to awaken at the right time to defend Poland. Among the highland people (górale), there is a persistent belief that a great treasure is hidden within the caves of the Tatras. This treasure is said to symbolize freedom, guarded by the Sleeping Knights.

Stories tell of a shepherd who sought this treasure, exploring cave after cave until he found the right one. Inside, he discovered knights in full armor, leaning on their swords, asleep. One of them stirred and asked the young man, "Is it time?" The king's knights are said to sleep in the mountains, destined to rise only when Poland is in grave danger. The young man replied that the time had not yet come. "If the time has not come," the knight said, "do not wake my brothers; let us continue our slumber."

This legend reinforces themes of resilience and national pride, symbolizing the readiness of the Polish people to rise and defend their homeland when it is most needed.

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Pan Twardowski: The Polish Faust

Pan Twardowski, also known as Master Twardowski, is a legendary Polish nobleman often referred to as the "Polish Faust." According to the tale, he lived in Kraków during the 16th century and sold his soul to the devil in exchange for great knowledge and mastery of magic. However, Twardowski sought to outwit the devil by including a clause in their pact stipulating that his soul could only be taken to hell in Rome, a place he had no intention of ever visiting.

For many years, Twardowski enjoyed the benefits of his deal until he happened to visit an inn named "Rome." There, the devil appeared to claim his soul. During their journey to hell, Twardowski began to pray to the Virgin Mary, prompting the devil to abandon him. Instead of being taken to hell, Twardowski was cast onto the Moon, where he is said to reside to this day, observing the affairs of humanity on Earth.

The character of Pan Twardowski is likely based on Jan Twardowski, a magician associated with King Sigismund Augustus. Historical accounts credit Jan Twardowski with summoning the spirit of the king's deceased wife, Barbara Radziwiłł. Although he supposedly authored two books—one on magic and another an encyclopedia of sciences—neither has survived to the present day.

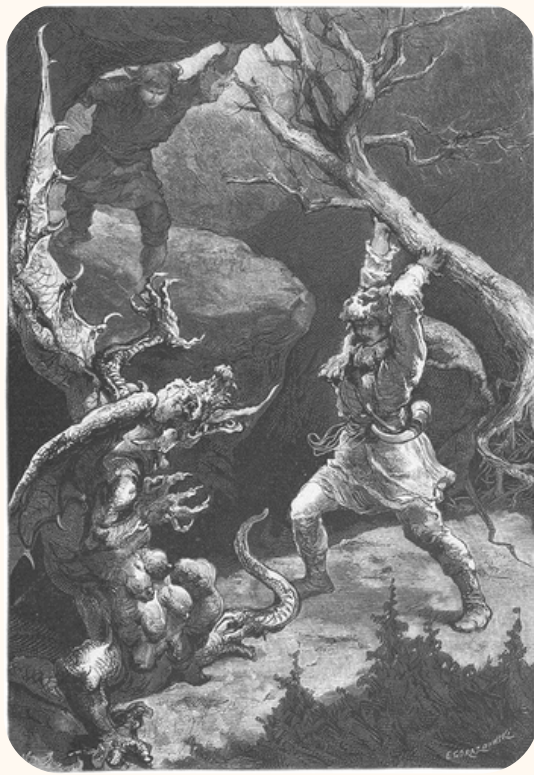
The legend of Pan Twardowski has inspired numerous artists, both in Poland and internationally. His story has been adapted into literature, ballet, theater, film, video games, and comics. Notably, the ballads "Pan Twardowski" by Tomasz Zan (1818) and "Pani Twardowska" by Adam Mickiewicz (early 1820s) remain among the most famous literary works referencing this enigmatic figure.

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Waligóra and Wyrwidąb: The Tale of Two Mighty Brothers

The legend of Waligóra and Wyrwidąb tells the story of twin brothers endowed with extraordinary strength, symbolizing brotherly unity and collaboration. Orphaned as children, one brother was raised by a bear, and the other by a she-wolf. As they grew, their destiny gifted them incredible powers.

Waligóra was so strong he could move entire mountains, while Wyrwidąb could uproot the largest trees with ease.

Seeking adventure, the brothers set out into the world. After days of wandering, they encountered a diminutive man who, seeing their exhaustion, offered them a magical gift: boots that could transport the wearer several miles with each step.

Each brother received one boot. The man also told them about a nearby kingdom being terrorized by a dragon that devoured its people. The desperate king had promised his daughters in marriage to the knights who could slay the beast.

The brothers resolved to help. Understanding the challenge ahead, they devised a plan to defeat the dragon. Wyrwidąb uprooted the largest tree near the dragon's cave, and when the dragon emerged, he struck its head with the trunk.

Though the blow staggered the beast, it only enraged it further. The dragon unleashed a fiery breath toward Wyrwidąb, but he evaded harm using his magical boot. Seizing the moment, Waligóra dropped a massive boulder onto the dragon's tail to trap it. While the beast was immobilized, Wyrwidąb delivered the final blow, striking its head with the tree trunk and killing it.

True to his word, the king gave his daughters to the brothers in marriage. Together, they lived long and happily.

In an alternate version of the legend, the brothers are known as Lel and Polel and are depicted as the sons of the goddess Łada. This tale showcases the enduring themes of strength, bravery, and familial loyalty in Slavic folklore.

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The Legend of the Fern Flower

In Slavic mythology, the Fern Flower is a mythical, legendary bloom said to appear only once a year during the summer solstice, on the shortest night of the year (around June 21–22). The finder of the flower is promised great wealth and prosperity, making its search a central part of the celebrations of the Slavic holiday of Kupala Night (Noc Kupały). However, no one has ever successfully obtained it, as the flower is believed to grow in a well-hidden location, protected by forest spirits and other supernatural entities.

The magical significance of the fern is tied to its habitat—dark, shaded places far from human settlements. Ferns, common in the forests of Central and Eastern Europe, never actually bloom, adding to the mystery and allure of the legend. The path to the Fern Flower is perilous, with frightening creatures obstructing the way, making it accessible only to those with extraordinary courage. The flower itself is said to be difficult to identify, appearing as a small, plain, and unimpressive bloom that only transforms into a stunningly beautiful chalice when plucked. It blooms briefly on Midsummer Night, only until the first rooster crows, and whoever manages to pick it will be granted whatever they desire.

The quest for the Fern Flower during Kupala Night has become a metaphor for humanity's pursuit of the impossible—chasing dreams and ambitions that seem perpetually out of reach. This legend encapsulates themes of bravery, perseverance, and the deep-rooted human yearning for the extraordinary.

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The Basilisk: The King of Serpents in Polish Folklore

The Basilisk, sometimes called the "King of Serpents," is a mythical creature featured in Polish legends and fairy tales. According to lore, a Basilisk hatches from eggs laid by a seven-year-old rooster, which are then incubated for nine years by toads or snakes. These creatures are said to live for centuries. Other legends claim that the Basilisk is born only once every 100 years from an egg laid by a rooster. It is described as resembling a giant serpent or lizard, feeding on mammals, birds, and reptiles, and is a mortal enemy of spiders. Its venom, stench, and even its gaze were said to cause instant death.

One well-known motif in Basilisk lore is the clever use of a mirror to defeat it. Heroes would trick the Basilisk into looking at its reflection, causing the creature to die from its own lethal gaze. Another natural way to kill a Basilisk is the crowing of a rooster.

The Basilisk is closely associated with Warsaw. A popular legend tells of a terrifying creature described as part rooster, snake, or turkey, with a snake's tail and frog-like eyes. It was said to reside in the cellars of a crumbling building on Krzywe Koło Street near the Old Town Market Square, guarding hidden treasures. The Basilisk killed intruders with its deadly stare, but it was eventually defeated by a young apprentice who descended into the cellars carrying a mirror.

The Basilisk remains a prominent figure in Polish folklore, idioms, and literature, symbolizing malice and danger. This is evident in expressions such as "eyes like a Basilisk" or "glaring like a Basilisk," which evoke its fearsome reputation.

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Living Water: A Symbol of Healing and Renewal

Living Water is a magical substance known for millennia, believed to restore life, heal ailments, or grant superhuman strength. It appears in legends, fairy tales, folk traditions, and even biblical texts. Legends place this miraculous water in remote, nearly inaccessible locations —at mountain peaks, underground chambers, or enchanted forests. Access to the Living Water is guarded by supernatural sentinels, challenging the hero to prove their worth. Only individuals capable of self-sacrifice, courage, determination, and often those who have suffered injustice, are deemed worthy to obtain it.

A Polish legend from Silesia tells of a poor widow gravely ill, seemingly beyond the hope of recovery. A local herbalist advised her son that the Living Water, found in a spring near the peak of Ślęża Mountain, could cure her.

Though many had sought the water before, none had returned. Undeterred, the widow's son embarked on the perilous journey. Along the way, he faced numerous strange creatures and apparitions intent on frightening him into abandoning his quest. Despite these trials, he reached the spring and collected the water.

Upon his return, the dying widow drank the Living Water and was miraculously healed. This tale highlights themes of bravery, perseverance, and the profound love and dedication one can have for their family, making Living Water a timeless symbol of hope, renewal, and the triumph of the human spirit.

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Cmentarz w noc dziadów. Źródło: Wikimedia Commons

Selected Rituals from Slavic Culture: Dziady

Dziady is one of the oldest rituals originating from the traditions of the ancient Slavs. It was observed on the last day of October and the first day of November, based on the belief that the living could communicate with the souls of the deceased, who would return to the world of the living under specific circumstances.

In Slavic mythology, souls journeyed to the land of eternal happiness, Nawia, after death. However, several times a year, they were believed to return to the world of the living and needed to be welcomed respectfully. Bonfires were lit during the Dziady rituals, serving as a guiding light for the souls to find their way home and spend the night with their loved ones.

In contemporary times, candles and lanterns on graves during All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (November 1 and 2) are remnants of these practices.

According to ancient Slavic traditions, it was essential to host the visiting spirits with warmth and generosity, ensuring their satisfaction and benevolence toward the household. The ceremonies were led by the community's eldest member, known as the guślarz. This person played a vital role in safely guiding the ancestors' souls to their homes and mediating conversations between the spirits and their living relatives.

Questions for the ancestors were posed to the guślarz, who communicated with the spirits on behalf of the family.

While the tradition of Dziady has nearly vanished in Poland, it continues to be practiced in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, where the old customs and ceremonies are preserved. This ritual underscores the enduring reverence for ancestors and the connection between the living and the dead in Slavic culture.

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Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe

fot. Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe

The Drowning of Marzanna: A Slavic Rite of Spring

The Drowning of Marzanna is a traditional Slavic ritual marking the arrival of spring and the farewell to winter. This ancient custom, celebrated at the transition between winter and spring, has deep roots in Slavic culture and mythology. The effigy represents Marzanna—the Slavic goddess of winter and death. Known by various names such as Morena, Mora, or Morana, Marzanna is associated with cold, death, and the harshness of winter. Drowning or burning her effigy symbolized the banishment of winter and the welcoming of the warm, fertile spring. This ritual offering aimed to bring purification, renewal, and the promise of new life.

The tradition is most commonly observed around the spring equinox, although the date has been standardized as March 21, marking the end of winter and the first day of the calendar spring.

The ritual begins with the creation of the effigy, crafted from natural materials such as straw, old clothes, and ribbons. The local community would then gather for a ceremonial procession, carrying the effigy to a nearby body of water—a river, lake, or pond—where it would be submerged or burned. The journey to the site was often accompanied by singing and dancing, meant to further dispel winter and invite spring.

It was believed that the water carried Marzanna away, along with all misfortunes and evil forces of the past season, clearing the way for the renewal, prosperity, and vitality of the coming spring. This vibrant and symbolic tradition reflects the Slavic people's reverence for the cycles of nature and their hope for renewal and abundance.

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fot. PIXABAY



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Kupala Night: A Slavic Celebration of Summer

Kupala Night is one of the most traditional Slavic festivities, marking the arrival of summer and the imminent harvest season. Celebrated on the eve of the summer solstice (June 20), the rituals often extended over four days. This festival prominently honored the elements of fire and water. Bonfires were lit on hilltops using two pieces of wood, believed to strengthen the participants and ensure fertility for the fields and livestock. Dancing and singing around the fires were central to the celebrations, and jumping over the flames was thought to purify and protect against negative energies.

Kupala Night was also a time for young people to form romantic connections. Girls wove wreaths from flowers and herbs, attaching a candle or a torch to the arrangement. These wreaths were then floated on rivers or streams. Boys would try to retrieve the wreaths, and if a wreath was successfully matched with its owner, the two were considered a pair. It was important for the candle to remain lit; if it extinguished, it was seen as a sign that the girl might remain unmarried. Similarly, if the wreath got caught in the reeds and no boy retrieved it, it symbolized that the girl might wait a long time for marriage.

Boys would wait downstream, attempting to catch the drifting wreaths, and once successful, they would return to the village to find its owner.

Kupala Night was widely celebrated in Poland, Belarus, Russia, and even in Scandinavian countries, reflecting a shared cultural heritage. The festival embodies themes of love, fertility, purification, and the harmonious interplay between humans and the forces of nature.

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Slavic Mythology Today: A Renaissance of Ancient Beliefs

In recent years, Slavic mythology has experienced a significant revival, boldly emerging in popular culture. This phenomenon reflects a global trend among Slavic peoples to reconnect with pre-Christian folklore, history, mythology, and rituals through literature, audiovisual arts, music, fashion, and more, in a quest to rediscover national identity.

Young Poles, in particular, are delving into their ancestral roots, exploring ancient history and Slavic beliefs. This fascination is evidenced by the growing number of literary works drawing on Slavic mythology. Each year, Poland sees the publication of dozens of new titles inspired by Slavic traditions, with both new and established authors contributing to the genre.

Renowned writers such as Olga Tokarczuk, Marek Krajewski, Berenika Mischuk, and Paulina Hendel have integrated Slavic themes into their work, fueling a burgeoning genre of "Slavic books." These fantasy novels, steeped in Slavic lore, dominate bookstores and are widely discussed on blogs, vlogs, podcasts, and discussion groups.

Social media has also embraced the "Slavic revival." Blogs, Instagram posts, workshops, and lectures celebrate and promote Slavic traditions. In music, bands such as Percival, Nów, Żywiołak, and Arkona channel Slavic heritage through reconstructed ancient instruments, folklore, and a distinct atmospheric style that captures the essence of Slavic culture.

The influence of Slavic mythology extends to fashion and jewelry. Numerous stores specialize in clothing adorned with depictions of legendary figures, gods, creatures from Slavic bestiaries, and traditional symbols. Shops like slava.pl and slowianskibestiariusz.pl offer a wide range of garments and accessories, while Slavic motifs are also featured in wooden and metal jewelry.

The Slavic Mythology Festival further highlights this revival. Held annually during the second-to-last weekend of August in Grodzisko Owidz since its inception in 2018, this three-day event promotes knowledge of ancient Slavic beliefs and rituals, drawing enthusiasts from across the region.

This renaissance of Slavic mythology underscores a renewed appreciation for cultural heritage, weaving ancient traditions into the modern fabric of art, literature, and everyday life.



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