Prophet Elijah as a Weather God in Church Slavonic Apocryphal Works

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Abstract: The prophet Elijah took over the role of the Slavic pre-Christian god Perun as a weather god among the East and South Slavs in the period of syncretism just after the Christianization. We can find several examples of this in the twelfth-century *Primary Chronicle* or *Tale of Bygone Years*. However, unlike other characters from the Old Testament, Elijah was not honored with extensive translations of full apocryphal works, except for a group of Church Slavonic apocryphal fragments. Nonetheless, some original works devoted to the prophet Elijah were composed, such as the encomium attributed to St. Clement of Ohrid (9th–10th c.) or the Chants from the Orthodox Soul devoted to the Apocalyptic role of the prophet (15th c.). Along these lines, we will compare the latter with the extant apocryphal fragments in order to establish the possible influence of the apocryphal works, as well as identify original Slavic motifs that could date back to the pre-Christian period.

Keywords: prophet Elijah; *Primary Chronicle*; Slavonic apocrypha; Slavonic homiletic literature; spiritual chants; Slavic pre-Christian religion

1. Introduction

As is a well-known fact, the prophet Elijah took over the role of the Slavic pre-Christian god Perun as a weather god among the East and South Slavs in the period of syncretism just after the Christianization known as dvoeverie “double faith” (Ivanov 1903; Lajoye 2015, pp. 122–37). Concretely, in this article we will focus on the Slavic cultures belonging to the so-called *Slavia Orthodoxa*, that is, the East and South Slavic countries holding the Orthodox Christian faith: Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. And we will compare the testimonies provided by several texts of different kinds that contain information regarding the biblical character of St. Elijah and his cult: chronographical, homiletic and biblical texts, both canonical and apocryphal. This way, we can distinguish the diverse influences of popular religion and beliefs in each type of text. The innovation of this article is in taking into account not only the folklore, as has been the practice until now, but also the ecclesiastical literary works, both canonical and apocryphal, with the aim of searching the degree of penetration of popular and folkloric elements in them. According to Andrei A. Orlov, writing on the Slavonic pseudepigrapha, “The majority of the Jewish extra-biblical materials that circulated in the Slavic lands came from Byzantium which exercised an unmatched formative influence on the development of the Slavic literary heritage”1. And the Slavonic pseudepigrapha, as well as other apocryphal books, have been a fertile ground for the motifs and beliefs coming from the popular religion and the folklore. However, unlike other characters taken from the Old Testament, Elijah was not honored with extensive translations of full apocryphal works, except for a group of apocryphal fragments that have been preserved in Church Slavonic. Nonetheless, some original works devoted to the prophet were created, such as the encomium attributed to St. Clement of Ohrid (9th–10th c.) and the “hybrid” genre of the spiritual chants. The spiritual chants are halfway between the popular and the ecclesiastical verses devoted to different saints and were composed starting from the second half of the 15th century.
They show a significant influence from the folklore, both from the bylina, the East Slavic oral epic narrative poems, and from the folk tales. Some authors have already studied the transformation of the heroes and gods belonging to the Slavic pre-Christian religion into Christian saints, such as Ivanov and Toporov (1974), as well as Boris Uspenskij (1982). But all of them did so based on the East Slavic folklore. In this paper we will analyze folk legends devoted to St. Elijah, as well as South and East Slavonic spiritual chants from the 15th c., comparing them with some apocryphal fragments about Elijah, in order to identify original motifs that could date back to the pre-Christian period.

2. The God Perun in the Slavic Pre-Christian Religion

One of the aspects that seem clearest in the Slavic pre-Christian religion, according to the historical sources, is that all Slavs believed in a sovereign god of thunder, which is evident from the first mention of Procopius of Caesarea in the 6th century (De bello gothico 3.14.22–30), when he speaks about the Southern Slavs, without naming this god directly: “Indeed, they believe that a single god, creator of the lightning bolt, is the sole lord of all things and they offer him sacrifices of cows and all manner of victims.” (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2021, p. 23).

This supreme divinity can be identified among the East and South Slavs with a god of whom we have a relatively significant documentation, Perun, the supreme celestial divinity, who wields lightning and rules over meteorological phenomena and the other gods. Evolutions of this name can be found in pol. piorun ’ray’ (Luczyński 2011, p. 222), in toponymy: Prohn in Pomerania (Germany), Piorunow, Peruny in Poland, Peryn in Russia, and Perin in the Balkans (Lajoye 2015, pp. 44–47). In the western area we find in Saxo Grammaticus’ Deeds of the Danes (14.39.38–45) a god Porenutius (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2021, p. 197), which may be an affective evolution with diminutive suffix of the Poruniec, Pioruniec or Piorunic type, that is, “son of Perun” or “little Perun” (Lajoye 2015, p. 47). Helmold in his twelfth-century Chronicle of the Slavs (1.52, 69, 84) speaks of a god guardian of the oaths Proue, variant Prone, who may be the very same god that we are analyzing (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2021, pp. 159–60, 162). The most interesting correspondence refers Perun to Lithuanian Perkūnas, which would come from the IE root *per- ‘to strike’ and the noun *perkwōs ‘striker’ or ‘oak, holm oak’, as attested by the Latin word quercus (Lajoye 2015, pp. 49, 51). The holm oak or oak is the sacred tree related to the god who wields the lightning, as we have ample evidence of among the Romans, the Celts, the Germanic peoples and the Greeks (Lajoye 2015, pp. 49–61, 77–79).

3. The Prophet Elijah as the God Perun in the Slavia Orthodoxa

As just mentioned in the Introduction, the prophet Elijah assumed the attributes and functions of the Slavic pre-Christian god Perun as a weather god among the East and South Slavs (Ivanov 1903; Lajoye 2015, pp. 122–37). An earlier and evident example of this can be found in the East Slavic first chronographical work, the so-called Primary Chronicle or “Tale of Bygone Years” (Russian Povest’ vremennykh let, hereinafter PVL), dating back to the beginning of the 12th century, though based on earlier materials from the second half of the 11th century (Sorlin 1961, pp. 323–26). Concretely, it appears in the entry sub anno 6452 (944) when narrating the signature of the peace treaty between the Byzantine envoys and the Rus’ representatives of Prince Igor of Kiev. As we can see in this passage, some of the Kievan Russes were already Christian (though the kingdom was still officially pagan), probably due to the precedent military campaigns of the Rus’ to Constantinople and the taking of hostages by the Byzantines, including the hostages’ subsequent baptisms. Along these lines, it is recounted that the Christian Russes took the oath in the church of St. Elias, while the Pagans took the oath by the idol of the god Perun.
PVL col. 54.1–8: заоутра призвав игорь | слы. и приде на холмь, где стояше перунъ. | покладоша уржуке свое и щить и золото. и | ходи игорь ротъ и люде его. елико поганыхъ русинъ. | а бывшъ русъ водиша ротъ и князь сбго или. же [14v] есть надь ручаеъ. конец пашъ бе! сьды. и козаръ. се бо бы сборнау цркви. мноци <бо> | бывши вараны хеанни. (Karskij [1926] 1962, p. 54) 
(54) “In the morning, Igor’ summoned the envoys, and went to a hill on which there was a statue of Perun. The Russes laid down their weapons, their shields, and their gold ornaments, and Igor’ and his people took oath (at least, such as were pagans), while the Christian Russes took oath in the church of St. Elias, which is above the creek, in the vicinity of the Pasyneha square and the quarter of the Khazars. This was, in fact, a parish church, since many of the Varangians were Christians.” (Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, p. 77)

In this, we can see clearly the equivalent mention at the same level of the church of St. Elijah and the idol of the god Perun, both sharing the same function as warrants of the oaths. An important detail of this passage is the location of the church of St. Elijah on the top of the hill, something that according to Jane Baun (2007, p. 206) was very common, both in Greek and Slavic lands. In the same East Slavic chronicle, the god Perun was already quoted as the warrant of the oaths made by the Russes when signing the Peace Treaty of the year 907 between the Byzantine Co-Emperors Leo and Alexander and the Kievan Prince Oleg. This time, Perun is invoked together with Volos, “the god of cattle”, as we can read in the following excerpt:

PVL col. 32.1–7: гдь же леший со шлексан’рому. | миръ сотвориа со шлагу. импеся по дань и роте | заховыше межы собою. целоваше кръгъ. а шлагъ водилъ на ротоу и му* ег. | по русскому закону. клашасъ | уржуемся своичъ. и пероучъ. бгомъ своичъ. и волосомъ | ско’емъ бгомъ. и оутвердила миръ (Karskij [1926] 1962, p. 32)
(32) “Thus the Emperors Leo and Alexander made peace with Oleg, and after agreeing upon the tribute and mutually binding themselves by oath, they kissed the cross, and invited Oleg and his men to swear an oath likewise. According to the religion of the Russes, the latter swore by their weapons and by their god Perun, as well as by Volos, the god of cattle, and thus confirmed the treaty.” (Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, p. 65)

Some authors have already studied the transformation of the heroes and gods belonging to the Slavic pre-Christian religion into Christian saints, such as Ivanov and Toporov (1974), as well as Boris Uspenskij (1982). But all of them did so based on the East Slavic folklore. In this paper we will go directly to the Church texts in order to look for any traces of such transformation, both in the epitheats and in the functions attributed to the prophet Elijah. With this aim, we will examine the oldest Church Slavonic work devoted to this saint, that is, the encomium attributed to St. Clement of Ohrid. This is a South Slavonic original work of Bulgarian origin that would date back to the 9th or 10th centuries. Additionally, we will analyze both South and East Slavonic spiritual chants from the 15th c., comparing them with some other apocryphal fragments, trying to identify original Slavic motifs that could date back to the pre-Christian period.

According to Jane Baun (2007, pp. 206–7), St. Elijah was a favorite of both peasants and kings in Byzantine and Slavic religious devotion. His feast day during the summer grain harvest (on July the 20th) made him a major recipient of prayers from the peasants, being commemorated also in the imperial city, Constantinople, with a large celebration, as is attested in chapter 28 of the Book of Ceremonies, compiled at the time of the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus, during the first half of the 10th c. Something similar can be said regarding the East Slavs, judging from the witness of the Primary Chronicle as to the church of St. Elijah, as well as from the spread of the works devoted to this prophet among the East Slavic lands. As Jane Baun (2007, p. 207) posits, “the attraction of Elijah was, however, more profound than merely the lure of a good picture or dramatic story. As a
Biblical figure who cared for people in concrete ways, he became the people’s champion in Orthodox popular imagination. Elijah was said in the Bible to have saved the widow and her son at Zarephath from starvation, then raised the same widow’s son from sudden death, and to have some authority over rain (1 Book of Kings, chapters 17–18). Such powers made a good relationship with the prophet an important form of farm and life insurance for a largely agricultural society with high mortality rates. From his Old Testament connection with rain, and New Testament appearance during the Transfiguration, Elijah has traditionally been closely associated with weather phenomena, especially thunder, lightning, and rain, and also mountains, in Christian weather folklore."

Jane Baun (2007, p. 208) also recounts that the connection of Elijah with weather is found as early as the Apocalypse of Paul. This is one of the most popular medieval Christian apocrypha. Originall written in Greek, most probably in Egypt in the third century or even earlier (Silverstein and Hilhorst 1997, p. 11), it was translated into Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Arabic, Church Slavonic, and Ethiopic. Ironically, the original Greek text didn’t survive, and it has come down to us in an abbreviated form preserved in only two manuscripts, dating from the 13th and 15th centuries, which was published by Tischendorf (1866, pp. 34–69). The best witness is the Latin version known as L1, which is attested mainly by two manuscripts dated from the eighth to the eleventh centuries: one of them, belonging to the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, was published by the famous Montague Rhodes James in 1893 (James [1893] 2004), and the other one, belonging to the St. Gall Kantonsbibliothek, was edited by Theodore Silverstein in 1935. This long Latin version would represent the original source with great fullness, and it agrees mostly with the Syriac (S), Coptic (C) and Old Russian (R) versions.

Regarding its contents, it develops the passage of 2 Cor 12.1–5 in which Saint Paul tells of being caught up into Paradise, into the Third Heaven. The apocryphal work gives a detailed account of this journey and continues the tour of Paul down to Hell, guided by an angel. In chapters 19–30 Paul is brought to Paradise, where he enters by the gates of gold with the names of the righteous written on them and is received by the prophets Enoch and Elijah. After that, in chapters 31–44 Paul is carried westward to Hell across the ocean surrounding the earth, where he is shown the different punishments for the sinners. Then, through the intercession of Paul and of the archangel Michael, Christ allows the damned to have a day and a night of rest from tortures on Sundays. Finally, in chapters 45–51, Paul visits Paradise for a second time, again meeting several biblical characters. The text ends suddenly during the talk with Elijah and Elisha. This is so in the Latin, Syriac and Old Russian versions (though the Syriac places the story of the discovery of the Apocalypse here, at the end). Only the Coptic goes on.

In the Slavonic tradition, as I mentioned before, the best witness is an Old Russian long version, as it is attested in a fifteenth-century manuscript belonging to the Cathedral of Saint Sophia of Novgorod (n. 1264), which was published by Tikhonravov (Tikhonravov [1863] 1970, pp. 40–58). In general, it agrees with the Latin long version L1, with some exceptions. The two excerpts that we will examine here show a full agreement with the Latin text.

The first one deals with the answer that the archangel Michael gives to the damned begging for mercy, which can be found in chapter 43:

[... ] Михаил глаголет: А(с) прев(с)вет(а) пр(а) въыхъ въ вса часы живы икако не замеданъ(а) даби еднаго ні нікаку глаголета вь кеса чады живы вько не замеданъ(а) даби еднаго ні нікаку глаголета вь кеса чады живы вько не замеданъ(а)

[..] And Michael answered and said: Hearken when Michael speaketh: I am he that stands in the presence of God always. As the Lord liveth, before whose face I stand, I cease not for one day nor one night to pray continually for the race of men; and I indeed pray for them that are upon earth: but they cease not from committing wickednesses and fornication. [... ] But I have prayed always,
and now do I entreat that God would send dew and that rain may be sent upon the earth, and still pray I until the earth yield her fruits […] (James [1924] 1983, pp. 547–48)

We see how, among his tasks of intercession, Saint Michael is also presumed to ask God to send the rain to the earth in order to grow the fruits. This way, the archangel assumes the function of a pagan god of weather and fertility. The Old Russian version fully agrees with the Latin\(^3\), while the Greek and the Syriac omit the weather attributes of Saint Michael, which are transferred to Saint Gabriel in the Greek (Tischendorf 1866, p. 62). Moreover, the text of the Apocalypse of Paul in most of the versions ends with the conversation of Paul with the prophet Elijah, who declares:

“I am Elias that prayed, and because of my word the heaven rained not for three years and six months, because of the iniquities of men. Righteous and true is God, who doeth the will of his servants: for oftentimes the angels besought the Lord for rain, and he said: Be patient until my servant Elias pray and entreat for this, and I will send rain upon the earth.”\(^4\)

Although it is based on a biblical passage (1 Kings 17.1; 18.1), this shows the emphasis of the work on the weather attributes of the saints, especially if we put it together with the former reference to Saint Michael. We already mentioned that in the dvoeverie “double faith”, the prophet Elijah was associated to Perun, the Slavic god of lightning, thunder and rain (Lajoye 2015, pp. 122–37). But as Ivanov and Toporov (1974, pp. 165–66) have already shown, in addition to Uspenskij (1982, pp. 31–32, n. 2), in the transformations of the ancient gods into Christian saints, the functions of the storm god Perun have been assumed, not by only one saint, Elijah, but by several saints, such as the archangel Michael and St. George the Dragon Slayer.

Continuing now with the panegyric sermon or encomium devoted to the prophet Elijah: it was already published by Lavrov (1901, pp. 236–80), who attributed it for the first time to St. Clement of Ohrid, based on its stylistic and linguistic features (Roždestvenskaja 1987). Angelov et al. (1970, pp. 673–706) agreed with Lavrov, including this encomium in their compilation of the selected works of St. Clement of Ohrid. However, none of the copies of the sermon that have come down to us contain the name of the Bulgarian saint as the author. Some of the variants, like the one edited by Angelov, Kuev and Kodov, ascribe its authorship to such a renowned Church Father as John Chrysostom, something that could have been due to the prestige and fame of this author, because no Greek original has come down to us. These scholars edited a Bulgarian copy of the text dating from the 13th–14th cc., while Lavrov published the edition of a Serbian redaction dating from the 14th c., which he believed to be a copy from an earlier Bulgarian original. Despite this, as Lavrov said, “it is not rare to find this sermon among our Sborniki”, that is, among the Russian or East Slavonic Miscellanies. According to Angelov et al. (1970, p. 673), most of the extant copies of the work (around 150 copies) have an East Slavonic origin, with the South Slavonic being a minority, which would show the widespread textual transmission of the work throughout the East Slavic and Russian lands. And the text can be found both inside Miscellanies and as part of the Čet’i Minei or “Monthly Readings”, the collections of translated and original Russian lives of saints organized according to the days of every month, including the Veliki Mnei-Četii (Veliki Mnei-Četii [1868] 1945, pp. 433–37), compiled during the 1530s and 1540s under the direction of Metropolitan Makarij of Moscow. Concretely, the sermon edited by Lavrov appears in the entry belonging to the 20th of July, the feast day of the saint.

Regarding its contents, as Lavrov (1901, pp. 240–48) has already remarked, most of the episodes of the life of the prophet Elijah mentioned in the sermon come from the East Slavonic translation of the first Book of Kings, and from the collections of liturgical readings, mostly from the Old Testament, known in the early Russian literature as “parimeiniki”. This is the case for the passages related to the punishment of King Ahab, making the rain to stop for three years and six months; Elijah’s retirement to the brook where he was fed
by the ravens; his stay at the widow’s house in Zarephath, saving her and her son from starvation and raising her son from a sudden death; Elijah’s victory on Mount Carmel over the prophets of Baal, with the miracle of the fire coming from heaven and burning the sacrifice offered by Elijah to the Lord, as well as the slaying of the prophets of Baal; and the transfer of the spirit of prophecy from Elijah to his disciple Elisha and the rapture of Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire with horses of fire in a whirlwind, the latter episode belonging to the second Book of Kings (2:11–14). However, the beginning of the panegyric sermon deals with the strange vision that Elijah’s father sees in a dream. Elijah’s father, who is not mentioned in any biblical work, is called either Sohab, according Lavrov’s text, or Agav, according to the copy edited by Angelov, Kuev and Kodov, while in the version of the Velikie Mineti-Chetti he is called Savak. According to Lavrov (1901, pp. 239–40), the name of Elijah’s father, together with the whole passage of his dream, would come from a short life of the prophet, the Greek original of which would not have come down to us.

The text reads as follows:

Eγ' ἥ γα σα ὑπάρχῃ ῥητορὶ καί ἐνδεχόμεθα καί οὐκ ἔσχεν ἡγ' ἑνός, ὑματίαν Ἐγάβη, ἵππος προβολής ἡ ἡγ' ἑνός, ἱππεὺς Ἰακώβου ἐνδεχόμεθα καί ἐν θηρίῳ πενεταδέλφης Ἰωάννης ἐγγένεται καί ὠρός πενεταδέλφης διὰ τὸ σέβας ἐτέλεστι. Καί ὑπέλειτο ἡγ' ἑνός ἤ χείραν καί ἐν καιρῷ δεκαετίας. “Ἡ χαίρετι τούτῳ, βλέπετε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐγγένετα καί οὐ μὴν τεκνίαν ἔχησον· καί ἔχησον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν καί ἀργον καί ῥεκανέας συμπλήρωμα, καί πολίτες παραφυλακτοί.” (Angelov et al. 1970, p. 700)

And when he was born, his father, who was called Agav, saw in a dream that some men came dressed in white garments and wrapped Elijah with fire, feeding him with flames of fire. And his father told this to the priests, and they said: “Do not be afraid, for his dwelling will be light, and his word will be a pronounced judgement, and his life will be with God the highest and he will judge Israel with sword and fire and with his zeal, and he will burn the enemies.”

This fragment could belong to an apocryphal life of Elijah that has not been preserved. The men dressed in white garments remind us of the episode of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, in which Christ appeared together with Moses and Elijah. However, we cannot help but think about a certain pagan story when reading the passage of the baby wrapped and fed with fire: the Greek myth about Demeter, goddess of the agriculture, who tried to make Demophon immortal by burning away his mortal spirit in the family hearth every night (Hom. Hymn. in Cer. 234). This possible indirect reference to the Greek mythology could support the alleged authorship of the work by St. John Chrysostom, as is attested in the Incipit of some Slavonic versions, though, as we have already mentioned, no Greek original has come down to us.

There is another apocryphal fragment at the end of the encomium that recalls the apocalyptic function of Elijah as one of the two forerunners of Christ before Christ’s Second Coming in the End Times:

Piščet’ bo sa bõ’ paki sõñatin’ vе pokladî, di’i i prîčečovatâ i v ëžëčěkh i kal’vâñčëkh obë i izlëvâõ, vûyâñç i k’ lemëw i zëjâwâõ. “Hñëstâj bo, brântë, bo ñàpi vëtra príčet’ñîs’kîn’ldîñçhto; dëskor’ bo raçruâŋštëka låjst’ ëñ; [...] I ne kûli trâl’stët’ uleëchina, ne ëñ, dêjëwënl’ ëñiñat’ ëñ i ne ñàpiñst’ ëñ. I prîcevâj’ bo, tâjës’ ëñ, tri’ di’i, ñîâj’ bo, ëñiñat’ ëñ i ñàpiñst’ ëñ. I uleëchina i vël’ tás’ ëñ, ñûj’ bo, ëñiñat’ ëñ i ñàpiñst’ ëñ. I uleëchina, bo ñàpiñst’ ëñ, dëjëwënl’ ëñiñat’ ëñ i ne ñàpiñst’ ëñ. I uleëchina i vël’ tás’ ëñ, ñûj’ bo, ëñiñat’ ëñ i ne ñàpiñst’ ëñ.” (Angelov et al. 1970, pp. 701–2)

For it is written that he will come back in the End Times and will prophesy to the nations and to the kneeling sons of Israel, crying out to the people saying: “None of you, brothers, have faith in the Antichrist enemy of God”, destroying quickly his deceit. [...] And not being able to bear his refutation, the shameful snake of Devil will kill him, not burying him. And he will remain his body like this for three days, as it is said by John the Evangelist about him in his vision: “And the spirit from God entered into him, and he stood upon his feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw him.”
This is quoting the Book of Revelation (11:11), and this apocalyptic mission of the prophet Elijah is based on the passage regarding the “two witnesses” of God who will prophesy against the Antichrist during the End Times:

Rev. 11.3–12. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. Though in the Book of Revelation, these two witnesses or prophets are not called by their names, it is easy to understand why they were identified with the prophets Enoch and Elijah in many apocryphal works, such as the Revelation of Elijah or the Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius, for they are said to have power over the waters and over the rain, and to burn their enemies with the fire going out from their mouths. Additionally, in other passages from the Old Testament both are said to have been taken to Heaven by God, knowing all the divine mysteries. While the Revelation of Elijah is only preserved in two versions (Coptic and Hebrew) the Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius was very popular among the Slavs, having many versions and Slavonic translations (Istrin 1897). In the latter, it is said that the blood of Elijah spilled by the Antichrist will burn the earth (Mil’kov 1999, p. 685).

Coming back to the panegyric sermon, it is more interesting for our purposes to analyze the epithets that are employed in order to invoke the saint. Surprisingly, we find more epithets or metaphors related to the fire and to the sun than to the rain, the lightning and the thunder, as we would expect from a storm god. Accordingly, both the saint and his miracles are compared, up to five times, with the sun, and the prophet is twice called “fire-bearer” and once “morning-star” and “golden sunbeam”. This wouldn’t fit well with a storm god and seems more in keeping with a fire and solar deity. Only once is the prophet Elijah called “storm clouds bearer”, and there is a whole sentence dealing with his powers over rain, one that differs a bit in the two editions, being more explicit in the text edited by Lavrov, that is, in the Serbian version: “(with your word shut the sky, and with your spiritual request) make it rain again and give to drink the earth, and protect the people with your wing from the wrath of God with your pure prayer”. But there are no epithets referring to the lightning or to the thunder. In the last fragment, we can see the character of Elijah as intercessor for the humans, and, in Greek, homoiopathes, that is, “having like feelings or affections, sympathetic, of like nature to ourselves”, as defined by Jane Baun (2007, p. 316). And this is exactly how Elijah is described in the New Testament’s Epistle of James (5: 16–18):

James 5: 16–18. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

The connection between the fire and the lightning and Elijah would be explained in a passage of the short life of a different saint: Andrew the Yurodivy (the “Holy Fool”), belonging to the Velikiie Minei-ˇCetii7 (under the 2nd of October), as is attested by Jacimirskij:

Молния есть сияние огня, сущаго вверху на тверди; небесный же огонь, то ты разумей огонь сущий, егоже Илия молитвою свел на полыни и на всесожжение.

Сего огня сияние есть молния. (Jacimirskij 1915, p. 329)

“The lightning is the shining of the fire that is up on the firmament; heavenly fire, you think that is the fire that Elijah with his prayer brought to enkindle and burn everything. This shining of the fire is the lightning.”

We must go to the variant of a Russian spiritual chant devoted to the prophet Elijah, which can be found in a Menologium8 or Mesiatselov of Ukrainian origin, in order to find another allusion to the lightning with reference to Elijah. It says the following:

20. Порозь Илия.Яко молния/Горит творить восходы/На коленцы огненны съдает./Четверокрыными конями тыдит; (Bessonov 1861–1863, vol. II, p. 822)

20. “The prophet Elijah like a lightning made his ascent up (to heaven), sitting on a chariot of fire, drawn by four horses.”

The spiritual chants are halfway between the popular and the ecclesiastical verses devoted to different saints that were composed starting from the second half of the 15th century. In the Russian spiritual chants, the prophet Elijah is mentioned mostly in highlighting his dual nature, earthly and heavenly, and especially his relationship to heaven/sky, omitting the link with fire or thunder:

Источниче благодарить/О Илие, въ небо взятый/Предъ ангеловъ двоекрылаты,/О Илие славны!/Илие великъ пророче,/Предъ пришествіемъ вторы предотече, (Bessonov 1861–1863, vol. I, p. 768)

“Spring of Grace./Oh Elijah, ascended to heaven/before two-winged angels./Oh, glorious Elijah!/Elijah great prophet,/before the coming of the second Forerunner,”

Here we have an allusion to Elijah’s apocalyptic function as a precursor of the second Forerunner, that is, John the Baptist, before the Second Coming of Christ. In another spiritual verse can be found an indirect reference to its meteorological aspect:

О Илие славны!/Илие великъ пророче,/Ангелы земны, человѣкъ небесны,/На земли плотъ воскресны,/На небеса возлетѣвы,/О Илие славны!/Илие великъ пророче./Ты Елисея благословилъ, Пророкомъ его поставилъ/А небеса заключилъ, (Bessonov 1861–1863, vol. I, p. 769)

“Oh, glorious Elijah!/Elijah great prophet,/earthly angel, heavenly man./On earth the flesh you resurrected./To heaven you flew./Oh, glorious Elijah!/Elijah great prophet,/You blessed Elisha,/established him as a prophet,/and closed the sky,”

Finally, there is also a spiritual chant of Serbian origin, composed later than the work described immediately above, that narrates the conflict between St Elijah and St. Nicholas during a gathering of saints around a golden table at the Agiou Pavlou Monastery at Mount Athos. In this composition, Elijah is called Gromovnik, that is, “thunder-bearer”:

Боже милиц, чуда невидена!/У Павлово светомъ манастиру/Поставлены одь злата столови,/Сви су свечи редомъ поседали:/На врхъ совре Громовникъ Илия, (Bessonov 1861–1863, vol. I, p. 578)
“Dear God, unseen miracle!/At the monastery of St. Paul/Settled at golden tables,/all the saints are sitting around:/At the head of the table is seated Elijah the thunder-bearer,”\(^{13}\)

Here can be observed the place of prominence given to St. Elijah over the other saints. The same can be found in other spiritual chants from Serbia and Montenegro, as collected by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (Karadžić [1845] 1895, pp. 1–7, 93–94):

Боже милостиви! чуда великого!/Гледах чуда при њега серцем и очима, /У Павлову светом намастиру/Постављени од злато столови, /Сви се свечи редом посадити/Наврх симе Громовник Илије, (Karadžić [1845] 1895, p. 93)

“Dear God! Great miracle!/Have been seen miracles unseen before./At the monastery of St. Paul/Settled at golden tables,/all the saints are sitting around:/At the head of the table is seated Elijah the thunder-bearer,”\(^{14}\)

And the attributes of St. Elijah are detailed in a more explicit way in another Serbian spiritual chant, when recounting the gifts given by God to the different saints:

Кађа свечи благо под јелиште;/Петар узе винце и шеницу;/И кључеве од небеског царства;/А Илија муње и громове; (Karadžić [1845] 1895, pp. 2–3)

“When the saints distributed the gifts:/Peter took the vines and the shed, and the keys of the heavenly kingdom;/And Elijah the lightning and the thunder,”\(^{15}\)

4. Conclusions

As a summary, we can say that, considering the canonical biblical texts containing references to the prophet Elijah (the First and Second Books of Kings in the Old Testament and the Revelation in the New Testament), they already contain miracles that link the prophet with the natural elements (drought, rain, fire from the sky, etc.). This could have been the original substrate for later associations with the Slavic god of thunder (Perun) among the East and South Slavs in the period of syncretism after Christianization, which was known as dvoeverie, “double faith”. However, it is not easy to prove this by employing the historical and literary sources, except the for the reference that can be found in the East Slavic Primary Chronicle (PVL) which equates the sanctuary of the god Perun and the church of St. Elijah in Kiev where the Rus’ took an oath in order to confirm the peace treaty with the Byzantines. In the context of the Church Slavonic pseudepigraphic texts, in the oldest work devoted to the prophet Elijah, the Bulgarian panegyric sermon or encomium attributed to St. Clement of Ohrid (10th c.), there cannot be found any trace of the characterization of the saint as a thunder god, with the references to rain and clouds taken to be from the biblical sources of the text. Nevertheless, a possible indirect reference to the Greek mythology can be identified, which could support the existence of a Greek original text now lost. We must wait until the 15th or 16th centuries in order to find just a few allusions to lightning and thunder associated to the prophet Elijah. Comparing the texts coming from different Slavic areas or cultures, we can distinguish the clearest characterization of the prophet Elijah with the attributes of a god of thunder in the Serbian spiritual chants and in a Ukrainian entry in a Menologium or Mesiatseslov, as well as in a Russian passage of the short life of St. Andrew the Yurodivy (the “Holy Fool”) belonging to the Velikie Mineti-Chetni of Metropolitan Makarij. As a conclusion, we can say that we have been able to identify a late and limited penetration of popular or folkloric motifs and elements in literary works, one probably coming from Slavic pre-Christian religion, and found mostly in the genres of hagiographic compilations and spiritual chants, the latter being an oral and hybrid genre which shows significant influences from folklore.

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Notes
2 Cor 12:1–5: It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.
5 Translation by the author.
6 See Note 5.
7 “Great Monthly Readings”, a collection of biblical books with commentaries and prologues, translated and original Russian lives of saints, and works by “church fathers” and Russian ecclesiastical writers, which was compiled during the 1530s and 1540s under the direction of Metropolitan Makarij of Moscow.
8 See Note 5.
9 Collection of information on the lives of the saints, arranged according to the days of the month.
10 See Note 5.
11 See Note 5.
12 See Note 5.
13 See Note 5.
14 See Note 5.
15 See Note 5.

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