

Slavic Hearth Culture, Pantheon Research, and Lore
For
Slavic Autumn Equinox Rite, September 28, 2008
to observe
The Harvest Celebration
(in Polish: Dozhynky)

Some Notes About the Differences We Will Encounter With This Ritual:

Since Green Timbre Protogrove, ADF, is located in the High Desert of CA, not Warsaw, Poland, we are opting to observe this High Day indoors (where it's cooler.)

The "Nemeton" will be a long table which the assembly will encircle.

The "Tree" will be represented by an image of the Zbruch idol.**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zbruch_Idol

The Well and the Fire will be as usual, modified a bit to accommodate the smaller area.

A central offering bowl will be used instead of our typical method of making offerings, which is to make offerings directly to the Fire or scattering/pouring offerings on the ground. (After the ritual, perhaps we can move the Fire to outside and dispose of all the offerings properly.)

In future years, when I have been able to learn a smattering of Polish or Ukranian, I will attempt to lead a language class so that we may all worship Slavic Deities in Their "Native Tongue"! For this first effort, we will use American for the ritual, and settle for simply attempting not to mangle Their Names.

Offerings for this ritual will include mead, beer, and "grains". It'd be great if we could find grains that would have been common 'back in the day' (rye, barley, spelt, flax, and buckwheat) but owing to time constraints we will content ourselves with such grains as we can purchase locally, and if we can't find any, I propose we use flour!

The exception to the offerings is the offering to the Outdwellers, to Whom I suggest we sacrifice vodka. (Note: vodka isn't terribly historically-accurate, but I'm in favor of keeping Them as "happy" as possible.) We will also make that sacrifice outside the Great Hall.

Notes About the Slavic Cosmology:

To better understand the Slavic hearth culture, and for the purposes of this ritual, the world was represented by a sacred tree, usually an oak, whose branches and trunk represented the living world of heavens and mortals, while its roots represented the underworld, that is, the world of the dead. Perun was a Ruler of the living world, sky and earth, and was often symbolized by an eagle sitting on top of the tallest branch of the tree, from which he kept watch over the entire world. Deep down in the roots of the tree was the place of his enemy, symbolized by a serpent or a dragon: this was Veles, watery God of the underworld, who continually provoked Perun by stealing his cattle, children or wife. Perun pursued Veles around the earth, attacking him with his lightning bolts from the sky. Veles fled from Perun by transforming himself into various animals, or hiding behind trees, houses or people; whenever a lightning bolt struck, it was believed this was because Veles hid from Perun under or behind that particular place. In the end, Perun managed to kill Veles, or to chase him back down into his watery underworld. [...]The Sky God then returned to the top of the World Tree and proudly informed his opponent, “*Well, there is your place, stay there!*” (This line came from a Belarusian folk tale of great antiquity.) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perun>

Some Notes About the Slavic Deities of the Occasion:

Svarog : In Slavic mythology Svarog is the Sun God and spirit of fire; his name means bright and clear. His name may be related to Sanskrit Svarga and Persian Xwar (pron. Chvar) both meaning the same thing (a Heaven where the righteous live before their next reincarnation; dwelling of Indra, the chief deva,) indicating an Indo-European etymological* relation. In the Slavic religion, Svarga is “heaven”, the residence of Svarog. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svarog>

For the purposes of this ritual, Svarog will be revered as the Chief of the Gods in Svarga (heaven) who, while powerful, concerns Himself more with the realm of the Gods than with earthly mortals. It was said that he was a fire serpent, a winged dragon that breathes fire. He was also portrayed as a smith god, identified with the generative and sexual powers of fire. In such myths, Svarog fights Zmey, a giant serpent or a multi-headed dragon. His animals are a boar, a golden-horned ox, a horse, and a falcon named Varagna. Svarog legends can be traced back to the 8th – 6th century B.C.E., when the Slavic tribes first began to practice agriculture. Svarog is Perun’s father, and according to some sources, is honored on September 21, called Svarog’s Day.

*Etymology is the study of words – when they entered a language, from what source, and how their form and meaning have changed over time.

Perun : As the Slavic Sky God, Perun is the highest God of the pantheon maintaining a presence in daily life on the mortal plane. He is the God of thunder, lightning, and (in Indo-European languages) ‘sky of stone’ or the firmament. The oak, iris, eagle, mountain, horses and carts, weapons (the hammer, axe and arrow,) war, and fire are His attributes. He was first associated with weapons made of

stone and later those of metal. Described as a rugged man with a copper beard, he rides in a chariot pulled by a he-goat and carries a mighty axe, or sometimes a hammer. The axe/hammer is hurled at evil people and spirits and will always return to his hand. In a number of Slavic languages spoken today, Perun simply means “thunder” or “lightning bolt.” Perun is a son of Svarog.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perun>

Veles : A major Slavic God of earth, waters, and the underworld, Veles is associated with dragons, cattle, magic, musicians, wealth and trickery, and is the direct opponent of Perun. The battle between the two is an epic myth of the ancient Slavic hearth culture. He may have been imagined as serpentine, with horns of a ram, bull, or some other domesticated herbivore and a long beard. Veles, seen as a huge serpent coiling around the roots of the World Tree, ruled the world of the dead. The Slavs described this world as quite a lovely place, called Virey or Iriy, a green and wet world of grassy plains and eternal Spring, where fantastic creatures dwell and the spirits of the deceased watch over Veles’s herds of cattle. The Slavs believed this world was “across the sea” where migrating birds flew each Winter. Each year, the God of Fertility and Vegetation, Jarilo, who also lived there each Winter, would return from across the sea and bring Spring to the world of the living.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veles_\(god\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veles_(god))

Jarilo : (**Jarylo** – *Polish*; also **Yarilo**, **Iarilo**, or **Jarovit**) A male God of Vegetation, Fertility, and Spring, as well as war and harvest. Worship of this God survived in folklore long after the forced Christianization of the Slavic world. Up until 19th century in Russia, Belarus and Serbia, folk festivals called Jarilo were celebrated in late spring or early summer. The Slavic root *jar* or *yar* means Spring or Summer. Festivities throughout the Slav world were basically alike: processions of villagers would walk through the village or on a walk in the country, someone would dress up or a doll made of straw would be dressed with green branches, and would ride on a horse. Certain songs were sung which alluded to Jarilo/ Jarylo’s return from a distant land across the sea, the return of Spring into the world, blessings, fertility and abundance to come.

Jarylo is a life-death-rebirth deity, believed to be (re)born and killed every year. He was a son of Perun, his lost, missing, tenth son, born on the last night of February, (Velja Noc’ – Great Night) the pagan Slavic celebration of the New Year. On the same night, he was stolen from his father and taken to the world of the dead, where he was adopted and raised by Veles, Perun’s enemy. Jarylo grew up guarding the cattle of his uncle. With the advent of Spring, he returned from the underworld, from across the sea, into the living world, bringing life and fertility to the land.

Marzhanna is the first of the Gods to meet Jarylo. She is a daughter of Perun, and Jarylo’s twin sister, a Goddess of harvest, witchcraft, Winter and death.

The two of them fall in love, court each other, and are married in a festival of Summer Solstice, today called Ivanje or Ivan Kupala in the various Slavic countries. This sacred union of Jarilo and Marzhanna, Deities of Vegetation and of nature, assured abundance, fertility and blessing to the earth, and also brought temporary peace between two major Slavic Gods, Perun and Veles.

However, since Jarylo's life was ultimately tied to the vegetative cycle of the cereals, after the harvest (which is ritually seen as a 'murder' of crops) Jarylo also met his death. The myth tells us that Jarylo was unfaithful to his wife – though the reader receives no indication of anything other than blissful love and marriage between the two Gods, nor is any other love interest named – and suddenly in a fit of jealous rage, Marzhanna kills him in retribution. This myth is in fact a ritual sacrifice, and Marzhanna uses the parts of his body to build herself a new house, an allegory meant to convey the death and rejuvenation of the world: Autumn, Winter, and Spring.

There is also a mystery connected to the mythology of Jarylo: It is always stated that Jarylo is walking yet he is described as coming on a horse. It is also stated that he walked a long way and his feet are sore. Folk accounts strongly emphasize the presence of a horse. Scholars have therefore concluded that Jarylo was himself conceived of as a horse (in some Slavic wedding traditions a young husband is symbolized as a horse.) If Jarylo has walked a long way, yet his feet are sore, but he is described as being astride a horse, perhaps the ancient Slavs thought of Jarylo as a centaur(?)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarilo>

Svetovid : Svetovid, or Svantevit, sometimes referred to as Beli or Byali, Vid; *Beli* = *white, bright, shining*. (As in a Serbian folklore poem: *Beli Vid waged war / Three years with the damn Turks / And four with the black Hungarians.*) Svantevit meaning "Dawning One" or "raising of the sun in the morning" is the ancient God of the Sun, war, fertility, divination, and abundance, who carries his sword (or sometimes a bow) in one hand, and in the other holds a drinking horn. (Christians have interpreted this as a "horn of plenty.") Svantevit had a white horse which was kept in his temple and taken care of by priests. It was believed that Svantevit rode this horse in battle. The horse was used for divination. Victory in battle, merchant travels, and a successful harvest all depended on Svantevit.

Matka Ziema : The Earth Mother, called Matka Ziema or Mati Syra Zemlja, for Moist Mother Earth. There don't seem to be actual mythologies for Matka Ziema, nor have any personifications of Her been found. Contracts, oaths, and treaties were sworn to with a handful of soil held in the hand and over the head. Supplications are traditionally made to Her by facing each compass point and invoking Her while making an offering of hemp oil:

East: “Matka Ziema, subdue every evil and unclean being so that he may not cast a spell on us nor do us any harm.”
West: “Matka Ziema, engulf the unclean power in thy boiling pits, and in thy burning fires.”
South: “Matka Ziema, calm the winds coming from the South and all bad weather. Calm the moving sands and whirlwinds.”
North: “Matka Ziema, calm the North winds and clouds, subdue the snowstorms and the cold.”

In some traditions, after the last invocation and offering, the oil jar would be dashed to the ground. (My suggestion is that four people each make an offering into the central offering bowl, taking the part of each compass point around the table. Since we already know that the Great Hall isn't built to accurate compass points, we'll have to beg Her indulgence! I also suggest that instead of throwing a breakable jar or glass bottle of oil on the floor (!) we pour the oil into Ye Olde Dixie Cups of Yore ahead of time, set them at each side of the table, and dispose of the cups in the Fire.)

Marzhanna : **(Morena, Marzyana)** Slavic Goddess of grain, harvest, and witchcraft, also associated with death, Winter, and ghostly apparitions (nightmare.) In modern times, Her ritual is called Maslenitsa, celebrated in March, during which flat round “pancakes” called blini are served and eaten in great quantities as a symbol of the sun. Straw effigies of her are made, symbolizing Winter, burned and sometimes also drowned.

Her mythology is a tale related to Her aspect as a Goddess of grain and abundant harvest. She meets Jarylo as He returns from “across the sea” to bring Spring and fertility to the land. After their marriage at the Summer Solstice, there is peace between Perun and Veles, opposing Deities of Sky and the Underworld. Jarylo's ritual sacrifice symbolizes the harvested crops: the myth invents a conflict between Jarylo and Marzhanna (Jarylo's unfaithfulness) and Marzhanna kills Jarylo, using parts of his body to build a new dwelling place. Living without Her husband, Marzhanna soon grows lonely and goes mad with despair and grief, becoming an old hag and dying in late Winter. During Maslenitsa, her effigy is “killed,” and she is reborn as a young, beautiful Goddess waiting to meet her brother Jarylo once more.

Mokosz : A Slavic Goddess of home and hearth, Mokosz (Polish: *Mokusza*) has a wide variety of mythology which relates her to Svarog, Perun, Jarilo and Veles. Mokusza oversees crafts which turn a house into a home, such as spinning, and weaving; this is also seen as relating to fate. She is seen as a Goddess of fertility, bounty, sovereign over the Domowije, and

Patroness of Midwifery. In one myth, she is Svarog's wife, which creates a marriage between "heaven" and earth; in another, Mokosz is Perun's wife. (Since there is no mythology stating who Jarilo and Marzhanna's mother is, as Goddess of fertility and bounty, She certainly is a reasonable candidate.) Mokosz is offered vegetables on Her feast day; some references point to October 28th. It was said that women who made satisfactory offerings would be helped with their laundry, denoting Her as a Water Goddess, further illustrated by an expression calling rainfall, "Mokosz's milk." This would provide a possible relationship to

Veles, and explain why Perun and Veles would be said to steal one another's wife: as rain is water it would be Veles's purvue, yet rain falls from the sky, which is Perun's domain. A further mythology states She is the Goddess of occult knowledge and divination, which might provide a link with Svantovit.

<http://lilithgate.atSPACE.org/articles/pantheon.html>

****A Final Note Regarding The Use Of The Zbruch Idol As The Tree:**

In 1848, near the village of Liczkowce just north of Husiatyn, in an area where the Zbruch River (a tributary of Dniester River) had changed its bed and had lowered, a drought revealed a four-sided pillar of grey limestone, 2.67 meters in height, with three tiers of reliefs engraved on each side. The three reliefs depict the following characteristics:

The three sides of the lowest tier show a kneeling, bearded entity who appears to support the upper tier on his hands; the fourth side is blank.

The middle tier shows a smaller entity with extended arms on all four sides.

The four sides of the uppermost tier have the largest figures of the idol, with four faces united beneath a spherical headgear. Each of the sides has a distinct attribute: a ring or a bracelet; a drinking horn and a tiny "child" figure; a sword and a horse; and an eroded solar symbol.

(Note: this so-called 'solar symbol' does not have eight spokes to the wheel, but six, the number shown in Perun's thunder marks.)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perun>

This pillar is called the Zbruch Idol, (*Swiatowid ze Zbrucz*) a 9th century sculpture, and is one of the rarest monuments of pre-Christian Slavic beliefs. The Zbruch Idol is commonly associated with the Slavic Deity Svantevit, but has been the object of controversy and widely-varying opinions!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zbruch_Idol

For the purposes of this ritual, and in my humble opinion, the Zbruch Idol represents Svarog holding a drinking horn (awaiting his offering of mead) on the front, Svantevit with his sword and divining horse on the right side, Jarilo with a ring representing the never-ending cycle of seasons (Wheel of the Year) on the left side, and Perun with the “solar symbol”/ thunder marks on the back side.

I whole-heartedly agree with (most) experts that the figure on the bottom represents Veles, the God of the underworld, especially since he is absent from the back side which I believe represents Perun.

Since no official conclusion has been made regarding the figure with outstretched arms on the center tier, for the purposes of this ritual, and in my humble opinion, it represents human figures (priests or humanity, itself) making an offering to Mother Earth, (*Matka Ziema*) as the “middle ground” between the Sky Father/ Sun Gods and the underworld, and without whom a god of fertility would be redundant. In so doing, the human figures actually embody the World Tree, the connection between the Realm of Sky / Sun (the Fire,) and the Realm of Water / Underworld (the Well.)

It could also be hypothesized that this figure might be Mokosz, providing the connection between all the Kindred and Realms represented on this sculpture, and suggesting the home and hearth (and therefore humanity) is an integral part of the Slavic cosmology.

It is for these reasons I have suggested the use of an image of the Zbruch Idol for the Tree.