

The Myth of Macha in Eastern Europe

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This article is based on a Székely legend from Transylvania which is not to be found in any other places in Eastern Europe. By analyzing the story it became clear that it is a Christianized version of a myth about the Celtic Horse Goddess who participates in a chariot race. The only parallel to this legend is mentioned in the Kievan Chronicle as a story about the Avars and the Dulebi women. Both versions are probably connected to the Avars and their subjects, the Bulgarians, and they can be dated to the Middle Ages.

In this paper I intend to analyze a myth connected to the lake of St. Anne (*Szent Anna tó*), which is situated in a volcanic crater in Transylvania on a mountain plateau 950 m high. It is 4 m deep and covers 22 hectares. This place, immediately west of the historical border of Hungary on the dividing ridges of the Carpathian mountains, is populated by the Roman Catholic *Kézdi Székelys*, a part of the *Háromszék* (“three sedes”) group, descendants of medieval border guards. According to their traditions, they are the descendants of the Huns, who joined the Hungarians when the latter arrived in 895. Although they have spoken Hungarian since they are mentioned in sources, they have preserved their special ethnicity during their almost thousand-year long history in that region until today (also under Romanian rule for the last 87 years). An example of their archaic culture is their belief that all Székelys are brothers because they are all descendants of the white mare, their mother (Gyallay 1959:219).

The following story was collected among them in the 19th century (Orbán 1868-73: III:74-5): Two brothers, belonging to the local gentry, were competing for wealth and power in the vicinity. The fortress of one brother stood on the spot where the lake is now, the other’s on the nearby mountain top, called *Büdös* (“stinking”, after a cave there). A foreigner once arrived to visit the younger brother, riding in a luxurious chariot, drawn by four beautiful horses. The local lord wanted very much to buy the horses, but the foreigner would not sell them. At last they

cast dice and the foreigner, who lost, was obliged to sell the horses for two villages. The younger brother immediately visited the older one, driving his new horses and angered him by saying that the brother never could acquire such beautiful horses. The envious older brother made a bet that if he could visit the younger man within 24 hours riding on better equipage than this one, he would get all the property and half of the fortress of his younger brother. Then the older one collected eight of the most beautiful peasant girls and harnessed them naked before his chariot. The girls did not want to draw the chariot, so the lord whipped the first girl, called Anna. She cried out a curse on the lord and the whole countryside, whereupon he and his fortress immediately sank and a lake appeared there. The eight girls swam to the lake-shore and went home, except for Anna, who sold the bridle, built a chapel and lived there from that time on. In the 19th century, there were two chapels on the two opposite sides of the lake, one consecrated to St. Anne, the mother of Our Lady, and the other to St. *Jováki*, i.e. Joachim, her father. They were built at an unknown period, but were already old and damaged in 1860, when a local “prophet” rebuilt them and urged the people to again hold great festivities there, because the fertility of the country and the prosperity of the state depended on it. The pilgrims of Kézdiszék always stopped by this chapel of St Anne to say prayers on their way back from the famous Marian shrine in Csíksomlyó (part of Csíkszereda, Rom. Miercurea Ciuc). The chapel of St. Joachim perished in the 20th century, but the habitants of the seven villages in the vicinity came together and repaired the chapel of St. Anne after the fall of Ceaușescu. Festivities are still organized there on 26th July, the day of St. Anne and 8th September, the birth day of Our Lady. So the cult continues.

This legend, which is not known by any other Hungarian groups or any other people in the region, was usually thought to be a romantic story.¹ However, it is doubtlessly a superficially Christianized version of the myth of the horse goddess, as the main motif shows: Two rival lords, contesting for a property, decide the right of possession by a chariot contest. The end of

¹It was rewritten several times, e.g. for children (Benedek 1894-96) and as a novel (Tamás 1989). The last one is based on a variant, collected also in the 19th century which explained the story by the cruelty of the landlord and the social standing of the peasants. I disregard this variant here as well as another, obviously later, more “poetic” version, according to which the girls became flowers and the lord a dragon in the lake (Orbán, 1868-73:III:75).

the story, a building which sinks into a lake as a punishment, is a common motif almost everywhere (AaTh Q 552.2.1). The lake is a passage between this world and the other, as we see in Greek myth in the case of Dionysos, who went down to the Underworld by the way of the Alcyonin lake, and in part of the legend of Heracles who dug a channel that became a lake and put the man-eating mares of Diomedes on the island in the lake, i.e. excluded them from this world. As for modern stories, a Bulgarian husband killed his wife, whereupon a lake appeared on the spot. A mare (the wife) was seen swimming in it, behind her a foal, her child, who died as well (Nagy 1975:521). It is not accidental that Anna (the horse goddess) dedicated herself to the lake by staying there while the other girls swam off and went home.

Indo-European *hippomanteia* and its variants, the use of horses for deciding or securing royal or possessory rights on a territory, was known among the Hungarians (cf. Polomé 1994:43-9 and Tatár 1997). We note the legend of the white horse with harness and saddle, which the Hungarians gave to the local inhabitants of the Carpathian basin in exchange for the right to rule the country (SH 1937-38: I:288-89), or the legend about persons who got possessory rights of a territory they could ride around during a defined time,² which is a variant of a tradition known ever since the Scythians. However, our legend is different because the “horses” are human girls and the contest is a chariot race.

Human beings, especially women, harnessed before a cart or a chariot or a plow appear in Hungary and among the neighboring peoples in three cases.

1. Extreme poverty forced people to actually do so a few times in the past³: during the reign of king László, called the Cuman, at the end of the 13th century (chronicles, SH 1937-38: I:474) and in 1601-04, when troops under the Italian war lord,

²The ancestor of the the Bél clan, Bekény Cepe got all the land in the Mátra Mountains which he could ride around while others consumed their lunch. Cf. the Scythian tradition: the keeper of the gold was allowed to use a year all the land he could ride around during a day (Bakó 1989:81). A similar story is told about the Nalácsi family among the Aranyosszék Székelys (Keszeg 2004: I:95). Cf. also the novel of Leo Tolstoi: *The Peasant and the Devil*, where the Bashkirs sold as much land to the Russians as they could walk around during a day.

³It happened in other countries as well. For example, in Norwegian, the expressions „harnessing the wife before the plow” and „on that farm the wife is the horse” mean the greatest poverty.

Giorgio Basta devastated Transylvania. Therefore the two-wheeled cart (Hung. *kordé*) was called "the cart of László, the Cuman" and "the cart of Basta". More recently, in the 20th century, this happened in the Romanian district which borders Transylvania and which has a large Hungarian population, called the Csángós. Of the village Klézse (Cleja) by the Siret River, the Csángós were forced by the Romanian bailiff to draw the carts of their landlord themselves (Beke 1988:141).

2. As far as I know, it actually happened on two occasions in Hungary: Count Peter Szapáry (1630-1703) was taken as a prisoner of war by the Ottoman Turks, was harnessed to a plow and forced to till the soil. Later, the Romanians who attacked Transylvania in 1848-49, killed László Péterfy, the professor of the college in Nagyenyed and the bailiff Székács by harnessing them before a plow and drove them until death in the town Borosbocsárd (Gracza 1894: II:420). Furthermore, they accused the Hungarians of doing the same in the 1940s when they put up posters in the town of Arad with drawings of Hungarian soldiers, beating Romanians harnessed before a plow (Kulics and Tölgyesi 1991:89) which actually never happened. Obviously, they understood this custom as a symbol of victory as the following legend attests: when the Moldavian prince Stefan Mare defeated the Polish army in Bucovina, he forced 20.000 prisoners of war to draw plows, till the battle field and grow a forest there as a new defensive border (Cantemiru 1872:chapt. VI).

This motif occurs as a punishment a few times in Hungarian legends. In Transylvania, the motif occurs only once, in the village of Bözöd (Székelyland): the local landlord, *János Daczó*, was very harsh to his peasants and therefore the Devil punished him after his death by forcing him to draw a plow and till a mountainside (Orbán 1868-73: III:74-75). The second narrative is a folk-tale from Baranya County, Southern Hungary. A Serbian orthodox priest, who was never content although he was rich, was transformed after his death into a horse by Christ and given to a poor man (Banó 1988a: 143-144). These few tales ascribe this practice to foreigners ("the Serbs") or characterize it as a heavenly punishment. Obviously, this ritual killing is an unusual motif among the Hungarians. However, it occurs in the Balkans not only in legends like in the one of Stoyan, a Bulgarian, who harnessed his wife before a plow as a punishment⁴ because of

⁴Something similar is reported about the ancient Thracians (in Xenophon): A Thracian farmer is plowing with an ox; a robber comes along and the two

malevolent slander (Nagy 1975:III:172), but also in actual fact . . . 3. Such a custom existed as a magical practice as well. Naked women, who were harnessed to plows and so drew a furrow around the village or their house as a protection against the plague, feral animals or other disasters, are well known throughout Eastern Europe. It is connected to the motif in AaTh F 383.3 where the fairies cannot cross the plowed furrow. However, in Hungary this custom occurs only sporadically and has no recognized ritual function (Pócs 1989:142). In Hungary the spell is different: the women run naked around the outside of the house, but did not plow a furrow. Another love magic spell occurs among the Gypsies, who migrated from Turkey into the Balkans. Girls who did not get married during the winter (as late as the beginning of the carnival), harnessed themselves naked before a cart on the day of St George, so the boys would run after them, as the wheels did (Gjorgjević 1903:76-79). The wheel, as a symbol of erotic love in this analogous function is known in Eastern Europe, e.g. among the Russians. Its clearest wording is to be found in Mari (Cheremis) folklore: the horse is a symbol of the wife and the chariot or cart is that of the sexual act, which is impossible when the chariot is absent (Beke 1961: III:486-487). It is therefore not surprising that the same motif appears in a ballad of the Csángós, who, living among Romanians along the Siret River, were influenced by Slavs and other peoples of Balkan origin. According to this ballad, the girl would not mind if her father was harnessed, made to eat nettles and dry stalks and haul wooden blocks (i.e. lived as a horse), because he did not approve of her lover (Kallós 1977:237).⁵

start to wrestle. They play, like in a theatre. If the robber is stronger, he may take the ox from the man. If the thief is stronger, he takes the ox; if the peasant is stronger, he harnesses the robber with the ox and forces him to draw the plow (Fol and Marazov 1976:chapt.2). It seems that it was the punishment of the defeated thief.

⁵The hauling of wooden blocks was a carnival custom in some regions of Hungary. Usually the boys draw the block to the house of that girl who did not get married during the winter, to mock the unmarried one. For example, in Bonchida, Transylvania, four boys, dressed up as old maids, performed this custom in parade which went through the village. In some places (Farnos, Bereg county and Ajak, Szabolcs county) this was understood not so much as a mockery of the girls but as a punishment for the boys who did not get married in the right time. In Göcsej (Zala county), the drawing of the block was the punishment of the girl (Tátrai 1990:134-137, 160). However, these Hungarian examples are rather archaic: to draw blocks without a wheel is a heavy, more archaic job than to draw a cart or a chariot. The not quite consistent tradition is probably of foreign (German) origin.

This sporadic occurrence of harnessed man and woman in all these cases is even more remarkable because the mare as a sexual symbol or even as the personification of the sexually active witch is well known among the Hungarians as everywhere in Europe.⁶ Sexual acts between a man and women who are transformed into mares, were already depicted on petroglyphs in Val Camonica and in Bohuslån (Sweden, Broby-Johansen 1973:ill. 79-8). I cite here Déméter and Poseidón, Surya, the Indian sun god whose wife had the shape of a mare, the Scandinavian Loki, transformed into a mare, and his offspring, the horse Sleipnir, etc. (cf. Doniger O'Flaherty 1982:8-11, Polomé 1994:48-49). The famous description about the enthronement of a Celtic king by Geraldus Cambrensis (*Topographia Hibernica*, cf. Polomé 1994:46) when the king copulated with a white mare, belongs here as well as the Irish expression „the mare of the king”, meaning the queen (Colum 1992:112). However, this subject is unusual among the Turks and Mongols. This motif was probably borrowed from Buddhist sources into an Uygur oracle book, according to which a prince fathered not only his son with his wife, but in the same time a foal and a camelcalf as well as, respectively, with a mare and a female camel (Malov 1959:80-85). This must be the older, more barbaric variant of the tale about the prince and his horse, who are born in the same time and who become true companions. In Hungarian folklore there is the famous tale about the son of the white mare (albeit from an unknown father), an ancient myth which is seen more frequently than among other Europeans (Banó 1988b:71). Besides these high-status examples, some girls were believed to be transformed into mares as a punishment as well. I cite the German superstition that girls who lost their virginity were punished in this fashion (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1934-35:V:1639). In Western Hungary, young girls who happened to drop by a neighbor on the day of St.

⁶Some examples: In 1599 in Patakfalva, Transylvania a man scolded a woman saying: “Go away, you ambling horse!” Whereas the woman answered: “Even if I am an ambling horse, am I not your ambling horse.” (Demény and Pataki and Tüd s 1994:III:132). In 1813 in Marosvásárhely a shepherd said in a lawsuit when accused of having a love affair with the daughter of his master: “I saw that she belongs in my herd.” This expression is used about a mare which allowed a stallion to cover it (Szenti 1987:578). Witches transformed into a mare who pursue or try to charm a man are reported several times, e.g. in Szatmárcseke and in Cegléd (Kiss 1989:152; Hídvégi 1992:732, 765), etc. This symbolism is widespread in Europe; note the Gallic verb: *marcosior* „ich möchte reiten (in sexuellem Sinn)” (Meid 1995:56).

Lucia, the dangerous day of the witches were tied up in the barn and hay was placed before them (Szendrey 1986:185), i.e. they were treated as mares. In a Csángó ballad Borbála Szeklédi refuses her Polish husband, so he put a saddle and harness on the wife, mounted and lashed her until she accepted him (Kallós 1977:185-190). This is a clear description of a forced marriage.

As this survey shows, harnessed women are usual in the Eastern European region, except in Hungary, although the woman, both as mother and witch transformed into a mare is widely known. On the other hand, there are no Eastern European folklore materials describing a chariot race where women played the role of a horse. The Serbian, Bulgarian and Romanian harnessed fairies who till a furrow around the villages and secure their fertility (Pócs 1989:70-74) belong not to this motif but to that of the naked women performing a similar magical act, as mentioned above. But the same motif occurs in Celtic mythology: it is the famous myth of *Macha*, who was forced to race against the king's chariot although she was pregnant and who cursed the men of Ulster⁷ for this (Gantz 1981:128-129; Ellis 1993:151; Olmstad 1994:158-159, Green 1995:76-77). Horse-races held during annual festivals were usual in other Irish districts as well, and at least some of them were chariot races (cf. Dames 1992:85, 229). Macha is a morphism of the Celtic goddess of horses, mostly known under her Gallic name, *Epona*. The cult of this war- and fertility goddess was known everywhere where legions with a Gallic component marched (cf. Simón 1998:46-47, 59). She must have been especially important in Pannonia, because the Celtic Scordicus tribe provided the Roman army with horses (Pető 1968:256). Furthermore, the Celtic Eraviscus tribe along the Danube still added chariots to their burial goods under Roman rule (Szabó 1971:42). This cult is well attested by coins and inscriptions in Transylvania as well (e.g. Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia, Várhely/Sarmizegetusa, Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca; Olmstad 1994:374). On those representations found along the Danube, Epona stands or sits between two horses. There are three such representations known from the Bulgarian side of the Danube, identified with the garrisons of the *Cohors II. Gallorum* (Hoddinott 1975:126), while the Thracian mounted Hero became the dominant horse god

⁷The most probable site of the chariot race was Emain Macha, the present Naval Fort and the chariot was supposedly a light, two-wheeled vehicle (Raftery 1994:74-80, 104-111).

further south in the Balkans. The myths of the continental Celts are not so well known as those of the insular Celts, however, they too probably arranged ritual races in honor of Epona. This can be deduced from the fact that one of her representations holds in her hands a *mappa*, a cloth which in Rome was used to give a signal to start the horse race. Green (1995:186) thinks that this must have been the symbol of the beginning of life, but it is not necessary to use such an abstract explanation.

The presence of the Celts in Transylvania is attested before the area became a Roman province. According to our sources (a.o. Ptolemy, Tacitus), the presence of the Celts in the Carpathian Basin is an historical fact (cf. ET I:82, Vékony 1989:90).⁸ According to Strabo, the Dacian kingdom was divided into five districts, of which three were populated by Celts: the *Anartii* lived by the river Sebes-Körös, the *Taurisci* lived by the river Szamos, and the iron mining *Cotini* in and around the Transylvanian Erzgebirge (Érchegység), along the Maros river. But neither these tribes or the Gallic legionaries could be the source of our myth because the Romans emptied *provincia Dacia* after ca. 100 years, when they could not hold it any longer against the Barbarians, and settled the mixed, but predominantly Greek-speaking population in Moesia, organizing *Dacia ripensis* on the right (southern) side of the Danube. Transylvania was then settled by different Germanic tribes, then the Huns arrived and later the Avars. Before the Avars arrived, the passes through the Carpathian Mountains into the Gyergyó, Csík and Kézdi valleys became impassable, since the forest grew so dense. We must therefore conclude that there were no Romano-Gallic survivors in these valleys. Towards the end of the Avar period, some Bulgarian Slavs settled here, as archaeology and the toponyms show. We now have the article of Blažek (2006:77-81), who explains the name Macha to be connected to *Mokoš*, the Slavic goddess of domestic animals, and both from the Slavic root **mok-* "wet". (This seems to be problematic linguistically.) In any case, the Slavs, who were known to have rather few horses (cf. Ibn Rusta: only the prince of the Slavs had

⁸However, there are some different views on the chronology: according to Szabó (1971:17) they inhabited Pannonia and the Hungarian Plain in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, mixed with the previous Iranian inhabitants there and in the 1st cent. BC their tribes, the *Anartii* and *Taurisci*, migrated to Transylvania. According to others (Schütz 2002, 667), they were already in Transylvania in the 4th century BC where the *Cotini* worked in mines and as blacksmiths and minted coins.

many horses, Kmoskó 1997:I/1:210) could hardly pass on this myth to the Székelys.

However, there is a near parallel of our myth as written in the Kievan Chronicle: The Avars who defeated the Dulebi people, did not harness a horse or an ox to their wagons but harnessed three, four or even five Dulebi⁹ women and in this way they travelled around in their territory (Likhachev 1950:I:14, 210). As Likhachev (1950:II:109) stated, this can hardly refer to historical fact, but must refer to a folk tale.¹⁰ I suggest that this is a Slavic rationalization of a myth (or even perhaps a ritual) which they did not understand. The Slavs who described this tradition at the end of an informative chain, obviously ascribed it to a foreign, hostile people. It was not their own myth or ritual, as opposed to the St. Anna legend, which the local population maintained in honor as their own mythical tradition and shrine.

But where these Dulebi live? A village *Dudleipin*¹¹ is mentioned in the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* (Lošek 1997) where the bishop of Salzburg consecrated a church for the newly baptized inhabitants in the 9th century. This village must have been the dwelling place of those Dulebis, mentioned later

⁹The Dulebi occur already in the works of Tacitus and Ptolemy. They are mentioned in Byzantine and German sources as well. They were recorded between the Odera and Elba rivers, in Bohemia and by the Southern Bug rivers (Sedov 1979:131-2, Budanova 1990:176). It was suggested that they are of non-Slavic, Western origin because of their ethnonym. But where could they have lived in such close coexistence with the Avars? Bohemia was suggested by Popov (1970:35) because their toponyms are situated there mixed with toponyms connected to Avars. This suggestion is confirmed by the 10th century Arab historian, al-Masudi, who localized the *dulaba* people among the Czechs by writing that they are living among the Western Slavs and their ruler is Venceslav (Nasonov 1951:131, Kmoskó 2000:I/2:199). However, the Avar rule did not extend so far geographically or in time to support such a narrative. The Bug is rather unlikely as well because the main body of the Avar people left the Pontic steppes for the Carpathian Basin.

¹⁰One of the scholars who believes that this data has historical value is Szádeczky-Kardoss (1998:215-6).

¹¹Some scholars (Sedov 1979:131-132, Budanova 1990:176) believed that this was a relatively wide area, between the Mura River and the Balaton (the later Hungarian counties Zala and Somogy), others (Atlas Tartarica 2005:182) suggested that it was on the Northern side of the Balaton, etc. But the bishop of Salzburg could only consecrate churches for *parishes*, not for any larger areas, which would have been bishoprics. The bishoprics in the region are all founded by Hungarian kings in the 11th century, Veszprém and Pécs by St. Stefan and Zagreb by St. László. Furthermore, the bishop followed a road from the German territories through Poetivo, present-day Ptuj in Slovenia, which is completely impossible if the Dulebis lived in Transdanubia.

on between Radkersburg and Mureck, by other means along the present border between Slovenia and Austria (Wolfram 1995:238, 302). This was the region of the Wends, where the Frank merchant, *Samo* managed to become independent from the Avars and founded a state in 623-4. He was called the prince of the Caranthans as well and was involved in battles with the Langobards who then lived in Northern Italy (Conversio, § 4; Fredegar, *Gesta Dagoberti*, Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998:173-174, 322). These Slavs and the Langobards were mentioned by Michael Syrus (op. cit.:60-61) forty years earlier, in 584-5 as the tax-paying subjects of the Avar Kagan.

We know that the “harnessing” of women – or men - was a sign of domination by their masters.¹² This domination possibly included sexual abuse as well. As Fredegar wrote, the Avars spent the winter among the Slavs and took their women into their beds (Szádeczky-Kardoss 1992:173). But the Avars could hardly have spent the winter among these Dulebis or Slavs, simply because their homeland was not close enough. As we know from archaeological finds, there was a very dense Avar population in present Central and Eastern Hungary, in Transylvania and in Southern Slovakia, i.e. mostly on the plains and in the hills, but not among the high mountains, like in Carinthia. In Western Hungary, the population was mixed, Slavs, Germans, even groups from Byzantine territories and Avars, and sometimes even avarized Slavs used the same cemeteries west of the Balaton, as archaeology tells us.

Certainly, a libertine and/or sexually predatory lifestyle is often ascribed to foreign peoples. On the other hand, women were often part of the spoils of wars.¹³ But this is not the case here, because the women were not taken away from their homes, on the contrary, the perpetrators moved into their homes. The important information in the story of the Dulebi women is that the Avars travelled around in their territory with these wagons the women were said to pull. The circumambulation reflects the king’s progress, the king’s visit to different parts of his realm, together with his royal entourage. This was a common custom in

¹²Already the Greeks said it about the Scythians, a mistake according to Herodotos (chapt. 1), because it was the Massagetae who used the women without restrictions. A sense of domination leading to hubris is quite often ascribed to conquerors, e.g. Attila (Eckhardt 1940:149, 192) and Fastida, the Gepid king (Iordanes).

¹³E.g. Ibn Rusta wrote of the *ar-Rusiya* that they make enemy males slaves but the women they use as common property.

several European countries.¹⁴ In Kievan Rus it was called *poliudie*. As Constantinus Porphyrogenetus wrote, the Rus left Kiev and travelled around in the villages of the subjugated Slavs from November till April. Such progresses were known among the Khazars as well in the 10th century when the Khazar Kagan travelled along the Volga to and from his capital. In all these cases the main economic reason was naturally to collect taxes, i.e. mostly food, and as most food could not be stored, to use it at once for the benefit of the elite troops of the royal entourage. The Avars did the same. Fredegar not only wrote that the Avars lived with the Slav women but that they collected taxes among these Slavs (V:48, Szádeczky-Kardos 1998:173). After conversion to Christianity, when the Kievan Chronicle was written, use/abuse of the housewives was certainly a great sin in Europe. But before the conversion, it was a well-known custom among many peoples, a kind of prostitution for the benefit of any guests. Such a custom is mentioned a.o. in the Karachay-Balkar edition of the Nart epos (Tatár 2002). Al-Bakri ascribed this custom to the *al-Unkalus*, who lived in the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century: according to him, they are very hospitable people, but they are “dogs”, allowing the guests to spend the night with their wives (Kmoskó 2000:I/2:258). These *al-Unkalus* are not the Hungarians who arrived in the Carpathian Basin in 895, and the first edition of al-Bakri is from 851. They were the Onogur Bulgars, whose ethnonym became “Hungaricus”, the Latin name of the Magyars among foreign peoples. The Onogurs were one of the components of the Avar Empire, they came originally from Khorasan, as al-Bakri wrote. Scholars were able to trace them back to Sogdiana (Zimonyi 2005:185), i.e. to a territory where polyandri was a usual custom among the Hephtalites (Litvinsky 1999:148) and other peoples. These Bulgarians migrated west from Pannonia: in 631-2, after a fight for dominance, they escaped with their leader, Alciocus (in other sources Alzeco, the 5th son of Kuvrat, the Bulgarian Khan), to the court of Dagobert, the king of the Franks. Dagobert sent them to the Bavarians and let them spend the winter in their houses, but then ordered to have them all killed. Only Alzeco and 700 followers with their families escaped from

¹⁴Rybakov (1984:83) was mistaken when he believed that this political-administrative visit was only known by the Slavs, particularly in Kiev and among the Polish people, which is not true. It still exists in Sweden, where it is called *Eriks gata*.

the slaughter and went to Wallucus, the Wend prince. They lived there for several years before they moved on to Italy during the reign of the Langobard king, Grimoald, i.e. between 662 and 671 (Fredegar IV 72, Paulus Diaconus, Hist. Langob. V 29, Szádeczky-Kardos 1998:212). It is possible to localize this story exactly: the subordinated but rebellious Bulgarians left Western Transdanubia, where they must have been settled in the buffer zone as a military auxiliary group, not quite as subjugated as the Slavs but not exactly proper Avars either. Their revolt was probably connected to Kuvrat's politics who liberated his Bulgars on the Pontic steppes from the last remnants of Avar rule in the 630s (Nicephorus Patriarcha, Glossar B I 130-1, Szádeczky-Kardos 1998:212). They migrated to the Bavarians, but had to flee again, this time to Wallucus, the prince of the Wends. The Dulebi lived between the Wends and the Germans (Bavarian subjects) in the Mura valley, so most probably it was among them that Dagobert ordered these refugees to settle for the winter. Their killing could have been generated by their custom of claiming special rights over their hostess as guests. In my opinion, this story was the basis of the tale about the Dulebi women, who were harnessed before the wagons of the Avars, as the Avars progressed through their territory. For local people, there could not have been much difference between the two Central Asian tribes, the Avars and the Bulgarians.

The storyteller probably inserted the harnessed women as a euphemistic expression for sexual abuse. This symbolism is not Slavic, but possibly was provided by the non-Slavic substrate in the area. Both in Carinthia and in Slovenia there survived small groups of Roman provincial inhabitants, subsequently subjugated by the Slavs (Wolfram 1995:302). They were called by different variants of the ethnonym Volcae, like Vlah and Walsch. (The name of their prince, Wallucus, attests to the same ethnonym.) The Vlachs, as Romanized provincials, were Romanized Celts in this part of the Empire. The Wends, who assimilated this substratum, did not understand the symbolism but remembered the tax-collecting perambulations and rationalized the narrative to fit these. This important evidence shows that the provincial, Romanized Celts probably knew of the myth about the chariot-drawing horse goddess. However, this was not the source of the myth about the St. Anne's Lake.

We can come closer to the source by studying local history. There were never any Romanians in this part of Transylvania, and even less Romanized Dacians, surviving 1000 years in the

mountains, coming out only when the Hungarians conquered the area, as some historians supposed. The area close to the lake did not originally belong to Székelyland, but to the Hungarian Lower Fehér county, of which parts continued to be usual holdings of the gentry while the Székelys as border guards, had different, collective gentry rights and properties. The lake and the fortress on the mountain top (the fortress Bálványos) belonged to the Apor family (Györffy 1987:II:97-129). They occur first in our sources as early as in the 10th century, when Apor a representative of the pre-Hungarian population, was the leader of a military campaign against Byzantium (SH 1937-38:I:310). The family still exists. Their surname, Apor is obviously the same as the ethnonym Avar, i.e. they belonged to an ethnic group which possibly lived in vicinity of Romanized provincial inhabitants for a long time. The Apor family owned estates mostly in the south of both Transylvania and Transdanubia (Karácsonyi 1900/1995:141-145), in both regions close to the properties of the Gyula or Khan clan. The Gyulas were the first governors of Transylvania and second among the leaders of the seven Hungarian and the three so-called Kabar tribes, who came into the country in 895. The original homeland of the Apors was in villages called after their name (the most ancient type of Hungarian place names) in Transdanubia and by the river Tisza. They must have obtained the estate in Transylvania shortly after the county was organized, obviously by the Gyula who gave his name to Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), the center of the county. This process is attested by place names which are identical with the personal names of the leaders of the 10-11th century, like Zoltán. Bálványos, situated farther east than the village Zoltán, must have been an early border guard post. Therefore it became an exempt territory after the Székelys arrived and still belonged to the original county until 1876-77. The Székelys arrived at the end of the 12th century when the king settled Saxons in their villages in Southern Transylvania to guard this part of the Hungarian border. The Apors became the local leaders of the Székelys. The family worked actively to populate their estate in Kézdi valley. We know that in the 14th century they even settled some few Russians there. Although Hungarian peasants populated the Bálványos estate before the Székelys, eastern and/or Romanized provincial traditions transmitted from the noble Apor family cannot be excluded. On the other hand, the Székelys who arrived in the Carpathian Basin before the Hungarians and have traditions about their Hun

ancestors might have remembered an eastern myth as well. Modern archaeologists have done very little work in this area, so we can still hope for some results in the future.

To what period can this story be dated? The episode that the Dulebi variant is based on happened in the 7th century. It was incorporated into the Kievan Chronicle not before the second millennium. There is a long interval between these two eras, enough to enable a rationalization of the original story. As for the Hungarian variant: St. Anne was the patron saint of the dying, therefore it was natural that she gave her name to the horse goddess, who secured fertility and also accompanied souls to the Underworld (Green 1995:186). St. Anne was already venerated in Hungary in the 12th century, with a Mass text dedicated especially to her. The first church dedicated to her name was mentioned in 1262. There are seven such churches in Székelyland (Bálint 1977:II:104). Considering that Anna, living beside the chapel, has many similarities to a *begina* or *Beguine*, a member of a lay sisterhood whose movement became first officially acknowledged in Belgium in the 12th century and is first mentioned in Hungary in the 13th century (Érszegi 1987:137, 226) and considering that any such person would probably not have been tolerated after the Reformation when Protestant princes governed Transylvania, we can place the Christianized Székely variant of the narrative in the Middle Ages.

Inasmuch as details of the chariot race are present both in the Irish myth and the Székely story, I do not think that the narratives developed independently from each other but rather survived in these two peripheries.¹⁵ The main point of the myth is the abuse of the horse goddess by making her draw a chariot. The origin of the horse-drawn chariot is debated. Some scholars believe that it was the innovation of the Indo-Iranians, used first of all for races as described in the Vedic texts (Anthony and Vinogradov 1995), others theorize that it was invented in the cities in of the Middle East (Raulwing 2000). In any case, it appears approximately in the 2nd millennium BC. However, the idea of the barbaric abuse of the horse goddess is probably older than the chariot. Rhiannon, another Celtic variant of the Celtic horse goddess was humiliated when she was made to carry

¹⁵The original myth must be very old, since Ashtarte already was the goddess of horses and chariots (Sykes 1995, 18-9). The same combination of war and chariot occurs in the story about the lady Déianeira, who was skilled both in war and in chariot driving (Apollodóros Bibliothéké VIII:1).

humans on her back and to carry hay as if she was an ass (Gantz 1976:83, 96, AaTh Q.482.4). It seems that the myth ascribes the abusive work of the mare as the cause of the infertile periods of the year, when the goddess is in the Underworld, forced to live with another husband¹⁶ than the one she had before. Her previous higher status should be regained every year, in spite of many difficulties. This is a usual motif in the Celtic myths (cf. e.g. the Mabinogion, Gantz 1976:168). The mythical separation of her two roles represents a fight of life against death and the result is fertility for one more year. A similar abuse of the female is present in the Székely myth as well, and Anna's liberation is mythical, not historical. In other words, she is a fertility goddess who rules a clearly determined region in the fertile period but who resides in the Underworld in the infertile period. The role of the horse goddess as the mistress of the territory is clearly echoed in tales that describe women plowing a furrow to protect villages against calamities. Likewise, Macha marked the boundaries of the fort Emain Macha with her brooch (Bruford 1989, 128). It is noteworthy that the solar god drives the chariot in Eurasia while the horse goddess draws it. Similarly, heroes may mark the boundary of a town with a plough while the horse goddess draws the plow.

Horses we think, were first hunted or kept for meat, later they became working animals (Makkay 1991:154-5). The horse goddess was obviously a venerated mother among some peoples, as she still is among the Székelys and in Hungarian tales. The myth of the humiliated goddess must have appeared when these three innovations occurred: the carrying of humans or burdens on the horse's back, to work harnessed to a plow and to draw a chariot. Horseback-riding is not typical for the Slavs, but tilling is, and the superstitions connected to it are very common in Eastern Europe. Riding was an absolute necessity for Hungarians, so there is no tales condemning this activity among them. But ritual chariot racing were practiced both by the Indo-Aryans, the Greek, Latin and Celtic peoples and it also occurs in the myth of the St. Anne's Lake, while it is unknown among the Slavs. The chronology and the distribution of this myth probably dates from the time when the Indo-Europeans became separated from each other and/or their way of life went through climatic

¹⁶E.g. Armenian Tsovinar, the goddess of the sea who has characteristics of a former horse goddess, sacrificed herself for the good of the country by marrying somebody against her own desires (Harutyunyan 1995:119-124).

and economic changes.¹⁷

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¹⁷Perhaps the Kentaur is created to show the adaptation of the horse to the old Hellenic culture (Kirk 1970:chapt. III/2).

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