

The Indo-European Daughter of the Sun: Greek Helen, Vedic Saranyu and Slavic Morana

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Résumé: Dans cet article, les auteurs soutiennent qu'il existe un parallèle indo-européen entre Héléne de Troie et la déesse slave Morana, qui à son tour a été proposée comme étant apparentée aux déesses baltes Saulės dukerys de Lituanie, et à la lettone Saules meita, divinités qui ont été signalées comme pouvant être également apparentées à Héléne. Les parallèles entre Héléne et les figures de l'aube védique (Ušas, Suryā et Saranyu) sont également examinés en détail. Le parallèle est suggéré à partir d'éléments communs figurant dans les textes décrivant ces divinités: l'arrière-plan généalogique, les chevaux, l'enlèvement, la fertilité, l'eau, la pomme d'or, la végétation et le cygne.

Mots-clés: Héléne de Troie, Morana, Saranyu, mythologie slave, mythologie védique, mythologie grecque.

Abstract: In this article the authors argue that an Indo-European parallel exists between Helen of Troy and the Slavic goddess Morana, who has in turn been proposed as being cognate to the Baltic goddesses Saulės dukerys from Lithuania, and the Latvian Saules meita, deities which have been indicated to be possible cognates to Helen as well. Parallels between Helen and the Vedic Dawn figures (Ušas, Suryā, and Saranyu) are also examined in detail. The parallel is suggested on the basis of common elements featuring in the texts describing these divinities: genealogical background, horses, abduction, fertility, water, the golden apple, vegetation, and the swan.

Keywords: Helen of Troy, Morana, Saranyu, Slavic mythology, Vedic mythology, Greek mythology.

The face that launched a thousand ships was likely that of a very, very old woman. While the Helen of Troy that contemporary readers of Homer are familiar with has the form of a mortal, she was, even in antiquity, considered immortal in several traditions, which shall be examined in greater details in this paper. Furthermore, it has come to light that there are several reflexes of Helen's character that figure in various other Indo-European mythological traditions, thus earning her a place among the Greek divinities that have been proven to belong to the inherited Indo-European mythological tradition.¹ In this paper, the authors shall examine two reflexes of Helen; the first comes from the Slavic-speaking world, in the form of Morana, a goddess who, at first glance, does not have much in common with Helen. A deeper look at reconstructed sacred texts referencing Morana reveal

1. For more on Helen and Indo-European myth, readers should refer to Jackson, 2006 and West, 1975. On the Indo-European origins of Greek epic see Allen, 2014, p. 1-19.

striking similarities, which shall be examined here. Slavic mythology is, at the time that this paper is being written, unfortunately not as well-known outside of Slavic-speaking circles as it deserves to be,² but, due to the archaic nature of both the Slavic languages and reconstructed Slavic myth, the Slavic world offers a unique insight into Helen's origins. For various reasons,³ the Slavs did not leave behind a large corpus of texts outlining their mythology and religious beliefs. Fortunately, however, a strong oral folk tradition has preserved ritual language used in poetry and song related to Slavic religion and myth among the various Slavic speaking peoples.⁴ Croatian philologist Radoslav Katičić, following an illustrious career in which he spent decades painstakingly researching Slavic mythology, among other topics, published a series of monographs on Slavic myth, including one dedicated to myths involving Jarilo and Morana, titled *Zeleni lug*. In this volume, he collects and interprets fragments of sacral texts involving these myths in the form of folk songs which had been orally preserved in various forms and in various Slavic languages, reconstructing through these songs fragments of proto-Slavic text, allowing us a glimpse of Slavic myths in the process; it is this corpus which will provide us with the lion's share of Slavic source material analyzed in this paper.⁵ We should note here, however, that due to the paucity and nature of Slavic textual evidence, any conclusions drawn should be viewed as tentative.

The Vedic figure of Saranyu is an incarnation of Uṣas (Dawn), which provides the oldest attestation of the Indo-European solar divinity parallel to Helen and Morana. Elements that shall be discussed in the article include similarities in genealogical background, horses, abduction, fertility, water, the golden apple, vegetation, and the swan, all of which tie together the divinities Morana, Helen, and Uṣas (Saranyu).⁶ But before examining each of these in turn, we shall spare a few words on the topic of Helen's divinity.

2. Steps are being taken to remedy this situation; English-speaking readers can now refer to Kalik and Uchitel, 2018 for an introduction on the topic; for sources on pre-Christian Slavic religion see Álvarez-Pedrosa, 2020 and Meyer, 1931.

3. The Slavs arrived on the territories which they now occupy relatively late in comparison with Greek and Italic speakers, and though the process of Christianization differed according to the territory, it can globally be said the Slavs were Christianized relatively early. Furthermore, the Slavs became literate at a relatively late date (compared to the Ancient Greeks and Romans), and the event of their literacy is tied with the process of Christianization itself, thanks to the Mission of Cyril and Methodius. For a collection of sources written in Latin or Greek pertaining to the religion of the Slavs see Meyer, 1931.

4. For more, see Ivanov and Toporov, 1974.

5. See Katičić, 2010.

6. The Sanskrit original name is *Saranyū* but in this paper we have decided to write it without diacritics for convenience as we employ similar conventions for Greek and Latin names.

Helen as a divinity

Helen of Troy's divine status is not, perhaps, universally accepted today, although it is widely accepted; however, Helen has been known as an immortal since ancient times.⁷ She is believed to have been made immortal after her death, and to have made Menelaus immortal as well, as a reward of sorts for all of the suffering that he had to endure on her account; they are said by Euripides to reside on the Isle of the Blessed.⁸ Isocrates recounts cult locations dedicated to Helen, including streams/fountains and statues; he also relates that Helen made her brothers gods, a feat that no mortal could certainly accomplish, and gave them the office of aiding sailors.⁹ This implies that not only was Helen not mortal, but that she also wielded a considerable amount of power. According to Edmunds, a cult involving Helen and her brothers is alluded to by Euripides, both in his *Helen* and in his *Orestes*.¹⁰ Most telling, perhaps, is Helen's relationship with the goddess Aphrodite; namely, Aphrodite fetches a stool for Helen, and this is athetized from the *Iliad* by Zenodotus, on account of it being improper that a goddess play handmaiden to a mortal; this behaviour is most likely the result of Helen originally being a goddess, and a powerful one at that, if Aphrodite feels the need to accommodate her.¹¹

West, in his inaugural lecture titled *Immortal Helen*, makes notice of the divine status of Helen, citing her worship as a goddess in Sparta.¹² He also backs up his claim of Helen's divinity by citing cognates from Vedic and Baltic mythology; however, he mentions only one of the Vedic dawn figures, *Suryā* (a feminine form of *Surya*, the sun god), and does not investigate the rich, mythic repertoire of the Vedic dawn goddess, *Uṣas*.¹³ As this paper shows, Vedic figures have many salient parallels with Helen. In Vedic mythology, the divine *Saranyu* is the mythic equivalent of Helen: she was seen as either the Sun's daughter or his wife and shares many characteristics with *Helena* and *Morana*.¹⁴ West investigated Helen's cognate in Baltic traditions in great detail but ignored the closely related Slavic *Morana*. Hence, this paper revisits the comparison with

7. According to West, she was worshipped as a goddess in Sparta, in which she had two shrines West, 1975, p. 5.

8. Eur. *Hel.* 1670-1679. Euripides, 1994.

9. Isocr. 10.61; Edmunds, 2007, p. 22.

10. Edmunds, 2007, p. 26.

11. Hom. *Il.* 3.492-497; Hughes, 2005, p. 275. For more on the relation between Helen and Aphrodite, see Clader, 1976, p. 12-23.

12. West, 1975, p. 5.

13. West, 1975, p. 9 focuses on the race of the gods to the sun to obtain his daughter in marriage. This only appears in the later *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 4.2 and not in the (older) *Rig Veda* as the myth of *Saranyu*.

14. The idea was first proposed by Pisani, 1928, p. 476-499. See Jackson, 2006, p. 84-93.

a special focus on the Slavic tradition, which is rarely used in Indo-European comparative studies, but deserves an equal place at the table.¹⁵

Cognates

West asserts that Helen and her brothers represent some of the Greek remnants of Indo-European myth.¹⁶ According to Edmunds, cognates of Helen may be found in the mythologies of three other Indo-European speaking cultures: Indian, Lithuanian and Latvian; these cognates are the Vedic *Suryā*, the Lithuanian *Saulės dukterys*, and the Latvian *Saules meita*, all of which are daughters of the Sun in their respective mythological traditions.¹⁷ The *Rg Veda*, in fact, offers three names of the dawn goddess *Uṣas*, *Suryā*, and *Saranyu*; for this reason the solar aspects of the deities in question will be examined.¹⁸ The etymology of *Saranyu* and the etymology of Helen's name could be reflexes of the same proto-Indo-European form, as argued by Pisani,¹⁹ although this hypothesis is complicated by the existence of a Laconic inscription found in the *Menelaion* in which Helen's name is written with a (reconstructed) initial digamma.²⁰ The most straightforward reconstruction of their original form, then, would be **seleneh₂-* or **s₂aranā*, in which case the latter form could be derived from PIE verbal root **s₂uel* 'to burn', indicating a possible affinity with the sun.²¹ An alternation between the forms **s₂uel* and **sel* finds an analogue in Nagy's reconstruction of the Indic *vas-* 'to shine', as **h₂ues-*, with some of the resulting reflexes being the Indian *uśás-* 'dawn', Latin *aurora*, and Greek ἠώς, as well to Ἑστία by way of the shorter, non-expanded root, **h₂es-*, a pattern of root variation (whereby CeC(C) has an expanded variant expressed as C₂eC(C)).²² To this list of cognates we add *Morana*, a Slavic goddess. Much as the Baltic and Slavic language groups can be thought to have a common origin in a Balto-Slavic language branch, so, too, are their mythologies closely related.²³ The Baltic cognates to Helen can be expected to have a closely related cognate in Slavic myth; this Slavic reflex of the original Indo-European deity is found in *Morana*. Little is known about Slavic deities in general, and even less is known about Slavic goddesses; two, however, are relatively well-researched,

15. For recent studies of Slavic mythology from a comparative angle see Lajoie, 2015, and Lajoie (ed.), 2019.

16. West, 1975, p. 8.

17. Edmunds, 2007, p. 2.

18. Edmunds, 2007, p. 5.

19. Pisani, 1928, p. 476-499. See now Nikolaev, 2012, p. 571.

20. SEG 26.457; Nikolaev, 2012, p. 571.

21. Nikolaev, 2012, p. 571, see also Jackson, 2006; Skutsch, 1987.

22. Nagy, 1990, p. 148-149. For more on the alternating forms, see Benveniste, 1969.

23. Katičić, 2010, p. 41.

namely Morana and her mother Mokošъ, whose name is cognate with the Old Church Slavonic word *mokrъ* ‘wet’; this etymology seems to be the most widely accepted.²⁴

Genealogy

As mentioned above, similar genealogical backgrounds link the goddesses in question. According to popular classical mythology, Helen is the only mortal daughter of the supreme god of the Greek pantheon, Zeus, and mortal woman Leda,²⁵ although in some versions of the myth it is not Leda who is the mother of Helen, but rather the goddess Nemesis, thus making her a full goddess.²⁶ Zeus has sex with Leda in the form of a swan, and from their union Helen and her brothers, the Dioscuri, were born, Helen having hatched from an egg; thus, Helen’s father is the supreme deity in the Greek pantheon, who is also the thunderer; her brothers are the twin divine horsemen,²⁷ depicted as riding white horses.²⁸

Morana’s parentage is a reflex of this same genealogy. Her father is Perun, who seems to be the *pater familias* of the Slavic gods. He is also the father of nine or ten sons, all but one of them unnamed; the only named son, Jarilo, is shown in Slavic folklore to take the shape of a horse.²⁹ Much like the also equine Dioscuri, Jarilo has a twin; here, however, we see a reversal of the sexes, in that the Dioscuri are a male set of twins in Greek myth, but Jarilo and his twin, Morana, are in Slavic mythology a female-male pair of twins.³⁰ Much as the Latvian *Saules meita* is the daughter of the Sun, so are her brothers, cognate to the Dioscuri, named *dieva dēli*, sons of god.³¹ Helen herself has a similar epithet, with the first member cognate to the aforementioned *dieva*: Διὸς θυγάτηρ;³² compare this to one of the widely used epithets for Ušas, *divás duhitár*,³³ a true cognate.

24. Katičić, 2012, p. 12; Katičić, 2011, p. 218. There have been other etymologies proposed, such as a very interesting one noted by Blažek, by which Mokošъ is cognate with the Irish Macha, derived from the proposed **Makisia*. Cf. Blažek, 2006, p.77-78; Lajoye, 2012, p. 220-222.

25. Cf. Eur. *Hel.* 17-21. Euripides, 1994.

26. *Cypria* fr. 7; Paus. 1,33; West, 1975, p. 8. For a detailed analysis of Helen’s genealogy, see Rozokoki, 2011.

27. West, 1975, p. 8.

28. See also Eur. *Hel.* 638-639.

29. Belaj, 2007, p. 355.

30. Belaj, 2007, p. 363.

31. Puhvel, 1987, p. 59.

32. Clader, 1976, p. 53.

33. Edmunds, 2007, p. 5.

To delve further into the genealogy of Helen and her cognates, one must also pause to take a look at her brothers, the Dioscuri, and their cognates, as they play an essential part in her myth and cult. The Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces, are divine twins of Indo-European origin and have numerous cognates in other Indo-European mythologies. The most well-attested cognates are the Vedic *Aśvins*, also called *Nāsatyas* (from the IE root **nes* ‘to save’ or ‘rescue’, compare the Greek Dioscuri as *σωτήρες*), and the Latvian *dieva dēli*.³⁴ The *Aśvins* have the epithets *divó napātā* (RV 1. 117. 12, 182. 1) and are described as ‘youthful’, an epithet which is shared by Castor and Pollux in Latin as well: cf. *yuvānā* (RV 1. 117. 14) and *iuvenes* (Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.6).³⁵ Much like their sister, they share the traits of being associated with horses and being bright/white; they are called *εὔιπποι* in Greek (Pindar Ol. 3. 39) and *suśvā* in Vedic Sanskrit (RV 7.68.1), both meaning ‘with good horses’; Kastor is additionally called *ἵππόδαμος* ‘Horse-tamer’.³⁶ They are both, like Helen, ‘light’. *Πολυδεύκης* is most likely derived from *πολυλεύκης*, with dissimilation; compare the Vedic epithet for the *Aśvins*, *púruścandrā* (RV8.5.32).³⁷ In Vedic mythology, their sister is the goddess of the dawn, which fits in well with the cosmic elements that we see in Helen, which will be addressed in the section on the swan.

In both the Indic and Greek traditions, the Sun has twin sons and a daughter; the Vedic *Uṣas*, however, is both the daughter of the Sun and the mother of his sons (i.e., the sons of the Sun), the *Aśvins*. As Jackson points out, the Vedic tradition stresses *Uṣas*’ maternity of the *Aśvins*, while the Greek tradition stresses the fact that the Dioscuri are Helen’s brothers.³⁸ It is possible for *Uṣas* to be both the *Aśvins*’ mother and sister because of her incestuous relationship with the Sun, her father.³⁹ According to one version of the story, Saranyu (an epithet of Dawn meaning ‘hasty’, ‘running’) disappeared from her wedding with Surya (Sun).⁴⁰ The gods hid her from mortals and put a shadow Savarna (literally ‘of the same kind’) in her place.⁴¹ When the Sun discovered the deception he went after Saranyu in the form of a stallion and she coupled with him in the form of a mare. The *Aśvins* (a participle meaning ‘having horses’) were born of this union.

34. This root is the origin of the Greek *νόστος* Jackson, 2006, p. 95-109; Nikolaev, 2012, p. 570.

35. See West, 2007, p. 186-187; Allen, 2014, p. 9.

36. West, 2007, p. 187-188.

37. Nikolaev, 2012, p. 570; West, 2007, p. 188

38. Jackson, 2006, p. 89-90.

39. RV 1.71.5, 10.61.7. See Jamison, 1991, p. 288-; Jackson, 2006, p. 66-72.

40. RV 10.72.1-2. For other sources see Doniger, 2014.

41. In a tradition that is best known to us through Euripides’ *Helen*, Helen of Troy is also replaced by a sort of shadow in her image, made out of air by the goddess Hera, and whisked off to Egypt for the duration of the Trojan war, while it is her imposter that was taken by Paris, as seen further under the heading *Abduction*.

The Slavic hero Jarilo (often called Juraj, through *interpretatio Christiana*)⁴² has a cognate in Baltic mythology usually referred to as Ivan, also a vegetational god whose coming ushers in the fertile season.⁴³ According to Katičić, the differences between the Slavic and the Baltic myth are superficial and were secondarily evolved.⁴⁴ This Baltic Ivan is a god, a fact that is more evident in the Baltic tradition than in the Slavic; the Baltic tradition will be more forthcoming in the case of other gods as well.⁴⁵

The relationship between Morana and her brother Jarilo is not only a blood relationship, but sexual as well. Helen's relationship with her brothers is not shown in classical mythology to be directly incestuous; there are, however, faint hints of incest to be found in myths involving Helen.⁴⁶ Helen's brothers are twins; Helen is later pursued by another set of two brothers, namely Agamemnon and Menelaus. While it is Menelaus that she marries, Agamemnon is the brother that secures their marriage,⁴⁷ and Clader even posits the following hypothesis: "Is it possible that the Atreidai may be Homeric hypostases of the Dioskouroi?"⁴⁸ By the same token, the Dioscuri had a replacement for Helen in the form of the Leucippides, daughters of Apollo or of Leukippos (white horse), likely a construct created to relieve the burden of incest from Helen, who were stolen by the Dioscuri during a cattle raid,⁴⁹ the motif of abduction otherwise being one intimately related to Helen.⁵⁰

Horses

Helen of Troy can be primarily associated with horses through the Dioscuri, her brothers. It is not only through her brothers, however, that Helen can be associated with horses, as there are indications that she herself was associated with horses: figures of Helen were found at the Menelaion, each depicting a woman riding a horse.⁵¹

The Dioscuri were discussed in the section on genealogy; let us recall again their epithet εἵπποι, and that Castor is also called ἵππόδαμος 'horse-tamer'. They are cognate to the Vedic *Ásvins*, whose relationship to horses is made

42. Belaj, 2009, p. 173.

43. Katičić, 2010, p. 42.

44. Katičić, 2010, p. 43.

45. Katičić, 2010, p. 44.

46. Clader, 1976, p. 52.

47. Clader, 1976, p. 52.

48. Clader, 1976, p. 50.

49. West, 2007a, p. 231-235.

50. For an excellent and detailed discussion on the myth of the abducted wife, see Edmunds, 2015.

51. Pomeroy, 2002, p. 20.

evident in their name, a participle meaning ‘having horses’. The name of their mother is originally a substantive adjective *saranyū* meaning ‘swift, running’, a term that is often applied to horses.⁵² As said, she conceives the horse twins in the form of a mare in her encounter with the Sun in the form of a horse.

In the realm of Slavic mythology, Morana’s brother Jarilo is shown to be the protector of horses, who brings fertility both to the fields and to horses. Jarilo’s connection to horses is represented in his feast day, celebrated on 27th November, which was only celebrated by horse owners.⁵³ Jarilo’s intense connection with horses is made the most evident in the following song:⁵⁴

Каня ня мю, Юрѣя ня знаю!
Я каня мю и Юрѣя знаю!

Jarilo (in the guise of Ivan) is so connected to horses that according to oral tradition he is said to ride the entire year; he arrives on midsummer eve, riding a decorated horse.⁵⁵ He is most often said in folk song to ride a white horse, which is relevant to the representation of both Jarilo and Morana as shining, white and bright, as related to their cosmic nature, as discussed below. Let us again recall here that, per Euripides, the Dioscuri, like Jarilo ride white horses as well.⁵⁶ Jarilo is also said to ride a green horse, a reminder of his vegetational nature and his fertility aspect, as seen in the following quotes:

Evo Đurda na zelenom konju.⁵⁷

Došel je, došel zeleni Juraj
na zelenom konju,⁵⁸

Morana, in texts reconstructed by Katičić, later kills her unfaithful brother in the guise of a horse, thus showing them to be twin horses; once again we are shown a change of the sexes from that which is represented in classical Greek myth, where the Dioscuri are male twin horsemen.⁵⁹ The alternation between

52. See Mayrhofer, 1986.

53. Katičić, 2010, p. 35.

54. I have no horse, I know not Juraj! - I have a horse and I know Juraj! Romanov, 1912, p. I 67; Katičić, 2010, p. 35. All translations in this paper were made by the authors of the paper unless stated otherwise.

55. Katičić, 2010, p. 42.

56. Eur. *Hel.* 638-639.

57. Huzjak, 1957, p. 23; Katičić, 2010, p. 53. “ Here comes Đurda on a green horse”.

58. “He has come, green Juraj has come on a green horse” Katičić, 2010, p. 53.

59. V. Katičić, 2010, #8900, *passim*. Morana’s name is etymologically derived from the Slavic verbal meaning to die ‘*mer-*’, along with its causative form meaning ‘to kill’ ‘*mor*’, v. Katičić, 2010, p. 310-311 and Derksen, 2014, p. 326. Perhaps this, too, has a

horses and horsemen in the two traditions reflects the close proximity between men and horses in the Indo-European proto-culture as horses played a key role in steppe societies.⁶⁰ As mentioned above, a significant number of figures of horses have been found in places dedicated to Helen; figures of other animals have been found as well, but the amount of horse figures is proportionately by far the highest; figures of Helen on a horse have been found in the Menelaion and Orthia cult centres.⁶¹ It is significant, also, that Cynisca, the first woman to have her horses win in Olympia, placed a votive figure of Helen at the Menelaion.⁶²

Abduction or Disappearance

Helen of Troy is kidnapped several times throughout her life: she is kidnapped by Theseus and saved by her brothers; she is also more famously known for having been kidnapped by Paris (Alexander) of Troy, an event which led to the Trojan war.⁶³ Morana, on the other hand, is not known to have been kidnapped herself, based on the material currently available to us; her twin brother, however, is; while Helen's kidnapping was motivated by sexual desire, Jarilo's is not; he is taken as a child by his father's (Perun) rival god, Veles, a Slavic god associated with snakes and dragons.⁶⁴ This abduction is alluded to in many Slavic folk songs, as in the following:

Ak' nas ne 'te darovali
 Mi vam bumo sinka krali,
 Sinka krali, otpelali,
 Otpelali med rožice
 Med rožice, fijolice,
 Među rajske djevojčice. ⁶⁵

Some researchers believe that an Indo-European myth concerning the abduction of a beautiful woman existed, basing their hypothesis on Greek myth

reflection in myths involving Helen, as seen in Euripides' *Helena*, in which there is an emphasis of the number of lives lost due to Helen's beauty. Zochios concludes that Morana, although connected to death, is not a death deity in the sense that she is ruler of the underworld, for more see Zochios, 2019, p. 73-79 & 91.

60. See Anthony, 2010.

61. Pomeroy, 2002, p. 20.

62. Pomeroy, 2002, p. 22-23.

63. For more on this topic see Edmunds, 2015.

64. For more on this topic see Katičić, 2010.

65. If you do not give us gifts / We will steal your son / Steal your son, take (him) away, / Take (him) away among the roses / Among the roses, the violets / Among the heavenly girls. Huzjak, 1957, p. 16; Belaj, 2007, p. 363.

involving Helen, Indian myth involving Draupadi and Celtic myths involving Guinevere.⁶⁶ As West cogently argues, the story of Helen's stay in Egypt was originally independent of the Trojan War saga;⁶⁷ It is the story of the goddess Helen who disappears, substituted by an image or a phantom (εἴδωλον).⁶⁸ Both West and Skutsch relate the choice of Egypt with Helen's affiliation with the sun, as to the early Greeks it was the southernmost land of which they knew.⁶⁹ Similarly, Saranyu suddenly disappears in the *Rig Veda*. The gods put a substitute of the same kind (Savarna) in her place. As Pisani argues, this has to do with the nature of the dawn, which quickly disappears before the advent of the sun.⁷⁰ The twin substitute of Helen is most probably an image based on twilight, the twin light of dawn. The Greek and the Indian story make sense in the light of their common solar associations.

There are myths from the various Indo-European traditions concerning the abduction of women who are shown with motifs involving vegetation and fertility. Examples of this include myths involving Ariadne and Helen, who was abducted twice, once by the same Theseus who abducted Ariadne, and who, according to some myths, was hung from a tree; in this manner she is found to be related to cults involving trees.⁷¹

The Golden Apples

The golden apple is a mythic element present both in mythos involving Helen, and in myths involving Morana. There seems to be an exchange of the sexes in the stories, making it difficult to reconstruct the original myth behind the story. In Greek myth, the apples are evidenced in several stories, elements of which show a strong affinity with the Tree of Life mentioned in Slavic and Germanic myth, leading to the conclusion that there is an Indo-European basis to the myth. This will be further discussed in the section on the Tree of Life.

The apple is closely associated with fertility. This is evident from the parallel role that it plays in Greek and Slavic myth in the choosing of a divine mate. In Greek myth, Helen is indirectly chosen to be Paris' bride through his giving of the apple to Aphrodite. In Slavic myth it is the bride who does the choosing, as evidenced in a folk song from Croatia:

Mara imala zlatnu jabuku - kirales!
Puno gospode za jabuku drže - kirales!

66. Edmunds, 2007, p. 6; see Jamison, 1994.

67. West, 1975, p. 6-8.

68. See Matelli, 2015, p. 28-46; for more on Helen's phantom, see Austin, 1994.

69. Skutsch, 1987, p. 189, West, 1975.

70. RV 10.72.1-2. Pisani, 1928, p. 476-499.

71. Edmunds, 2007, p. 15; Edmunds, 2015, p. 74; see also Edmunds, 2015, p. 169-173.

Komu jabuka, temu djevojka - kirales!
 Juri jabuka, Juri djevojka - kirales!
 Jura ju tače u ra(v)no polje - kirales!
 U ra(v)no polje, u crne gore - kirales!⁷²

Morana (here named Mara, as per *interpretatio Christiana*)⁷³ has a golden apple, and it serves the function of choosing her bridegroom; she gives the apple to her chosen mate, thus marking him as her future consort, as clearly seen in the text: “to whom the apple, to him the girl”.⁷⁴

In the Slavic oral tradition, there exists a series of songs in which thunder and lightning play with oranges and golden apples:

Ој ђевојко, душо моја,
 што си тако једнолика
 и у пасу танковита -
 кан да с’ сунцу косе плела
 а мјесецу дворе мела?
 Ни сам сунцу косе плела,
 нит мјесецу дворе мела,
 ван стајала и гледала
 ђе се муња с громом игра.
 Муња грома надиграла
 двјема - трима јабукама
 и четрима наранчама.⁷⁵

Katičić believes that the golden apples and the oranges in question represent balls of lightning, as is highlighted in the cosmic aspect of the song, that is, the personalization of the sun and the moon, as well as in the mention of thunder and lightning.⁷⁶ While this is an interesting idea, a simpler solution seems to be most appropriate in this case: thunder and lightning are contrasted with

72. Mara had a golden apple - kirales! / A lot of men vie for the apple - kirales! / To whom the apple, to him the girl - kirales! / To Juraj the apple, to Juraj the girl - kirales! / Juraj rolls it in the flat field - kirales! / In the flat field, in the black mountains - kirales! Huzjak, 1957, p. 14; Katičić, 2010, p. 91.

73. For more on *interpretatio Christiana* and Slavic pagan religion and myth, see Belaj, 2009.

74. For more see Katičić, 2010, p. 130-131 and Katičić, 2009.

75. “O maid, my love, / why are you so featureless, / and so thin in the waist? / As though you braided the sun’s hair / and swept the moon’s court? / I did not braid the sun’s hair, / nor did I sweep the moon’s court, / I stood outside and watched / how the lightning plays with the thunder. / The lightning outplayed the thunder, / with two - three apples, / and with four oranges.” Karadžić, 1841, p. 1, N. 235; Katičić, 2010, p. 217.

76. Katičić, 2010, p. 222.

the sun and the moon in a game of apples and oranges, which suggests that the fruits represent the celestial bodies. For example, apples are analogies for the Sun in Greek mythology, as the round shape of the fruit is reminiscent of the solar disc.⁷⁷ In Ossetic, Celtic, and Greek mythologies, golden apples are associated with immortality, a famous example of which is the tree of the Hesperides, guarded by a serpent in the far west, the land of the setting sun.⁷⁸ That an orange fruit resembles the sun hardly needs arguing. There is no mention of this in the Veda but a later tradition on the birth of Hanuman says that the young god was hungry and jumped at the newborn sun because he mistook it for a fruit. The Rāmāyana does not specify which fruit this was but it can be interpreted as a reference to an orange.⁷⁹

Returning again to Slavic myth, we see that the bride in question plays with her brothers in the form of thunder and lightning. The bride wins at their game, and the bride is given the golden apple by her mother to give to her chosen groom because of this. She chooses her brother, who has just returned from far away as her groom.⁸⁰ Helen, on the other hand, does not choose her bridegroom, but rather is chosen through the means of a golden apple.⁸¹

Fertility and vegetation

Helen's affiliation with fertility is not quite as marked as Morana's, but there are elements that mark her definitively as a fertility deity. The most obvious of these is the fact that she is considered the standard of beauty to which no other woman can compare. Some of her symbols include a torch, grains and pomegranate, with grains and pomegranates being commonly used as fertility symbols in mythology.⁸² Helen's association with trees is also often interpreted as a mark of her fertile nature. Helen was worshipped at the cult centre of Artemis Orthia, which was closely associated with fertility as is evident from many archaeological finds of naked figures with genitals prominently displayed.⁸³

Morana, and her holy marriage with her brother are directly related to Slavic fertility rituals. In the yearly cycle of time, time being viewed by the pagan Slavs as a cyclical event, the arrival of Jarilo heralds the beginning of spring, and his divine marriage to his sister brings about the fruitfulness of the fields; this is represented as a holy drama, likely accompanied by ritual actions. The end of

77. Anaxag. apud Geom. 293. See Littlewood, 1968, p. 171.

78. West, 2007, p. 159.

79. Rāmāyana 4.66.

80. Katičić, 2010, p. 220.

81. See Littlewood, 1968.

82. Hughes, 2005, p. 281-282.

83. Waugh, 2009, p. 159-167.

this fertile period is marked by the sacrifice of Jarilo as a horse.⁸⁴ Reflections of this same story are evidenced in a Baltic wedding song about two orphans and their marriage on a green field, indicating the deep age of the myth.⁸⁵

The beginning of the Slavic vegetational cycle seems to be marked by the call of a cuckoo bird; as is seen in the section on the swan, the cuckoo is also one of the birds associated with Morana. Katičić relates that that cuckoo's call is first heard around Juraj's feast day, and his call is taken as a sign that the fertile season is beginning. In Slavic folklore the call of a cuckoo is also associated with weddings.⁸⁶

Many Vedic hymns invoke the Dawn to bestow health, wealth and fertility. The poet celebrates the Dawn who awakens all creatures and stirs the world to movement. The Dawn opens the doors of light to provide riches in the form of cattle and 'hale heroes'.⁸⁷ The nourishing and fertile qualities of Dawn are also apparent in her comparison with the cow, a most important animal in the Vedas that provides milk and butter, essential ingredients in Vedic sacrifice.⁸⁸ The Dawn is compared to an eager wife who lets her breast spill over.⁸⁹ The fertility of Dawn also features in the myth of Saranyu, who gives birth to two pairs of twins, the Aśvins and the two progenitors of human race, Yama and Manu.⁹⁰ As an instance of multiple birth, twins are universally associated with fertility.⁹¹

Associated with both the golden apple (i.e., a fruit) and vegetation, is the reverence of Helen in the form of a tree. Spartan girls would revere a tree by carving "I am Helen's tree" into its bark on the night before their wedding and pouring libations of oil into the ground, as noted by Theocritus in his *Idylls*:⁹²

γράφματα δ' ἐν φλοιῷ γεγράφεται, ὡς παριῶν τις
ἀννείμη Δωριστί: 'σέβευ μὲν Ἑλένας φυτόν εἰμι.'⁹³

One story (related by Pausanias) featuring Helen's death has her being hung from a tree by the furies on the island of Rhodes; due to this reason she is said to have been worshipped there as Helen Dendritis:

84. Katičić, 2010, p. 187.

85. Katičić, 2010, p. 190.

86. Katičić, 2010, p. 118.

87. RV 1.113.4-5, 18.

88. RV 1.92.4, 4.52.2-4.

89. RV 1.124.7.

90. In other versions they are Yama and Yami, his female companion (RV 10.10).

91. See Meurant, 2000.

92. Hughes, 2005, p. 81-82. See also Edmunds, 2007, p. 12-15.

93. "Letters will have been carved into the bark, so that a passer-by can read, in Doric, 'Worship me; (for) I am Helen's tree.'" Theocritus, *Idyl.* 18.47-48.

καὶ αὐταὶ διαλαβοῦσαι δὴ τὴν Ἑλένην αἱ γυναῖκες ἀπάγχουσιν ἐπὶ
δένδρου, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ Ῥοδίους Ἑλένης ἱερὸν ἔστι Δενδρίτιδος.⁹⁴

Brillante believes that this sort of hanging has an initiatory function, representing the end of the youth of a young woman.⁹⁵

The reverence of a tree at the time of marriage is left over from an older mythological element; in a Russian wedding song accompanied by wedding guests who mimicked the wedding rites in the form of a performance, the wedding takes place at a tree, representative of the tree of the world, in whose branches Morana and Jarilo's father (i.e., Perun) reigns in his kingdom.⁹⁶

Water

As water plays an integral role in myths involving Helen of Troy and Morana, we shall now turn our discussion to water's role in the mythology surrounding both of these goddesses. Pausanias mentions an island off the coast of the Peloponnese as being the place where Helen and Paris first had intercourse:

ἡ δὲ νῆσος ἡ Κρανάη πρόκειται Γυθίου, καὶ Ὀμηρος Ἀλέξανδρον ἀρπάσαντα Ἑλένην ἐνταῦθα ἔφη συγγενέσθαι οἱ πρῶτον.⁹⁷

Divinities of Greek or Roman antiquity with marked sexual power are known to inhabit water or are associated with bodies of water,⁹⁸ and Helen is no exception, with a number of bodies of water dedicated to or named after her. There were, according to Pausanias, several temples dedicated to Aphrodite situated near springs that were dedicated to Helen, thus associating Helen with both love and sex personified and water, as well as several springs named after Helen.⁹⁹ Like the hanging mentioned in the previous section, bathing in some of the springs named after Helen is thought to have had an initiatory function, notably the ones on Chios and in Corinth; Edmunds links these to a *lekythos* on which Helen is depicted naked beside a tree, while Eros pours water on her.¹⁰⁰ Bathing in the waters of Helen's springs, furthermore, is implied to bring beauty and desirability to the young girls who participate,¹⁰¹ conferring onto them some of Helen's abundant charms.

94. "And the women themselves taking Helen hung her from a tree, and this is why the Rhodians have a sanctuary to Helen Dendritis." Paus. 3.19.10.

95. Brillante, 2003; Edmunds, 2007, p. 19.

96. Belaj, 2007, p. 256-259.

97. "The island of Kranæ lies across from Gythion, and Homer said that Alexander, having abducted Helen, made love with her there for the first time." Paus. 3.22.1

98. Hughes, 2005, p. 250-251.

99. Paus. 3.19.9.; Paus. 2.32.7; Paus. 2.2.3; Hughes, 2005, p. 253.

100. Edmunds, 2015, p. 177; on the *lekythos* see Shapiro, 2005.

101. Edmunds, 2015, p. 177.

Other links exist between Helen and water as well: Helen kept watch over those in danger while at sea and made St. Elmo's fire, sometimes regarded by sailors as dangerous or a bad omen.¹⁰² Incidentally, it was not only Helen who watched over sailors; after making her brothers gods, she gave them the office of aiding sailors as well, as evidenced by Isocrates.¹⁰³ In a fragment attributed to Hesiod it is said that Helen's mother is a daughter of the ocean, i.e., an Oceanid.¹⁰⁴

Water plays an important role in the holy wedding of Jarilo and Morana, in which Jarilo must cross a bridge, thus crossing over water, to get to his bride-to-be.¹⁰⁵ In many of the oral traditions concerning these Slavic deities, the groom and his bride-to-be meet for the first time by water.¹⁰⁶ In Russian song, the place in which they first make love is described as being between the sea, fields and a dark forest,¹⁰⁷ reminiscent of the scene of Helen and Paris' first sexual encounter. Worshipers of Morana would drown effigies in her image in rivers and marshes.¹⁰⁸ While Helen is associated with both fresh water and sea water, we were not able to find any instances of Morana begin associated with sea water, the absence of which is not particularly surprising for several reasons. The first of these is the aforementioned paucity of sources on Morana; the second has to do with the sea itself. The proto-Slavic word for sea, reconstructed by Derksen as **mǫrę*,¹⁰⁹ like the Latin *mare*, derived from the Indoeuropean **mori*, which, in its original form, indicated not the sea, but rather a large body of water.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, while the exact location of the proto-Slavic homeland is still being debated by researchers, new research in genetics seems to point to the basin of the Middle Dniepr as the most likely candidate, notably not on the sea shore.¹¹¹

Though it may seem counterintuitive, Vedic mythology closely associates fire with water. Agni, the fire god, is said to have been born in the waters and hides in them when the gods seek him out for sacrifice. Agni's heavenly counterpart, the Sun, gives his splendour to the waters that shine.¹¹² The name of his divine consort, 'Saranyu', is a substantive adjective (from the verb *saranyati* 'rushes, moves quickly') meaning 'running' and is applied in this sense both to flowing

102. Hughes, 2005, p. 255.

103. Isocr. 10.61; Edmunds, 2007, p. 22.

104. Hesiod frag. 24.

105. Katičić, 2010, p. 47.

106. Katičić, 2010, p. 158

107. Katičić, 2010, p. 173

108. Zochios, 2019, p. 75.

109. Derksen, 2008, p. 325.

110. Matasović *et al.*, 2016, p. 632.

111. See Rebała *et al.*, 2007.

112. See Proferes, 2007, who discusses the joint use of fire and water symbolism in royal consecration ceremonies.

rivers and running animals. It is no accident that we find a parallel formation in the river name Sarayu, and both the names are ultimately derived from the root *sar-*, *sarati* ‘flows, runs’ (used both of liquids running and animals running).¹¹³

The Swan and solar aspects

As mentioned previously, Helen is intimately connected to the swan; she was famously conceived while her father was transformed into the shape of a swan, and hatched from a swan’s egg, the shell of which was reported to have been kept as a cult relic. Pausanias describes the sanctuary of the Leucippides, Hilaeira and Phoebe, daughters of Leucippus, whose pursuit and rape mirrored that of Helen. The egg of Leda from which Helen was born hung from the roof of their sanctuary:

πλησίον δὲ Ἰλαειράς καὶ Φοίβης ἐστὶν ἱερόν... ἐνταῦθα ἀπήρηται ὦν τοῦ ὀρόφου κατελιγμένον ταινίαις εἶναι δέ φασιν ὦν ἐκεῖνο ὃ τεκεῖν Λήδαν ἔχει λόγος.¹¹⁴

While Morana is not noted to have had such a birth (although it is certainly not out of the question, thanks to the paucity of information that we have about Slavic mythology), she is associated with the swan in several Slavic folk songs; her cries at leaving her parental home are compared to the cries of a cuckoo bird and of a swan.¹¹⁵ Morana is also mistaken for a swan in the forest, because of her pale skin.¹¹⁶ She is also directly addressed as a swallow, another white bird here replacing the swan, in the following Russian song:¹¹⁷

Родимый мой батюшка по сеньям ходить
да невестушек ластушек побуживаить:
бстанья невестушки, белыи ластушки!

The association of a young bride with a bird seems to be a trope in Russian folk literature, in which women who are married come to visit their birth family in faraway places by flying to their home in the shape of a bird.¹¹⁸

113. Mayrhofer, 1986, p. s.v.

114. Paus. 3.16. “Nearby, there is a sanctuary to Hilareia and Phoebe... there, there is an egg hung from the roof, wrapped in fillets. It is said that the egg is the egg which Leda laid.”

115. Katičić, 2010, p. 118-119.

116. Katičić, 2010, p. 361.

117. “My own papa walks through the halls, to wake the swallow-daughters-in-law: Awake, daughters-in-law, white swallows!” Šejn, 1898, p. 850; there is also a version of the song in which the mother wakes the swallow-daughters, v. Šejn, 1898, p. 852, Šejn, 1898, p. 849 and Šejn, 1898, p. 847. For an analysis see Katičić, 2010, p. 124.

118. Katičić, 2010, p. 125.

Unlike Helen, Saranyu does not hatch from an egg but her father, the Sun, is born in a similar way. He is the last son of the divine Aditi and born as Mārtāṇḍa, usually interpreted as ‘dead egg’ but the second part of the compound (-*aṇḍá*) more specifically denotes ‘the contents of an egg/womb’ or ‘brood’, an amorphous mass that is yet to take shape.¹¹⁹ The association extends to the frequent Vedic connection (*bandhu*) between the sun and the solar bird.

In Vedic mythology several birds are associated with the sun. The falcon in particular is revered as the solar bird, as reflected in the shape of the altar in the Agnicayana ritual. Another solar bird is denoted by the term *haṃsa*, used for both goose and swan, and it is sometimes difficult to decide which is implied in a particular passage. However, the swan is famous for its beauty and shining feathers and hence a more appropriate solar bird.¹²⁰ The birds appear several times in the Rig Veda in connection to celestial flight and the Aśvins. In RV hymn 4.45 the poet invokes the Aśvins and depicts them standing on their chariot at dawn together with the daughter of the Sun, Sūryā. Alongside their chariot and horses, they are accompanied by swans, the solar birds.¹²¹

Your swans—honeyed, unfaltering, golden-feathered, calling ‘uhu’, waking at dawn,
swimming in water, invigorating, stroking the invigorator,
(along with them) you go to the pressings of the honeyed (soma) like
flies to honey.

The Aśvins are repeatedly invoked to come to the sacrifice like wild geese (*haṃsa*).¹²² Thus, we may conclude that the association between swans, egg and the solar family (Sun, twins horse gods and the sun’s daughter) were a part of Indo-European mythology, but particular motifs were applied differently in Greek, Slavic, and Vedic cultures.

Helen of Troy has been thought to be cognate with the dawn goddesses of the Vedic pantheon. This solar aspect of the deity is best reflected in the many descriptions of her which describe her as being shining, glaring and so forth, as hinted in above in passages describing the swan’s egg from which she was born. A statue of Helen from the 2nd century BC shows her with the Dioscuri on either side of her, while rays of light crown her head.¹²³ She is also often referred to in Homer’s epic poems as shining, gleaming and glistening; while Hughes believes that this refers to the fact that women would use oil on the fabric of their clothing to make it glisten, it is our belief that that glistening is an

119. See Norelius, 2020, p. 154-155.

120. RV 4.40.5, 10.124.8.

121. RV 4.45.4. Translation after Jamison and Brereton, 2020, p. 629-630. We disagree with their translation of *haṃsa* as ‘geese’ in this passage.

122. RV 5.78.1-3. At (8.35.8) the Aśvins are also compared to flying geese.

123. Hughes, 2005, p. 53.

exemplification of Helen's nature as celestial goddess.¹²⁴ One of her epithets in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey also alludes to this, λευκώλενος,¹²⁵ She is associated with gold, the most sun-like metal; she wore golden hair-ornaments, and spun on a golden distaff.¹²⁶ In an Idyll by Theocritus both Helen's paleness and golden nature are brought to light:

Ἄως ἀντέλλοισα καλὸν διέφανε πρόσωπον,
 πότνια Νύξ, τό τε λευκὸν ἔαρ χειμῶνος ἀνέντος·
 ὦδε καὶ ἄ χρυσέα Ἑλένα διεφαίνεται' ἐν ἀμῖν.¹²⁷

Morana is also described as shining, as in the following Russian song:

Выбирал себе невесту,
 распрекрасную королеву.
 Что не та-ли моя невеста
 среди города стояла,
 золотъм венцом блистала,
 бриллиантами освещала?
 вы секитесь ворота,
 поклоняйтесь низенько,
 вы пожалуйте, княжна, правую ручку.¹²⁸

Morana's brother is described in similar terms. He is pictured by the Belarusians as a shining young man who rides a white horse, wearing a white gown, holding a human head in his right hand and a sheaf of wheat in his left, yet another symbol of fertility.¹²⁹

In the Rig Veda Uṣas is repeatedly celebrated as the shining goddess that brings first light to the world. The Vedic poet compares her to a maiden dressed in light.¹³⁰ She removes the black robe of night and dispels shadow and darkness.¹³¹

124. Hughes, 2005, p. 106-107.

125. Clader, 1976, p. 44. We must note here, however, that λευκώλενος is used as an epithet for several other characters in Homer's epic poems and the Homeric hymns; for more see Clader, 1976, p. 41-45.

126. Pomeroy, 2002, p. 76-77, 105. Eur. *Andr.* 47-53; Hom. *Il.* 6.289-92.

127. "The rising Dawn shows a beautiful face, / O Lady Night, white spring after winter has passed, / in this way, too, golden Helen shines on us." Theocritus *Id.* 18 26-28.

128. "He chose a bride for himself / a beautiful princess, above all. / Did not my bride stand in the middle of the garden, / shining with a golden wreath, / Lit up by diamonds? / Doors, break yourselves, / bow deeply, / Please, princess, your right hand." Šejn, 1898, p. 1056; See Katičić, 2010, p. 145.

129. Katičić, 2010, p. 89.

130. RV 1.124.3-4.

131. RV 6.65.2, 7.78.

The Dawn is repeatedly celebrated as shining and brilliant in the Vedas and this image finds a clear parallel in the description of Morana and Helena.

Conclusion

Helen of Troy has captured the imagination of listeners, readers, movie watchers, *Xena: Warrior Princess* fans and many others for millennia, and our fascination for her has grown over time. We have attempted, in this paper, to shed some light on Helen's mysterious beginnings through her connection with cognate deities from other Indo-European traditions, namely the Slavic Morana and Vedic Saranyu, who were examined in detail in this work in order to determine their common motifs found in myths related to them. It has been determined that they share a number of mythological elements in common, the most important being a common genealogical background along with equine siblings and an evident connection to horses. Another common motif shared by them is that of abduction, although it is expressed differently in each of the mythological traditions. Water is yet another common motif, in these myths with a heightened sexual aspect. Further common motifs related to sexuality and fertility discussed in the article include vegetation, in particular the golden apple and its association with marriage. Finally, motifs involving swans (or, in some texts, other white birds serving as a stand in) are discussed, as well as their connection to solar deities.

While none of these common elements taken individually would point to a common origin, it is the belief of the authors of this text that all of these elements taken together can be seen as proof of a common origin of these divinities. If so, this would by extension point to a cognate relationship between Morana on the one hand, and the already established cognates of Helen: the Vedic Suryā, Saranyu, and Uṣas, the Lithuanian Saulės dukterys, and the Latvian Saules meita.

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