

SEVENTEENTH INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLING SEMINAR OF ULSIT
“Modern Dimensions of the European Educational and Scientific Space.
Bulgarian – Sicilian Cultural Communications”

6 June 2024
University of Messina
Sicily, Italy

SUPERNATURAL FORCES AND MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN BULGARIAN AND ITALIAN
MYTHOLOGICAL IDEAS:
COMPARISON AND ANALOGIES OF SELECTED IMAGES

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Project Interdisciplinary research on beliefs and representations of supernatural and mythical creatures in Northwestern Bulgaria and their transmission through time – KII-06-75/4 - 07.12.2023





The mythological conceptions of different cultures, apart from their specificities, often have their similarities, which are sometimes even more than the differences. Mythology is rich in supernatural beings that reflect the beliefs and cultural characteristics of a people. In this context, Bulgarian and Italian mythology offer interesting analogies and similarities in their supernatural entities that intertwine with the customs, beliefs, and folklore of their societies.

A first glance reveals that Bulgarian and Italian mythologies have rich traditions of supernatural forces and mythological elements that have shaped their cultures and narratives over the centuries. And as noted, although each mythology has its own unique characteristics, there are also similarities and shared motifs between them.

In the present material, based on various studies, an attempt will be made for a brief comparison and general analysis of the similarities and differences of some of the most common characters existing in the Bulgarian and Italian folk representations, which are not only preserved, but still alive today.

The mythological representations of the Southern European peoples have their own specificity and peculiarities, which are rooted in the heritage left over from the period of Antiquity. To a large extent, ancient Greek mythology underlies these views. In all peoples and cultures, supernatural beings are perceived as those that are considered to be beyond the ordinary scope of natural laws, ordinary human experience and observation. They are fulfilled with mysticism and incomprehensibility.

They appear in popular representations and descriptions perceptions of various supernatural beings - demons, vampires, werewolves, spirits, ghosts. There are also angels, fairies, elemental beings (spirits of nature), gods and many others. About the frenzy about them is that they are something difficult to explain, but possessing a unique look, characteristics, and abilities. It is inimitable, different, and distinguished in the world around us.

Encoded in people's ideas is the understanding of the existence of a symbolic or real presence of the spiritual, mystical, or unknown in the world.



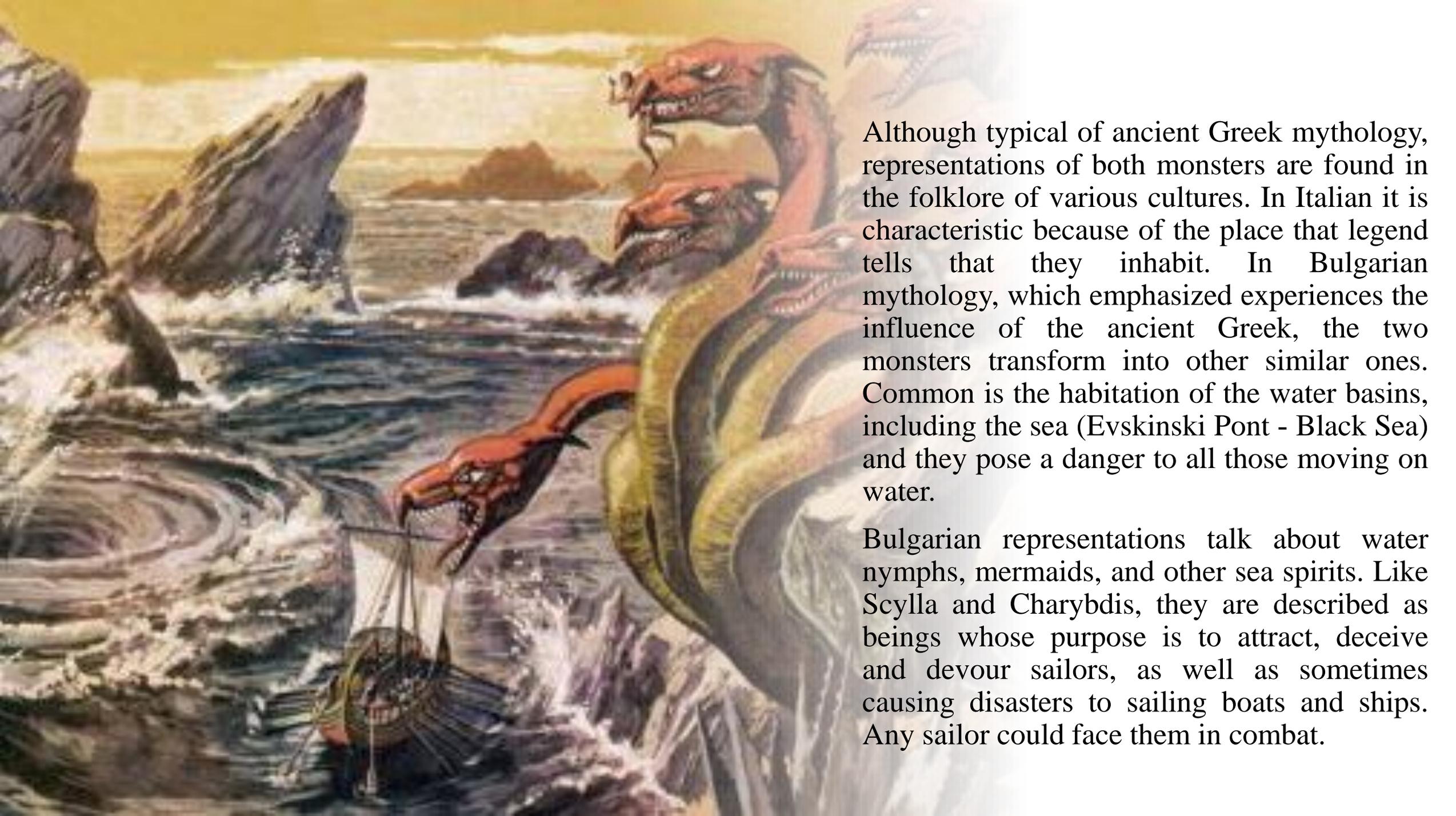


The concepts of supernatural and mythological forces that exist in the minds of the southern peoples, including the Italian and the Bulgarian, are based on characters related to ancient Greek mythology. Here we find two of the most recognizable mythical creatures - Scylla and Charybdis.



They are an invariable part of the characters that are often mentioned in numerous legends and lore. Both inhabit the sea waters and wreak havoc on mariners and ships. They surround the Strait of Messina, which separates Sicily from the main Italian coast.

Scylla is a rock shoal described as a monster that has six heads and long legs. It emerges from the rocks and impetuously attacks the passing ships, capturing the sailors with each of its heads. He lives near the Italian coast. Charybdis is the water vortex that creates huge eddies and swallows deeply everything that falls into them. It is located near Sicily. What both monsters have in common is that they are perceived as obstacles that any sailor wishing to cross these seas is forced to overcome.



Although typical of ancient Greek mythology, representations of both monsters are found in the folklore of various cultures. In Italian it is characteristic because of the place that legend tells that they inhabit. In Bulgarian mythology, which emphasized experiences the influence of the ancient Greek, the two monsters transform into other similar ones. Common is the habitation of the water basins, including the sea (Evskinski Pont - Black Sea) and they pose a danger to all those moving on water.

Bulgarian representations talk about water nymphs, mermaids, and other sea spirits. Like Scylla and Charybdis, they are described as beings whose purpose is to attract, deceive and devour sailors, as well as sometimes causing disasters to sailing boats and ships. Any sailor could face them in combat.



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**Dragon (flying
and fire-
breathing
creatures)**

These are some of the most ancient creatures known in the folklore of almost all European nations. They are associated with the belief about mythical animals that live in inaccessible places, are covered with scales, can fly and spit fire. They have extraordinary power. A peculiarity is that in most mythologies it is associated with protection from various dangers. In this way, dragons and dragons are not completely accepted as evil creatures.

In the Bulgarian public consciousness, they are powerful beings. They help certain people by guarding places associated with some sacredness.



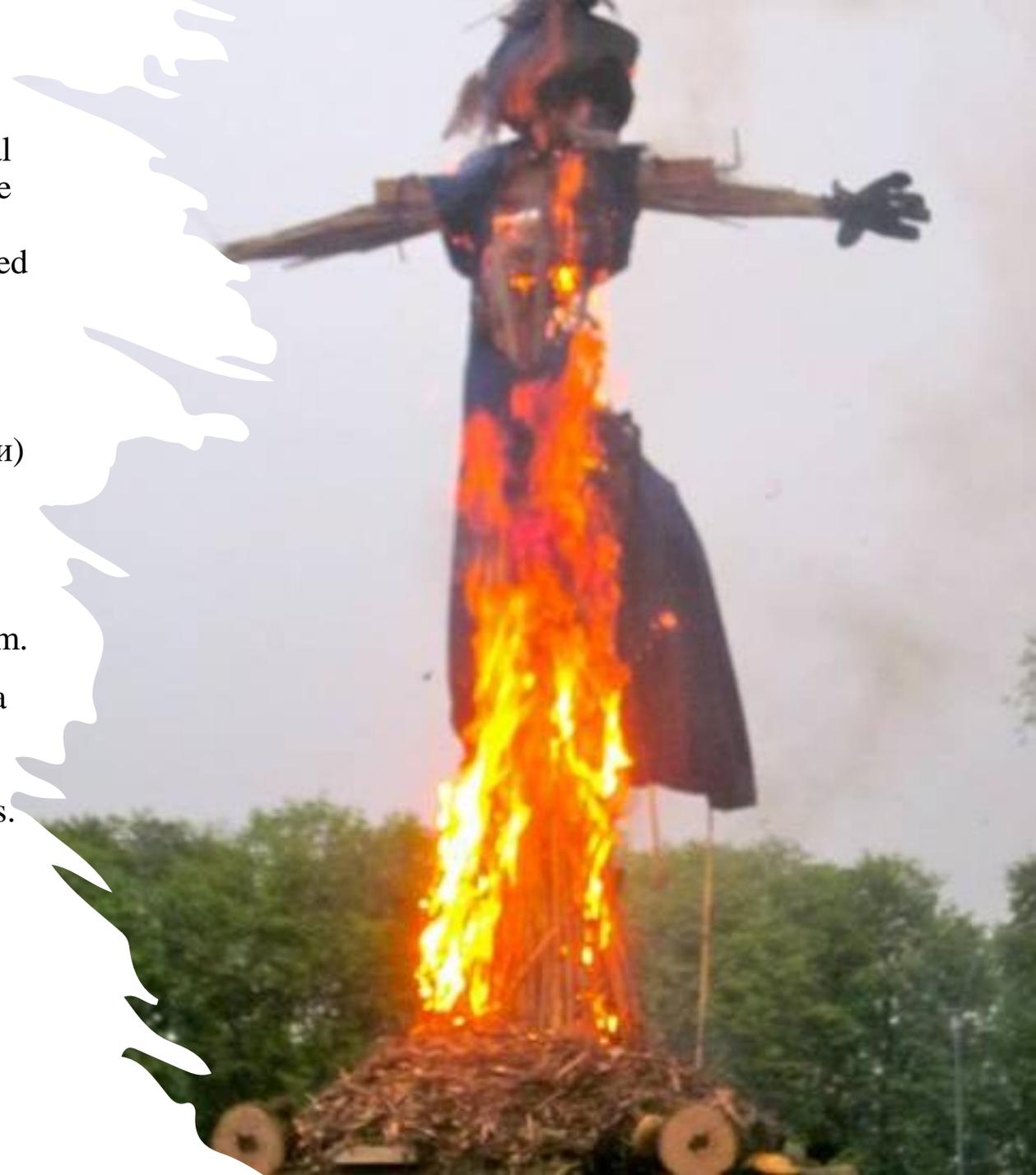
Italian mythology is more about dragons. Here, too, they connect with possessed power and assist people in their struggle to defeat evil. Therefore, they are taken as symbols of war and protection. In the Middle Ages they were part of heraldry. We find them painted or engraved as ancestral symbols.

Witches and related witchcraft

Witches and the various spells performed by them are present in Bulgarian folklore. Different names were used for them in the individual regions. They possess supernatural and magical power. The visual image is of an old and ugly woman who looks with „evil eyes“ and performs magical rituals incomprehensible to those around her. They are associated with causing harm and trouble to people. Interestingly, there are also cases in which women designated as witches do not necessarily bring only evil. There is no bad meaning in the name itself. In some regions they are called healers who use different herbs or things related to animals. They chant and cast spells when they prepare medicines (илачи) with which they heal. Some perform ritual „bullet casting“ or „wax casting“ by which they take away the evil forces attacking a certain person. These women have inexplicable abilities with which they can perform magical rituals affecting the fate and health of the people to whom they are directed. And yet, the name „witch“ is also used for them.

This shows that in the Bulgarian folklore tradition witchcraft often has a double side - positive and negative. Italian folklore also contains the notion of various witches and wizards. And here these are women who practice magic and can use their powers for both good and evil purposes. In fairy tales and legends, they are often depicted as figures of mystery and intrigue.

- „strega“ (in singular) or „streghe“ (in plural)
- „Koga“ or „Brusha“
- „Mayare“ , „Mask“ , „Jubiana“



The character of Baba Yaga

She is known as the character associated with a woman who is invariably present in many fairy tales. Sometimes it resembles that of witches. Interestingly, it has an almost legendary character. Baba Yaga is not directly present in Bulgarian folklore. It is mostly borrowed in fairy tales from the Slavic peoples. It is most prevalent in Russian folk tales. There, Baba Yaga is a mysterious, often misunderstood, and mystical old woman. Everywhere she is perceived as an old and evil witch with incredibly strong magical abilities. She lives somewhere deep in the woods, and it is hard to find her house. It is made of wood, but it is not laid directly on the ground, but is placed on chicken legs that come out of it. Around her, there are often many small mythical creatures like spirits that prevent a person from reaching the house. In turn, Baba Yaga attracts small children.

Italians have various other characters who are a known equivalent of Baba Yaga. Among the typical figures, we can mention that of Strega Nona. In southern Italy, this is what a witch with magical abilities was called. She is presented as a woman with a good-natured character, but sometimes she is capricious, as a result of which she does bad things. Despite the fact that she is not quite similar to the Slavic version of Baba Yaga, the closeness comes from the presence of magical abilities. The image of another woman - La Befana, is interesting. It is known throughout Italy. She is perceived as an old woman again. It is typical of her that she flies on a broom at night. This happens around the Christmas holidays.





Spirits of nature

These are perhaps the most frequently encountered images in the mythological representations of various peoples. They exist in Bulgarian and Italian folklore. In Bulgarian mythology, the most common are „samodivas“ and „mermaids“. The understanding about them is that these are women who inhabit forest spaces and meadows and are always near a river or lake. The popular image describes them as beautiful girls who often dance and sing. They hunt young men and kidnap them, forcing them to live in their unknown to ordinary people life and world. There are many cases where these samodivas are also associated with the attraction of natural phenomena such as storms and hurricanes. Sometimes they also interact with dragons who protect and assist them.

In the imagination of the Italians, such creatures are the "nymphs". These are also beautiful maidens who secretly perform ritual dances at early dawn. One cannot find them easily. Nymphs are considered the patronesses of nature and are usually represented as protectors of the places where they live and therefore do not allow mortal man near them. And here they are connected with certain remarkable places or phenomena in nature. Italian folklore contains another character that often runs parallel to that of the nymphs. It is about the forest gnomes (nani). Although their gender is not mentioned, it seems to assume that he is male.

Vampires and goblins

In Bulgarian mythological representations, vampires are creatures that carry the characteristics of the undead - those for whom life continues even after death. They are the result of a kind of magic. They always appear at night. They represent the dead rising from their graves at night and seeking for food the blood of the living. The vision for them is that they have the ability to change shape and cause bad things or harm to the living. In some areas they are also called „vurdulacs“, and in others they are also likened to „goblins“ or „karakonjuli“. They also have the characteristic of disembodied beings. Man is afraid of them and makes rituals to avoid meeting them.

In Bulgarian and Italian mythology, the vampire (vampiro) is a disembodied and undead being. They are always associated with death, betrayal, and bloodshed. It originates from humans, and for some it is a continuation of its path after death. But this time there is a curse attached to it. Italians refer to vampires as „werewolves“. Their main manifestation is to feed on the blood of living people. Italians believe that vampires are creatures that seek to influence human life negatively. That is why there are a series of rituals performed so that they do not approach living people and do not enter their houses.



Conclusion

- Italian and Bulgarian folklore is enriched with a series of mystical creatures. There are many nature and domestic spirits, forces living in the world around us, but often invisible to the ordinary human eye. These creatures are associated with ideas about the beauty and magic of nature. Some are listed as bad, evil, but there are also those who protect families and homes.
- The commonality between Bulgarian and Italian folklore is related to the understanding of the importance of nature and the relationship of people with it in their cultures over the centuries. Both peoples perceive mystical beings as accompanying their life cycle of development. They are full of mystery and magic. They are veiled by the incomprehensible. The inexplicable is often personified with the mystical. The search for the supernatural complements these points. They bear symbolism accompanying the beliefs, fears and values of the communities that created them. It is important to note that all mythical figures preserved in popular memory play a key role in various folklore traditions and rituals. And today, a large part of them is practiced in communities across time and space. Thus, the common features in the mythical world of Bulgarians and Italians not only reflect the similarities in their natural environments and cultural influences, but also emphasize their common human need for connection with the invisible world, as well as the belief in the forces that rule this world. And on the basis of comparative analysis, we gain a deeper insight into the diverse cultural expressions and shared mythological heritage of different societies.