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The Thraco-Dacian Origin of the *Paparuda/Dodola* Rain-Making Ritual

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Abstract. This study presents an analysis of the rain-making ritual from Romania, called *Paparuda*, performed in the spring and in times of severe drought. The ritual is common also in the Slavic folklore, having the same structure. In this study, I will demonstrate that the origin of the rain-making ritual *Paparuda/Dodola* is Thracian, and that the South Slavic tribes from Balkans adopted the ritual from the Thracians. The ritual is present almost in the entire Balkan Peninsula, especially in the area inhabited by Slavs, which was Thracian before the Slavic migration from the 6th century.

Keywords: *Paparuda*, *Dodola*, Slavic mythology, Perun, Thracians, Saint Elijah

Paparuda, also called *Paparudă*, *Papalugă*, *Păpălugă*, *Paparugă*, *Babarugă*, *Băbăruge*, *Dodola*, *Dodoloaie*, *Dadaloaie*, *Dodoloi*, *Mămăruță* or *Gogul*, is the name of the magic rain-making ritual both in the Romanian mythology and the South Slavic ones (Croatians, Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians) (Paliga 2008, 50).

In the mythology of Slavs, we found out that Perun ⁽¹⁾ went to the heavenly world Prav, ⁽²⁾ where he met *Dodola*, the beautiful daughter of the god of heavens, whom he married, and she would be called *Perunica* (Перуница) or *Perperuna* (Asov 1999, 16). The hierogamy of the two results into a child, *Diva-Devana*

(*Ibidem*, 103-104; Danilov 2007, 79). ⁽³⁾ Another legend tells us that the god *Veles* steals *Dodola* on her wedding day with *Perun*. The latter will wage a mythological war against *Veles*, will defeat him and, as a result, the latter will take refuge in the underworld. *Perun* is presented as a fighter against the drought (Platov 1998, 108). There is an old song about him from *Gnjilane* ⁽⁴⁾ where he is called *Elijah*:

Let the dew appear,
Oh *dudula* dear God!
Oh *Elijah*, God bless!

⁽³⁾ In the medieval encyclopedical dictionary *Mater Verborum* from 13th century, the parents of *Devana* (*Deuana*) are *Perun* and *Letnicina* ('*děvana letničina i perunova dci*'). The manuscript was written in Latin and contains also more than 1000 comments written in the medieval Czech language. In the manuscript, the mother of *Devana* is compared to the Roman goddess *Diana* (Patera 1878, 48).

⁽⁴⁾ Settlement in Kosovo, which was called *Dardania* in Antiquity. Thracian and Illyrian tribes used to live on this territory.

⁽¹⁾ The Slavic god of thunder and lightning, similar to *Thor* in Scandinavia.

⁽²⁾ *Prav* represents the divine law applied to humans as social law, being enforced by the god *Svarog* or *Dajdbog*.

Oh Elijah, my Perun!
God bless, bless, bless, Elijah bless!
(Milojević 1870, 321).

Etymologically, the term *dodola* belongs to the Thracio-Phrygian language, which had anthroponyms and toponyms with the radical *doid-*, *dyd-* or *doudou-* (*Doidalsos*, *Doidalses*, *Dydalsos*, *Dudensis*, *Duda*, *Dudis*, *Dudisti* or *Doudoupes*) (Decev 1957, 151). This makes us think of the Thracian origin of the ritual (Bratu 2008, 3), present in the ethnic and cultural distribution area of the Thracians. The Polish historian Alexander Gieysztor considers that the term *paparudă* has Slavic origins, being derived from *Perperuna-Perunika* (god Perun's wife), while *dodole* would represent popular mythical figures associated with the rain cult (Gieysztor 1986, 47, 103). Studying the etymology of the word *Perun* we found out that the radical *per* means 'fire' (the lightning's fire), having as origin the Indo-European *pur*, 'fire'. In Thracian and Phrygian, the root *pur-* would be translated as 'having the colour of fire' – blonde hair or 'shining' (Paliga 2009, 120). The old form of the word *Perun* must have been *Pur-un*, and the Slavs would have taken from the Indo-Europeans (especially from their Thracian neighbours) only the root of the word *pur*, which means 'fire' (Paliga, Teodor 2009, 218). The Bulgarian ethnologist and historian Ivanicka Georgieva believes that the theonym *Perun* could be a pre-Slavic relic of Thracian origin forming from the root *per* (Ivanicka 1993, 232-233). The archaic Slavonic form seems to be *Prporuše*, a term met in Croatia and Slovenia (Gieysztor 1986, 49-50). The old Slavs also called Perun 'the God of fires in the Sky' or 'The God of thunder and lightning' (Paliga, Teodor 2009, 218). Therefore, the ritual is dedicated to a goddess called *Paparudă*, *Dodoloaie* or *Dodoliță* ⁽⁵⁾ by the Romanians (Vulcănescu 1985, 418), *Pirpiruna* or *Dudulețu* by the Aromanians from the Balkans (Paliga 2008, 52), *Dodola*, (pl. *Dodole*) by the Serbs, Croatians and Macedonians (*Ibidem*, 51), *Peperuna* or *Peperudă* by the Bulgarians (Vulcănescu 1985, 418). In the Romanian territory, *Paparuda* has various names depending on the region: *Paparugă*, *Peperuie* (Banat), *Papăruie*, *Papalugaia*, *Babatăț*, *Babarudă*, *Mătăhulă*, *Buduroasă-roasă*, *Păpărugă* (Ardeal), *Papălugă* (Moldavia), *Băbărugă* (Bihor). In Croatia, more exactly in

Dalmatia, we come across the variant *Preperuša* (Ovsec 1991, 170, 291). On the Greek territory we have the variants *Pipieruga* and *Perpeira* (Vulcănescu 1985, 418), which have probably come along the Slavic channel.

On the basis of the philological analysis of the term *paparudă* we may reach the conclusion that the term under examination might have Indo-European origins. The first part of the name, *papa*, derives from a common Indo-European root, as well as the Greek word *παππος* 'ancestor', 'mythical elder' or the Latin *pappus*, 'old man', 'elder'. Some researchers suggest that the second part of the word, *rudă*, has Slavic origin, therefore Indo-European too. In Bulgarian, *rudă* means 'nation' and *roždenie* might be translated as 'relative' ('blood', 'blood relative' in Russian) (*Ibidem*, 419). The Romanian folklorist and literary historian G. Dem Teodorescu considers that *paparuda* has a Thracian origin (Teodorescu 1874, 128-134). The Romanian philologist and poet Gheorghe Săulescu believes that the term *papalugă* has Greek-Latin origins (Săulescu 1982, 244). Georgieva associates the Slavic forms *dodola* (sg.), *dodole* (pl.) with the Lithuanian *dundulis* 'thunder' (Paliga 2006, 106) which is quite possible if we take into account the very close connection between Thracian and Lithuanian (both belonging to the Satem group). As far as *Dodoloaie* ⁽⁶⁾ is concerned, she appears as a pluviometric goddess, invoked by her feminine entourage (little girls who start the rain). *Dodoloaie* identifies with the Vedic god Rudra (Ghinoiu 2008, 105), a divinity of storms and winds. ⁽⁷⁾ We notice that in the magic invoking of the goddess people's pleas are addressed directly to her: 'Paparudă, rudă/come and get wet/so the rain may fall/heavily,/paparudele (plural form)/make the corn/as tall as fences' (Kernbach 1983, 540).

The time of performing the ritual varies from region to region. For instance, in Oltenia (Olt county), the ritual usually takes place on Thursdays and Sundays, between Easter and

⁽⁵⁾ In Banat and Crișana regions, *paparuda* is called *dodoloaie* or *dodoliță*.

⁽⁶⁾ For the Romanian space, the term *dodoloaia* is attested in Crișana and in the Romanian and the Serbian Banat.

⁽⁷⁾ In Vedic mythology, Maruts or Rudras are the sons of Rudra and they are responsible for rain and storm. They are described as a group of handsomely youths who travel in their chariots drawn by spotted mares or antelopes with sparkling spears. Storms and downpours of rain surround their procession, which makes the rain fall on the ground (Oldenberg 1988, 114).

Rusalii (Pentecost). In Transylvania, the ritual is performed on the Ispas day (The Ascension), that is 40 days after the Resurrection, and so it is in Bukovina, too (Moisei 2008, 106). The Aromanians from Macedonia (Macedo-Romanians) perform Pirpiruna on the second or third week after Saint Thomas' Sunday. In Dobrudja, as in other areas of Muntenia and Banat as well, Paparuda is performed by Gypsy women only (Petrovich 2007, 271), on the third Thursday after Easter (Kernbach 1983, 540). This is a result of the Christian influence upon the popular pagan remnants and due to the negative image that Gypsy women have; they are seen as witches, fortune tellers or spellbinders. Thus, what is malefic, of pagan origin, has been transferred to Gypsies who are perceived negatively by the community. In Gorj County the custom is for the ritual to be performed by boys only. ⁽⁸⁾ In Moldavia, in the time of Dimitrie Cantemir (18th century), the ritual was performed only by Romanians. In his book, *Description of Moldavia*, Cantemir narrates the Paparuda's episode in the chapter dealing with religion: 'In summer, when the crops are endangered by the drought, the peasants take a little girl, younger than ten, and dress her up with a shirt made of tree leaves and weeds. All the other little girls and children of the same age are following her and are dancing and singing around; wherever they arrive, the old women have the custom of pouring cold water on their heads. The song they are singing is approximately like this: Paparudo! Climb up the sky, open its gates, send the rain here, so the rye, the wheat, the millet and others grow well' (Cantemir 1978, 198).

In Macedonia and Bulgaria, Dodola is practiced also at the beginning of summer, when it is drought, usually on Lord's Ascension. ⁽⁹⁾ The main character, a 9-12 years old little girl, is adorned with greens and lilac (Mircevska 2005, 5). Taking the date of the ritual into account, *dodola* might have preserved certain pagan Slavic influences from the god Perun (The master of rain and thunder) (Zecevic 1975, 127-128). In the Serbian version of the ritual there are groups of boys or girls, between 12 and 15 years old, covered with leaves, lilac flowers, sometimes even cabbage leaves, who go from

⁽⁸⁾ A rain-making ritual, performed by boys, similar to that of paparuda was recorded in India as well. See the custom of the King of Rain.

⁽⁹⁾ In Mavrovo region from North-Western Macedonia, the Dodolea's ritual was held on Ascension day, on the Great Thursday, 40 days after the Resurrection.

house to house and sing. The owner of the house symbolically pours water on them (Paton 1845, 270-271). Here follows a song recorded in the first half of the 19th century:

We go through the village, hey, dodo, hey,
dodole!
and the clouds over the sky, hey, dodo, hey,
dodole!
We go faster, the clouds go faster, hey, dodo,
hey, dodole!
The clouds are ahead of us, hey, dodo, hey,
dodole!
The wheat, the wine is shared, hey, dodo, hey,
dodole!

.....
(Karadžić 1841, 111-114)

The rain-making ritual is also present in India. In his book *The Golden Bough*, the Scottish anthropologist George James Frazer mentions a certain 'King of the rain' ⁽¹⁰⁾ from Poona: 'In Poona, India, when rain is needed, the boys dress one of them just in leaves and call him King of the rain. They go then to all houses in the village; the owners or their wives sprinkle water on the King of the rain, giving everybody all kinds of food; after all houses have been visited, they take off the King's costume of leaves and throw a great party with the food they have gathered' (Vulcănescu 1985, 419).

The performing of the rituals by the girls at the beginning of their menstrual activity suggests a rite of passage from childhood to maturity. The dancing carol was accompanied by *aspersion*, ⁽¹¹⁾ which is related to imitative magic (Vulcănescu 1985, 418). The same is true for the boys performing the Dodola (Cuceu I., Cuceu M. 2008, 39) ritual. Virginity also plays an important part in the power of invoking the divinity, by means of bodily purity (Kovacevic 1985, 79).

The vegetation covering the girls plays the role of fertility (Cuceu I., Cuceu M. 2008, 31). We can also mention the pagan ritual of wedding, which makes the matrimonial relationship between the two official, where the girl is wearing a flower coronet, symbolizing her virginity on the wedding day. Spring is a season when Nature rebirths, the vegetation is pure and will not wither until the end of the year. In Serbia again (Toplica district), those who perform the ritual walk in twos and on their way

⁽¹⁰⁾ Reference is made here to the ritual dedicated to the Vedic god Rudra.

⁽¹¹⁾ Artificial rain; the body's sprinkling with water.

towards the river they stop in a cemetery where they collect a cross from the grave of an unknown soul. Then they stop in a house where a mother lives and steal a table. When they get to the river, they place the table in the middle of it, with the cross on it, in shallow waters, and all sit around it. Then, all the participants start eating a special cake made of millet and sing. After this, they let the table flow down the river:

From two ears, many grains,
From two bunches, a bucket of wine,
Hey, dodo, hey, dodole! (Nikolov 1960, 203)

In the case of the same Southern Slavs, the young ones performing the ritual are given food and food products necessary for cooking in their homes. The food is consumed by the participants during the ritual. This custom of the host offering food, money or wooden vessels was also recorded on the Romanian territory (Ghinoiu 2009, 225).

In Russia and Ukraine, the ritual exists since the medieval times. On some silver bracelets from 12th – 13th centuries we can see few women wearing shirts with improvised sleeves. They flutter those long sleeves in order to attract the rain. The Russian historian Boris Rybakov believes that the silver bracelets were used to keep tight the long sleeves before the *Rusali* starting to perform the rain-making ritual (Rybakov 1981, 283; 1967, 95).

A very interesting aspect is the fact that the inhabitants of Gorna Reka region (the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia) have not performed the Dodola's ritual ⁽¹²⁾ for 40 years (Mircevska 2005, 6). In the case of Romanians, while performing the ritual in front of the people's gates, the paparude start a rhythmic dance, clapping their hands and snapping their fingers, repeating the exclamation *Ha! Ha!* (Olinescu 1944, 329) or *Paparuda leo!* The resulting sound is similar to the one produced by the Spanish castanets. In the meantime, the mistress of the household takes a bucket full of water and throws it at the paparude (Pop 1989, 132-145). Then, a crucial event in the economy of the ritual takes place: the paparude, seeing the household mistress coming with the bucket, pretend to run away (sometimes they even do it, usually when the water is cold). They are eventually caught by the mistress of the household and 'baptised'. After the event, which

is sometimes amusing, the paparude are congratulated, and wished for a long and happy life, each being given a coin and a bowl of wheat, corn flour, wheat flour, beans, a tuft of wool or an old dress. They say that the household which has not been visited by the paparude will have a summer full of hardships.

At Aromanians, the *Pirpiruna* ritual is performed by girls. One of them, who usually comes from a poorer family, is covered all over her body with sorrel leaves, ferns, poppy flowers or with a plant called *iboj*, which is also named *Pirpirună*. The main character is accompanied by numerous girls, in whose presence she performs the ritual in front of the people's houses, invoking the rain.

Within the Aromanian communities in the Balkans, the mistress of the household has the custom of suddenly throwing water upon the paparude. Tradition says that Pirpiruna and her 'companions', after having visited all houses in the village, make a flour pie which they eat afterwards to a fountain which has a spring or a river nearby. While they are eating the pie, the girls must stand with their feet in the water of that spring or river. In the Meglen too, in the north of Greece, where the Megleno-Romanians live, the ritual is performed by a girl, who is undressed by other girls and covered with a plant called *buzeu*. Megleno-Romanians call this girl *Paparudă* or *Duduleț*. The girl goes from house to house where the mistress of the household gives her an old coin called *para de timp diznit*. After the ritual is over, the girl goes to a valley where she undresses the buzeu covering her body and throws the vegetal garment into a river. Then, the girl, together with the rest of her companions, go back home to eat the food they have been given during the performance of the ritual.

In conclusion, we may state that the Paparuda/Dodola rain-making ritual is a pan-Balkan one. Its origin can be found in the Antiquity, at the Thracians. The Slavic tribes, which massively appeared in the Balkans starting with the 6th century, took over this custom from Thracians. This is also confirmed by the fact that the ritual is performed only in the area inhabited by the Thraco-Dacians. The attestation of the Thracian anthroponym *Paparon* also confirms the Thraco-Dacian origin of Paparuda.

The Slavic origin of the ritual was supported by the etymological analysis of the word *paparudă* which, along with all its local variants, would be a derivative of the name of the Slavic god Perun and of his wife Perperuna-

⁽¹²⁾ Besides the base form *dodole*, one may also find variants such as *vajdudule*, *ojdodole* or *dozdole* in Vardar Macedonia.

Perunița. Subsequent studies have proven the contrary of these assertions, supporting a pre-Slavic origin of the god's name. At the Thracology Congress in Sofia, 2000, the Bulgarian historian and anthropologist Aleksandr Nikolaev Fol suggested a plausible explanation of this very old oronym, giving it a Thracian origin. Fol also argued that the Thracians, venerating the Pirin mountainous range in Bulgaria (South-West of Bulgaria), impressed the Slavic new-comers, and they would have borrowed the name of the mountain and transformed it into a god (litholatry).⁽¹³⁾ Therefore, the Pirin Mountain would have been 'baptised' in the honour of god Perun (Paliga, Teodor 2009, 216-217). What is sure is the fact that the radical *per* in the word Perun means 'fire' (the thunder's fire) his origin being the Indo-European *pur*, which means 'fire' (*pyros* in Greek means fire). The old form of the word *Perun* must have been *Pur-un*, and the Slavs would have borrowed from their Thracian neighbours only the root *pur*, which means 'fire', Perun being by excellence the god of the eternal fire (*ignis aeternus*) (Paliga 2009, 125).

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⁽¹³⁾ Litholatry – a cult that consists of worshipping sacred stones.

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Fig. 1 – V. Titelbacha, *Dodole*

Source: The Museum of Ethnography in Belgrade



Fig. 2 – Uroš Predić, *Dodola*



Fig. 3 – Romanian Paparuda



Fig. 4 – Peperuna at Bulgarians



Fig. 5 – Women (Rusalii) from the Eastern Slavic area performing the Paparuda/Dodola ritual (detail from the medieval silver bracelets from Russia, 12th and 13th centuries)



Fig. 6 – Russian woman performing the rain-making ritual of Dodole (photo from the end of 19th century).