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## MYTHOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF COSMOLOGY AND ANTHROPOGONY IN MACEDONIAN FOLK CULTURE

**Abstract:** This paper has analysed and established the basic mythic codes related to the creation of the World, and in the process two basic codes that constitute *the mythic foundation of creation* have been emphasised: **code no. 1 - primordial elements:** *air, water, fire/light, earth, soul* and **code no. 2 - movement**. This is followed by an analysis of the mythic ideas about Man, and in this context it is interesting to mention that the process of cultural familiarization of his own body was/is experienced and was/is carried out through the forms of the everyday contacts with the outside world. Thus, the complex symbolic systems, in which the body is allocated the roles and the function of a medium, are created by means of two mutually linked relations:

- the body as a unique entity, structure, micro-world, microcosm;
- the World, the macro-world or the macrocosm, according to the parameters of the human body as a micro-world, or microcosm.

The mythic beliefs related to the interpretation of the spatial structure of the Earth and the Cosmos contain the most archaic, initial codes of structuring human thought.

**Keywords:** cosmogony, anthropogony, creation of a world, creation of a Human being, folk culture, Macedonians

The myth, i.e. mythic thinking, is the determining category that constitutes the foundation of the entire system of perception and creation of man's ideas about himself and the world (Lévi-Strauss 1988: 103-236, Lévi-Strauss 1989: 202-228). Therefore, in popular cultures, like in the cultures of archaic communities, the myth should be considered a basic phenomenon of human culture, or, to be more precise, as the only relevant system of religiously and socially governed behaviour of the people in a certain culture (Елијаде 1992: 17-18). Therefore, the myth cannot be viewed as fiction, conceit, fantasy or pretence that the people use as a basis for their entire behaviour. On the contrary, the myth is based on the people's awareness and idea of the real events, the real stories that oblige them to follow prescribed rules. Myths encapsulate the most holy truths about people, about their ancestors, about their country, so it makes perfect sense that people regard such fundamental elements of their identity as fundamental truths in their consciousness and in their mythic knowledge and ideas (Елијаде 1992: 20).

The term **mythic reality** is perhaps the most relevant factor for expressing the totality of the people's mythic experience without sensing that they are in fact immersed in a *virtual* reality of sorts. Maybe to the researchers and for the modern man, observed

from a historical and temporal distance, the mythic ideas and mythic reality are merely mythic ideas for something that does not exist, but one should try to finally understand that while some things look mythic to us today, there is nothing mythic in the social and cultural milieu, the mindset, the awareness and the way people conceive the world and their environment. They consider none of this mythical (imaginary, fantastical); quite the contrary, they believe this to be **their only reality**.

In cultures where information is passed on and organized mainly through rites (such are, in fact, popular cultures), it is important to note that there is no homogenous semiological system used exclusively for securing, storing and processing of information, but this is done through the institution of rite. In so doing, the sign and symbolic communications system uses elements of man's natural and cultural milieu (elements of the environment, objects, parts of the home, food, clothing etc.), and, in the process, they are assigned special symbolical meanings (Байбурийн 1993: 11).

As a result of the thought processes, the people's consciousness gives birth to ideas, beliefs and knowledge that are the sole yardstick in the creation of one's image of oneself, the others and the world. Thus, the sums of the values of mythic thought "are organized along the lines of **codes** - systems of conditional signs and symbols that in their totality articulate the spiritual profile of a given community and their world view" (Kodovi I/1, 1996: 5-6).

If mythic ideas, knowledge and beliefs stem from the process of ascertaining the mythic reality, and if in most of the cases they are transformed into logical wholes from single essential units, such as codes, then the only way one can act or react in the sense of organizing or restructuring this knowledge is to **take action**, or, to be more precise, **take ritual action**. Thus, the rite is the most significant medium that allows one to act in order to intervene in mythic reality.

The rite, as an inherent anthropological and cultural phenomenon, is unique in terms of cultures and societies because it can function as the sole type of action, a type that can be created, formed, recreated and reshaped. Thus, rather than considering rite as a kind of formal representation or performance, it should be taken as an act in which the actors, in the most straightforward manner possible, participate in new societal and cultural moments, or recreate older moments of this kind in line with the principles of cyclical repetition and according to the patterns of the ancient beginnings (Ристески 2001: 1-41).

In terms mythic consciousness, the rite is the basic medium for actualizing reality. It can be used for one's gain, and with the rite or through the rite one can destroy, heal or kill.

Therefore, it is less important to delineate and understand rite as an action or activity conducted within strictly defined and socially and culturally determined patterns than *as a core, unique activity, an act of introducing order, of sorting, arranging, positioning or reordering something that had been in a certain order before this order got disturbed for one reason or another*.

## Mythic Codes of Creation

A closer inspection and analysis of folklore and ethnographic materials from the national culture of Macedonians related to the motif of the creation of the world reveals a number of fundamental mythic codes. They constitute **the mythic foundation of creation**.

### Code no. 1

#### Primordial elements:

- part
- **air** (a primordial element of the creation of God)<sup>1</sup>;
  - (creation of heavens<sup>2</sup>);
  - **water** (a primordial element of the creation of God;<sup>3</sup> a part of Earth; the Earth rests on water<sup>4</sup>; water also symbolizes the cyclic movement in nature: heavens-earth-underground-heavens);
  - **fire/light** (the Sun is a symbol of eternal heat and light; the creation of the Sun<sup>5</sup> - a life-forming force for everything

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1 "He (God) was made of air". (NMM 2/1 1998)

2 "And then he made the heavens and put on Earth..." (MFW 7/529 1972); "They dispersed in the broad sky..." (MFW 7/530 1972); "...the sky opened on the eve of Annunciation..." (MFW 7/533 1972).

"Our world stood on an ox. (...) The ox... On a fish... On water. Under the water, **the Wind was the Strongest - it carried the water**". (NMM 2/18 1988)

Even though air is not mentioned as a primordial element in stories no. 530 and 533, still, from a semiological standpoint, the code of heavens is completely identified with air.

3 „And God was created **from a dew drop, from water**. The dew drop fell, the dew drop fell on a blade of grass. But when **the Earth was not created**, the grass was there somewhere, **on the waters, somewhere around the waters**". The mythic image of water as a primordial element is absolutely confirmed because of the popular ideas for its existence even before the creation of the Earth (NMM 2/1).

„And underground, under the Earth, **there was water**. There was a strong ox **swimming in water**"(22); „**Water is under us. And our Earth rests on water. Everything rests on water**" (NMM 2/21).

4 „ Our Earth was resting on a buffalo, a large buffalo; one of his horns was turned towards the place where the Sun shines, while the other was turned towards its shade. Quite large. And the buffalo was standing on some **fish and the fish was standing on water...**" (NMM 2/18)

5 „А пак Сонцето, Месечината и ѕвездите ‘и обесил Господ за небото, како некои кандила за некој таван“ (МНУ 7/529 1972); „...По Божи благослов беше отишла топката многу далеку и застанала на едно место, та се сторило Сонце. На часот беше светнало како некое сонце утрено, кога да болсни во чоечките очи и да не можеш во него да се опулит...“ (МНУ 7/530 1972); „Кога ги напрајл Господ Сонцето и Месечината, еднакви беше ‘и напрајл да светат: Сонцето да светит дење, а Месечината ноќе...“ (МНУ 7/531 1972); „... Од топлината и светлината на сонцето, сите созданија Божји се благодариле на сонцето и дури му се поклањуеле понекој, од што многу го милуале. (...) Сиромашкото сонце едно си е, откако се создало и досега, пак си е едно. Чунки е така, ај да го ожениме за и тоа да види радост и да земи од срце в раце. (...) Ами не преесапуете оти ако го ожениме сонцето, ќе си народи едночудо деца (сонца) и кога ќе огреат сите, живи ќе не изгорат, чунки едно е сега и кога да греит силно, не се траит од горештина. (...) Кога ‘и чуло сонцето

- on Earth) (MFS 7/38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 47, 59, 50, 51 1972);
- **earth** (a primordial element of Earth;<sup>6</sup> a primordial element of the creation of Man and beasts;<sup>7</sup>)
  - **Soul** (a life-forming primordial element<sup>8</sup>).

## Code no. 2

### Movement

The basic code when emphasizing **life**. The most specific mythic-ritual form that can show that something is alive. Therefore, movement is the most important factor that shows that the object or being which is observed is alive. On the contrary, if the object or being is inactive, it means that it is approaching the state of death, or it simply signifies death. Apart from this basic meaning, **the code of movement**, depending of the shape of the movement - cyclical, centric etc., signifies the **process of primordial creation**. Cyclic movement, according to all ethnographic and folklore materials so far, symbolizes a **creation process**. In that sense, the initial magical-ritual use of the game should also be interpreted.

## Human being – the Centre of the World or in the Centre of the World

Within the very foundation of the mythic setup of the World, **Man** has put himself in the **Centre of the World**, and only then started to develop the spatial and temporal structure of his environment, both on the horizontal and the vertical axis. Therefore, today in ethnology, anthropology and in all the other social sciences<sup>9</sup>, the thesis of the **anthropocentric aspect** of the structural setup of Space and Time (Цивъян 1999: 31,

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тие зборои од 'рслано, голема мака му паднало, тики замижало и бирбаш се фрлило в море за да се удаит. На часо се стемнило, и ватило да студи времето“ (МНУ 7/534 1972).

„Првен... Госпо... го дал виделото“ (HMM 2/4)

6 „In seven days God created the world. The first day he created the Sun and the Moon, the Earth, Water and then everything else (MFW 7/2 1972)

7 „God made Adam from **earth**, he made him a human being, **he picked up mud from the ground** and he made him a human being“ (MFW 7/1 1972), „There were no people and he used the earth to make humans (4), „...He created the human being first out **of clay**...“ (MFW 7/2 1972)

8 „... He picked up some mud from the ground and created man, **and then God blew at him and brought him to life**“ (MFW 7/1 1972) „He created the human being in a week, first, out of clay, - **he gave him a soul** (MFW 7/5 1972).

9 The thesis for the anthropocentricity of human culture as a view of the world has been confirmed on a number of occasions using linguistic interpretations of Space according to the parts of the human body. Thus, a special role has been given to the human body, i.e. the terminology used for determining distance, size, quantity, as well as many other categories (Filar 1999: 68-69).

Михайлов 1994: 325-337) has been substantiated on a number of occasions, especially in popular culture. The beautiful story entitled “The first birth of our time”, which was recorded by M. Cepenkov, is the best illustration of the primordial anthropocentric code of the position of man in the World.

“The woman and all female creatures, when they were born, they were all born unable to walk, like a toddler today. Thanks God, he took all the offspring, for example the lamb from the sheep, the calf from the cow and the foal from the mare and the rest, he threw them in the air and blessed everybody, so that they can stand on their feet and start walking. And from that moment, each new offspring immediately falls on its legs.

He reached *to take the child from the woman and throw it in the air* (italic set by Lj. R.). But, the poor *woman grabbed the child and wouldn't give it away* (italic set by Lj. R.). God be praised, he couldn't take it away (not that he couldn't do it, but he wanted her to give over the child of her own will). Having no other choice, he left her and he blessed her with the words:

*- Bless you, woman; since you didn't give me the child so that I can throw it in the air, like I did with all other animals, so he should be unable to walk for more than a year; may you carry him in your hands until he can walk!*” (italic set by Lj. R.) (MFS 7/537 1972:20).

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A large number of studies have been dedicated to the study of Man and his body, and, apart from the biological aspect, and especially in research carried out in the social sciences, special emphasis has been given to analyzing the human body as a basic cultural code, or a system of symbols, that, depending on the cultural and societal tradition, can be interpreted and analyzed in a different way. In that sense<sup>10</sup>, Mary Douglas has clearly delineated the categories “biological body” and “social or symbolic body”, and, in an attempt to clarify the views of M. Moss, she thinks that Moss has postulated the relationship between nature and culture in a wrong way, concluding that the matter at hand is undoubtedly “a natural tendency” that “has appeared in response to a perceived social situation, which must always ‘wear’ its local history and culture. Thus, natural expression depends on culture” (Douglas 1994: 102-103, Гарнизов 1995: 4).

It is interesting to note that the process of cultural acknowledgement of his body was/is experienced and was/is carried out by Man through the everyday contacts with the outside world, and the creation of the complex symbolic systems in which the body assumes the roles and functions of a medium is achieved through two interlinked relations:

- understanding the body as a separate entity, structure, micro-world or microcosm according to the parameters of a macrocosm;

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<sup>10</sup> Here we will mention only the most recent research that observes the human body as one of the founding and initial media for expressing one's own views of man, as well as the fact that human body is considered to be the basic parameter in the structuring of the World (Codes 1999: 1-225).

- understanding the World, the macro-world or the macrocosm according to the parameters of the human body as a micro-world, or microcosm

## The creation of a Human Being

“Since God created heaven and earth, with everything on them and inside them, what can see and can’t be seen, alive and dead; and after God saw, him be praised, that everything he had done was done well - he wished to *also make people on this earth*, so they can live and celebrate him. (...) He only allotted himself one day to make the people.

He woke up early one morning, rolled up his sleeves, took the hoe in his hands, *dug up the ground, mudded it up*, and began making people as the potter makes pottery. First he *made his legs, then the body, then the hands, then the head, hair, ears, eyes, mouth, nose* and he added all the other tools; (...) He looked and him and laughed out of joy, because he had made them good-looking, smart and sensible.

“I have made you beautiful humans - he said to himself - *these people are a great fit for me! (...)*”. (MFS 7/553 1972: 47)

In a large number of the ethnographic and folklore materials, the mythic concept of the act of the creation of Man is believed to be divine, which, of course, could be interpreted in many ways if it was to be interpreted. First of all, it may mean that in the mythic concept of the World, God still has supremacy over Man. In fact, Man was created by God. On the other hand, however, the code of divine creation of Man can be interpreted again from the point of view of anthropocentricity in the structuring of the world. Only in that way can Man as a creature gain divinity and be a direct descendent of God.

The ethnographic and folklore materials for the creation of the human being that is available reveal another few significant pieces of information about the basic codes that are used as a foundation for the mythic concept of the creation of Man. As in the creation of the World, the basic primordial elements of creation also take part in the creation of Man, postulated by using several mythic codes.

**Earth (mud, clay, dust)** - the basic element used for the creation of Man, that is his body<sup>11</sup>.

**Rock** - an element used to create the bones of Man<sup>12</sup>.

**Fire - (heat, sun)** - that is the next significant element of creation, that is expressed in the most explicit manner in the motif of a human drying up in the sun. The mythic code of heat is closely related to **blood** as a fluid that signifies life<sup>13</sup>.

**Water (humidity)** - a necessary element for kneading the earth. It is intimately related to **the other bodily fluids and fluids that are excreted** (tears, urine); this code is to an extent opposite of heat, and it has a similar effect on popular beliefs and rites.

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11 „The Devil and God, when they were brothers, began to create man from a lump of dirt” (MFW 7/537 1972: 20, NMM 2/8), „His body from **dirt**” (Tikves Anthology 33).

12 „His bones **out of rock**” (Tikves Anthology 33).

13 „His **blood** from his **dew and the sun**” (Tikves Anthology 33).

**Air (soul, spirit, life)** - a constituent of human essence, considering the fact that Man became alive only when God blew a soul of life into the dead dirt<sup>14</sup>. In the apocryphal texts of the Middle Ages, air as a primordial element can be divided in several mythic sub-codes, such as **cloud** - used to create human thought and **wind** - used to create human breathing.<sup>15</sup>

**Sun** - some apocryphal texts of the Middle Ages reveal that God used the sun to model the human eyes.

## CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE EARTH AND OF THE COSMOS

### That World, or on the Other Side of Mythic Reality

*Mythic reality*, as can be seen from the analyses so far, has always been clearly delineated and divided into two basic categories: **our, human reality - this world, and the other, non-human reality or the reality of the other side of our world - that world**. A basic feature of both realities is that they are mutually and inextricably linked and even though they are clearly defined, one can move from one reality to the other. So, when members of one of the realities are in the space or sphere of the other reality, it is always thought that what is considered common and normal has been distorted, but this kind of movement is never considered to be fatal. In fact, that is the most significant feature of both realities, their *lack of determination in terms of recognition* (Ристески 2001: 319-320).

### The Tripartite Structure of the Earth

*“The mother has a dear son, oh, oh,*

*she is looking at **the high skies,***

***the high skies, the low earth, oh, oh...**”<sup>16</sup>*

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14 „The Devil and God made a man. And they made the lump of man, but who will give him a soul?

God tels the Devil:

- You should give him a soul!

- But - the Devil said - I can't!

And God gave a soul onto man...” (NMM 2/8 1972)

15 „His **breathing** from the wind, **his soul** from **the spirit of God**. **His sense** from **a cloud**, **his thought** from **angelic haste** (A Medieval Collection 1996: 148, 267, *Tikves Anthology* 33)

16 **AIŠK**, inv. no. K-47/1995: 9. Interlocutor Mitra Koleva, born in 1936 in the village of Krusevica, Mariovo.

The study of the separate segments, as well as understanding the foundation of the mythic logic in the perception of spatial elements of the Earth and Cosmos are perhaps the most complex anthropological issues, since one only has a limited corpus of empirical materials today related to the matter at hand. They feature extraordinary combinations of various traditions (popular, church tradition, other types of interpretation), as well as their permanent transformation having in mind the temporal distance, including the accomplishments of natural science. Thus, in the ethnographic and folklore materials for Macedonia created at the end of the 18th century, but mainly during the 19th and 20th centuries, a considerable contamination and a number of layers of information arranged on top of each other in relation to the current cultural events is evident, which makes scientific analysis even more difficult. Still, mythic ideas related to the interpretation of the spatial structure of the Earth and the Cosmos contain the most archaic, primordial codes of structuring popular thought, since from the beginning of time people tried to make sense of their thought process, to establish a relatively concrete, logical order, and to interpret their environment, even though they were dealing with events that baffle even today's people, who try to help themselves by explaining them using their own measurements and expectations.

In the ethnographic and folklore materials we have available, two basic shapes that describe the appearance of the Earth can be seen: that it is like a large **slab** or a large **ball**: "When God made the Earth, it was first *flattened* (italic set by Lj. R.). (...) He grabbed the Earth with both hands and squeezed it from all sides, so that it can become *round*..." (MFS 7/529 1972: 5).

Even though there are various popular beliefs about the shape of the Earth, they all converge in the idea that the Earth is sitting on the back of a large mythic animal, God's buffalos, ox (oxen), large rams or that it rests on sturdy, large wooden poles. Since recent ethnological research has produced some interesting data, pretty well conserved, a few snippets will be presented in their entirety, even though some of the examples have already been published. During field research, while talking to informant Dzilo Mustafoski from the village of Broshtica in Debarska Zhupa, perhaps one of the most comprehensive pieces of information about what the Earth looks like was noted, with a number of archaic elements linked to its structure: "Our earth *stood on a buffalo underneath it, a large buffalo, one of its horns was facing the place where the Sun shines, while the other was turned towards its shade*. This big. *And the buffalo was standing on a Fish, and the Fish was on Water. Under the water the Wind was the strongest - it held the Water*. That is how it used to be..." (NMM 2/18 1998: 27-28).

The materials seen here demonstrate the formation and being of the basic mythic code of the **creation and existence of Earth**, which features elements that boast an exquisitely rich mythic connotation of elements of the primordial matter. The motif of the large animal that carries the earth evokes images of the mythic animals, the divine animals that are gods themselves, or, in the more recent Christianized variants, animals that belong to God. In any case, the matter at hand are mythic protozoa from the time of creation and eternity that, apart from divinity, contain the concept of **nature and naturality**.

The ethnographic and folklore materials related to the ideas about the Earth lead to a conclusion that the mythic logic of traditional thought adheres to a **tripartite structure** of the vertical organization of Space. According to this mythic logic, Earth is made up of

**three components, three earths or three levels.** The earth that us, humans use, which is best known, is **Middle Earth**, then the earth below us is **Nether Earth**, and the earth above us is **Upper Earth**.

## Middle Earth

The space taken up by Middle Earth (Risteski 1999: 133-134, Dictionary 2000: 404-405, c. Middle Earth), according to popular belief, signifies our world, a **conquered earth** (of course, that never means total and complete assimilation/rule over its space), a space where people and animals live in their environment: "...We lived in *middle earth*. We are in the middle" (NMM 2/27 1998: 31). Or: "Our elders say that we lived in *a middle spot*. We were both above and below - *we were in the middle*" (NMM 2/29 1998: 32). In some variants of the ethnographic materials, the ideas about Middle Earth are linked to the people being tied around the belt - the middle part: "We were in the middle. In the middle. There were people below us, people above us - we were in the middle. *That's why you men wear belts, while we wear bands. That is why we tied our waists. We were in the middle...*" (NMM2/28 1998: 32). That is the space that people know well, and, at least according to the more archaic variants of ethnographic and folklore materials, the ideas of **one's own earth** (Михайлов 1994: 327-333) (which are also why the people believe they have the right and opportunity to rule it) are, still, relatively narrow, so the boundaries of their earth are usually the nearby mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes or seas. The motifs about **the end of the world** are still quite common. It is (was) believed to be behind the nearest mountain summit, where the Sun rises every morning, while it set behind the opposite summit. The Moon rises and sets behind the same summits, but in reverse order. However, most of the mythologies, including that of Macedonians, believe the end of the world is in the space where the sun sets. Usually the location of the end of the world is also the place where one can (could) communicate with the other worlds. In western Macedonia, near the high summit Krcin, there is a famous region called Babina dupka (*grandmother's chasm*). Namely, that is where the Sun usually "sinks", disappears from the line of sight of the population in the villages in Debarska Zhupa: "On our way here, we would say that the Sun is hiding in *Babina dupka*, up by the hill. The hill is called Babina dupka, here, towards Albania..." (NMM 2/48 1998: 45). These regions, whose names are quite revealing, showcase the archaic connotation of the space. In the valleys, on the other hand, the ideas about our world usually end somewhere in the distance, where the horizon "meets the earth", "where the heavens lie on the earth". Here is the end of the world. From that point, however, the mythic thought knows about an alien space, a space not ruled by humans, and his presence may be dangerous, but on many occasions it may be necessary in order to satisfy certain requirements, which can be done only **in the other world, in the mythic reality**, inhabited by other creatures, where divine influence is stronger. A beautiful story entitled Breshko - the Macedonian king holy *duf*", filled with countless elements that reveal the other side of reality, that was recorded by V. Radovanovic, reads: "...That kid, Breshko, the Macedonian king, started to fight; *he roamed the entire Earth*. And, *when there was no Earth left, he entered the Dark Earth...*" (Радовановић 1931: 160). Thus, the basic feature and attribute of the creatures that live on the Earth is their *mortality*, and for the people - *their life expectancy*, which ends in death, when they shift

to the reality of the other side, the hopelessness in front of the creatures of the other world. Middle Earth, unlike Nether Earth, is characterized by **light, daylight, sunlight**, which alludes to life, as opposed to death. In one of the stories recorded by S. Verkovic - "The three kings of the king and the golden apple tree", one can see the familiar motif of the youngest son descending to the Nether Earth. In order to climb up to the Upper Earth, or Middle Earth, populated by humans, the son addresses the eagles and tells them: "I want you to take me out to *the upper, white earth!*" (Верковиќ 4/87 1985: 391).

*The Mountains, the Lakes, and the Rivers* are part of the Middle Earth landscape, but, according to ethnographic and folklore data, their creation and features are linked to certain mythic characteristics of the things that can be found on the other side.

The idea of **two creators - the God and the Devil** permeates folklore information related to cosmogonic issues. In that context, without getting into the issue of "the dual nature of the World", according to some of the folklore information that was collected, after God created *the fields*, the Devil created *the mountains*. The motif that "devil created" the mountains confirms the thesis that according to popular belief, mountains exclusively signify the things that can be found on the other side. Christian manuscripts, however, say: "...God used the mountains to secure the earth, so that it doesn't wobble on the waters..." (*Tikves Anthology* 1987: 36). Apart from the features of mythic reality on the other side, the mountains also signify the non-human world, the world of nature. For that reason, in most of the chants, the basic code of the spell is the motif of chasing the disease out of the space occupied by people, the space filled with life, and the disease is sent to *mountains* and *forests*.

*"...Pass nine mountains,*

*pass nine konaks,*

*Go into the mountains,*

*Where it is clean and neat,*

*where you will find a colourful fountain..."* (Обремску 2001: 206)

The creation and characteristics of *lakes* are also linked to the ideas about divine, and especially demonic nature. Let us revisit the legends about the creation of the Ohrid Lake, about the keys that can be found under today's site of the St. Naum monastery: "Everybody believes that St. Naum is the keeper of the lake and that he holds the keys..." (Вражиновски 1995: 52). In the folk stories recorded by V. Radovanovic in Mariovo, it is evident that all accounts related to water surfaces include mythic creatures - the *zmey*, the *lamia*<sup>17</sup>, the fury: "Since a lake can't exist without *zmeys* and *lamias*" (Радовановић 1931: 170). Or: "In our village, Mariovo, our elders say that on Visoka there used to be a lake. In Visocko Ezero (*tall lake*) the *zmey* used to live; he would bathe in it. The *zmey* was from Pelister, from the direction of Bitola. (...) The obstructed lake became a puddle. (...) The folk erected a marble rock, and the Turk saw a large beast, it appeared from the

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<sup>17</sup> both *lamia* and *zmey* are translated with the word 'dragon' in English (translator's note)

obstructed lake. This *water monster was a fairy, with twelve heads and four legs, gray hair and horse eyes...*” (Радовановић 1931: 170). The lakes are the fairies’ favourite locations. The fairies bathe in the highest mountain lakes, and they trap, bewitch and bewilder whoever comes near them.

**The River**, as already mentioned in the segment covering the cultural topography of the region, is quite significant when conceiving the space. It is evident that the river and the riverbed are in the centre of the spatial structure of virtually every region, and it represents an axis which is used as a basis for organizing the surrounding space. Because of the continuous flow of the river in the riverbeds, the mythic ideas about the river are linked to the concept of **progression, continuous movement**, which absolutely points to the infinite cosmic time. Because of these qualifications of the River, the popular accounts contain several variants of a more subtle differentiation of the Rivers, and, accordingly, a different ritual use. If the category of Rivers that flow continually and never run dry evoke the abovementioned connotation, then the rivers that do run dry in certain periods of the year signify the opposite, i.e. **interruption and inconsistency**. Other rivers bust out of the riverbed after a pouring rain and create a devastating torrent. According to popular belief, they are unpredictable, and therefore they are called **crazy**. In Macedonian toponymy, many rivers are called **Luda Mara** (*crazy Mara*<sup>18</sup>) (in the Valandovo region) etc. Before the onset of the torrential water, this type of rivers in some parts of Macedonia, such as in Poreche, are used as a source of the so-called **uplavna voda** (*anti-fright water*), which has healing powers and is used in the chants against uplav (*fright*). Such an understanding of the River within the micro-region is of exceptional significance, since it is one of the most significant natural factors for a better life.

However, apart from the natural features, the River has appropriated additional cultural features, usually mythic. In certain regions of Macedonia, rivers are simply called **reka** (*river*), but the more significant rivers in the regions that are also the main stem of the other rivers, are frequently called **Golema** (*large*), **Golema Reka** (*large river*) or **Velika** (*grand*). According to the results of the field research carried out so far, this naming system is used for river Treska, which, quite tellingly, is called **Velika** (*grand*), and then **Golema** (*large*) upstream, before the river is formed. The similar goes for river Vardar. For Crna Reka, some people use the designation **Golema Reka** (*large river*) or just **Reka** (*river*). This is the source of information for a key aspect of how water, i.e. rivers are treated, in the cultural conception of Space, which reflects the meaning, but also the associated mythic connotation. In fact, mythic thought during the many years of creation and recreation shaped the idea of a **mythic river** (Цивъян 1999: 167-203), that is not only of paramount significance for life on earth and is a water communication artery, but is also an insurmountable barrier that splits Space in two. In fact, it is well known today that the ancient name of river Vardar, Axios, means ‘axis’, which shows quite clearly that the River is believed to be an important axis used as a basis for constructing Space, and, at the same time, this points to its exceptional significance for its survival. On the other hand, however, river Vardar is the key marker that divides the territory of Macedonia in two halves - eastern and western Macedonia. The mythic river also acts as a link between our and the other world, because of the concept that it “stems” from the other world, courses through our world and goes “back to that world”. So, it is also considered to be

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18 *Mara* is an abbreviated form of the name Maria (translator’s note)

one of the many possible links between worlds. One should also remember the motifs used for describing the coming of newborns in this world “by river” - “the river brought him/her”, as well as the myriad rites related to “letting the first fruits in the river”, the ritual “drowning” (of a turtle in case of a drought) or “bathing” (during Epiphany), as well as letting everything that is believed to be bad or unnecessary in the human world “run in water”, which means that the water will take it away or purify it. On the other hand, if one passes the river from one bank to the other, it means he or she has mastered the space. This is usually done by linking both banks with **a bridge**, which rounds up the idea of cultural mastery/submission of nature, and in this way the mythic code of the river is enriched by making it a symbol of border and of unification, connection of two opposing sides. Therefore, a significant portion of the rituality of Macedonians that carries the basic mythic code of separation or connection occurs on a river, stream or another type of running water.

## Nether Earth

“...Under us there were people. That is what the elders say. There was **water** and there were people under us. And the people say and there were people who lived there. Some *were small people*. They lived in some world, *they lived 200 years*. *When they turned 100, they would get married and say: ‘He is very young to be married!’* He was one hundred years old and he got married. (...) **The people of Nether Earth were a different kind of people. Shorter people. Their gait resembled a chicken.** A little bit shorter, **but they lived for 200-300 years.**

**Nether Earth was populated by eagles - eternal, they would not die.** *They drank some water there.* The water was called **immortal water**. So that is why one may say: ‘You live like an eagle’...” (NMM 2/27 1998: 31).

That is how Nether Earth is perceived according to the account of one of our best informants - Ordan Pozharski, a true master of the culture of his people, who was an integral part of the culture. This short and too rudimentary sketch of Nether Earth and the mythic reality of the other world is a brilliant example of the variety of symbolic and functional elements used to build the image of the World in general. It contains the most significant semiological codes that form the foundation of the idea of Nether Earth. However, in order to avoid an overtly idealistic note in the materials expounded above, and before the analysis based on them continues, more relevant data linked to the popular belief about the Earth will be presented.

When we asked informant Paca Gulicoska, born in the village of Oktisi in the Struga region, what the Earth looks like, she quoted her elders in her reply: “And **the nether people** were people just like us. They were not naked. The upper people are naked, the nether people aren’t. Only like *the wild people* (...). And the nether people wore clothes, just like us. We say **we will go to the nether village**. We are in the middle” (NMM 2/28 1998: 32).

Apart as strictly ethnographic information, the data about the appearance and the features of Earth can be considered part of the plethora of stories in the rich folklore heritage, especially magical stories, which feature the motif of the hero descending to Nether Earth to find the *lamia*, the motif of the apple tree that bore golden apples and the

unknown thief, the motif of the hero who descended to Nether Earth to kill the *lamia* or about the boy who tried to find the truth or justice by going towards the Sun, the Moon or before the Wind. In an archaic version of the story about the soothsayers who told a man that he would marry a fairy, recorded by V. Radovanovic, this is how the motif of Nether Earth and its features are described: “There was a man for whom the soothsayers chose a wife when he was born. (...) And the last said: ‘Come on, we will predict and give him one of our girls, a *fairy lass*; let him marry a *fairy peahen*’. When the child became a man, he could not get married. He searched for a wife in his village, but he couldn’t find one. And he went to a city. (...) An old man found him on a bridge. (...) And the old man said: ‘Child, buy a cow, slit its throat, skin it and put on its hide; *three eagles will come, they will hoist you and take you somewhere* - that will bring you luck!’

And he, the man, did so. Three eagles came, *hoisted him and took him to a large rock*. And he grabbed a knife, he cut the hide open and went out. He strolled along the rock. From the rock he could see **a chasm straight under him**. *There were marble stairs in the chasm. He descended: he entered Nether Earth!*

There he found an old woman. She cooked three cauldrons of broth for *the fairies*. (...) ‘Son’ - she said, ‘I will give you some food; take that lass and take her to **your world**: you were meant to have her as your wife, to have a fairy peahen!’ And the man asked the old woman: ‘But, how will I go to that world?’ - ‘I have’ - she said, ‘an *old eagle that is immortal*; we will call it, each of you will grab one of his legs, and he will take you down to your world’.

**That old eagle took them down from the Netherworld to the Upper World**. Ant the man, upon reaching **the Upper World**, took his fairy bride home...” (Радовановић 1931: 161-162).

In another story, that was mentioned previously, Breshko - the Macedonian king holy *duf*, which can be found in the Anthology of stories from Mariovo, the Christianized alternative of the motif of the descent into Nether Earth is presented, as well as the symbolism and meanings of some mythic codes engraved in the story.

I... That child, Breshko, the Macedonian king, started to fight; he ran over the entire Earth. And, when he could do it no more, he entered the **Dark Earth**. **He was walking for three years**. Finally they approached **the Garden of Eden**. Breshko entered the Garden of Eden, and he commanded the army to stop. He found Saint Peter there; he became a blood brother with him, and they entered the Garden of Eden together. Saint Peter told him: my blood brother, I will give you some *of these sweet fruits so that you can take to your earth*; I know, in your earth *they plant only wild plants*. **And he gave him a scion, so that he can graft the wild plants**. Breshko, **seeing that the land is not fit for people, returned**, and immediately picked a plant from another tree, which was the most tasty, of the kind that does not exist in our earth.

They returned from the Garden of Eden to the **Dark Earth**, and king Breshko told the army: ‘If you take some of the earth which you walk on, you will regret it; if you do not take any, you will also regret it!’ Some of them took some earth, others did not take anything. They left and **entered Light Earth**. And the people could see the ones who had taken some of the earth, **because the earth was golden**. And everybody regretted it! The ones who had taken some earth, said: ‘Why did I take only little?’ And the ones who did not take any of the earth said: “Why didn’t I take any?” (...)” (Радовановић 1931: 160).

If the materials outlined above are analyzed, a number of rudimentary mythic codes used as a foundation of the idea of the existence of Nether Earth - the Underground can be pointed out.

Firstly, it must be stressed that everything that belongs to the sphere of Nether Earth can be defined as *belonging exclusively to the mythic reality of the other world, that world*, so the matter at hand is a world with unique features that frequently clash with the features of the human world. Even though Nether Earth is represented as a world where the features of Middle Earth are projected or copied, it is still not merely a reflection of our life, the life on this side, but is something much more, and on many occasions something much less than it.

Thus, the most significant feature of Nether Earth or of the creatures that live there is **immortality**. One can easily recall the above mentioned data about the people who lived in Nether Earth and reached an age of 200-300 years, and got married when they were 100. Despite not being fully determined, this piece of information clearly expresses the idea of longevity and immortality. That place is inhabited by the oldest eagles, whose king - the immortal eagle, is the only one capable of ferrying people from the one to the other earth. From there one can bring the immortal water, that is consumed by some of the heroes on this side who possess features of the other side, thus gaining immortality and becoming heroes. The desire to obtain immortality, which is offered by the Nether Earth, is perhaps the link that solidifies the bond between Middle Earth and Nether Earth, between the normal, mortal people and the immortal, or long-living people, i.e. the drive of each Man to ensure a longer life and immortality.

On the other hand, however, the next feature of Nether Earth makes it less appealing as much as the first feature makes it appealing to humans. It is **eternal darkness** that reigns in the Realm of Nether Earth, in the Underground. In all probability, this motif strikes a balance between the excessive desire to remain immortal and/or live this eternity in pitch darkness. **The Dark Earth**, as evident in the folklore data presented above, is no place for a human, a mortal to live in - "...*Seeing that the land is not fit for living, he returned...*", but it is a Realm of countless other demonic and mythic creatures. In the Saint George's Day song "Oj junache dolnozemche" (*Oh, hero of the Nether Earth*), sang for the dead, underlines the connection between the Nether Earth, *darkness* and the *underworld*, as well as the eternal need of the dead for "white openness", i.e. light:

*"Oh, hero of the Nether Earth,*

*pray to God,*

*let him give you the keys,*

*so that you can open the dungeons,*

*the dungeons of Nether Earth,*

*so that you go out in the open,*

*and see your father; mother..." (Стоилов 2000: 139)*

The third key attribute of Nether Earth is connected to its **chthonic features**. Primarily, Nether Earth is where, according to popular belief, the world or the Realm of the dead (the Garden of Eden, the ideas related to the burial of the dead). Still, one is obliged here to outline the features of Nether Earth related to the world of the dead. Namely, in line with popular belief, after its demise the human essence is divided in the two basic components that used to keep it alive - the body and the soul. The body, made of earth, returns to it again, and the soul, free from the body, continues its path and existence in the mythic reality of Upper Earth. The chthonic features can also be seen in the motif of **the golden earth and the golden relics** that can be found in the Nether Earth. The natural durability of gold as a precious metal, the pure form in which it can be found, i.e. dug out from the bowels of earth, its sheen and some other features have all contributed to its becoming one of the most significant features of the chthonic world, the underground. The motifs of vaults and treasures hidden in the earth, which are usually guarded by mythic creatures such as *the lamia*, *the smok*, *the talason*, all living in the reality of the other side and the chthonic world.

The chthonic features of Nether Earth are embellished with some of the specific semiological meanings that can also be found in the celestial bodies. Even though the main features of the Heavens, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and the other celestial occurrences are directly linked to Upper Earth, since these two Earths, i.e. the Upper Earth and the Nether Earth have certain common features of the unique mythic reality of what can be found on the other side, some of their characteristics have a conspicuous chthonic connotation and features of the Nether Earth. The change of the features of the celestial bodies, according to popular belief, is linked to the cyclical temporal phases that occur in the Cosmos, and the phases when these bodies have minimum activity, when they are stationary or when the connotation of their activity is the opposite from the social norms are “noticeable”.

The Moon and the Stars have marked chthonic features most of all because their activity is associated exclusively to **night, darkness, the period when demonic creatures roam the earth**, since they cannot be seen in the heavens in daytime. The Moon is the mistress of night and darkness, and travels hand in hand with death. Some beliefs and popular concepts of Macedonians are related to the travel and stay of the souls of the deceased on the Moon (Ристески 1995-1997: 102). Despite the fact that the activities of celestial bodies, according to the logic of myths, are curators of temporal changes, i.e. they bear the important code of **time, movement**, and of the specific temporal movement in cycles, which will be covered later; however, in popular belief, the Stars evoke a significant corpus of meanings with exceptionally chthonic connotations. There is a widely held popular belief that human birth and death are linked to the appearance of the Stars in the heavens by destiny. Each person has their own star which can show their destiny.

Even though they are often neglected by the common people, the features of the Sun at night-time belong to the sphere of the chthonic and Nether Earth. After the lengthy, day-long travel above Earth, it wearily “sinks” in the sea or leaves for Nether Earth, in its castles, to its mother. **The Distant Earth** where the Sun resides at night-time is a clear allusion to mythic distance and emphasizes how inaccessible this world is to the common people. Of course, in special situations and using special tools, one can reach the Sun. The

motif of *two pairs of iron opinci*<sup>19</sup> that the boy needs to reach his Sun-mother, as well as the countless hurdles he must tackle to get there is widely known.

## Upper Earth

**Upper Earth** is the third, highest stratum, or a world that constitutes the union of popular beliefs about the Earth and the Cosmos. The Upper Earth, in fact, contains the most significant cosmic features since it holds the Heavens, which is “trailed” by the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. Still, the Heavens is the unifying element of the entire Upper Earth, especially because of the fact that in the popular culture of Macedonians it is perceived to be **the head and the roof of the Earth**. In this context, one should evoke the mythic analogies in the perception of the tripartite structure of the human body and its place of residence - the house, so that the basic mythic codes intrinsic to it can be determined. Apart from being **highest** in the World, the Heavens is also unattainable and infinite. Only such a sky could be **a roof**, which immediately calls to mind the function of *protection* of Earth and the creation of the idea of the completeness of the macrocosm as **a large home, a worldly house**: “When God made the Earth, it was first *flattened*. Then *he made the Heavens* and he put it over the Earth as a *vršnik over a crepna*<sup>20</sup>. (...) And God hung *the Sun, the Moon and the stars on the heavens as if they were sanctuary lamps hanging off of a ceiling*. And the angels always light them, like one lights the oil of a sanctuary lamp at church” (MFS 7/529 1972: 5). This is how the information from ethnographic materials that show the more archaic codes of creation of the heavens and celestial occurrences generally look like. They are seen as creations of God. However, in most of the materials, the Christianized elements of the interpretation of their creation stand out, since certain interpretations of some of the natural occurrences recorded as early as the Middle Ages of the Christian teaching have been accepted by the Church as official interpretations of the occurrences, and so it includes them in its texts which are also known as *Razumnici (books of wisdom)*. These texts were usually merely translated or copied on the territory of Macedonia, and their content, modified to a greater or lesser extent according to popular beliefs or because of the knowledge of the copiers, became available to the common people who visited the spiritual shrines - the churches and monasteries. Thus, some of the church knowledge became part and parcel of the popular interpretation of the occurrences and vice versa.

The *Tikves Anthology*, compiled at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, in “The book of wisdom for all questions”, the question: “What did God create the sun and moon from?” is answered thusly: “When God created the heavens and earth, and when he considered how to create man, and when he realized that man would be born of him, that he would be crucified and betrayed and eventually die, and when God thought of death, *tears flowed from God’s eye*, and God called *this tear* the **sun**. **The Month** is made *from God’s omophor*” (*Tikves Anthology* 1987: 33).

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19 *Opinci* is the term used to describe traditional peasant shoes in Southeastern Europe (translator’s note)

20 *Vršnik* is a metal lid that would be put on top of a *crepna*, a clay dish used for baking bread (translator’s note)

In some varieties of the popular stories, the archaic mythic representations of “Christian” (or at least it was believed they were Christian) motifs for the appearance of the Sun, the Moon and the Stars have been seamlessly integrated. Thus, in the materials recorded by M. Cepenkov, the creation of the celestial bodies is linked to Christ’s activity and divine providence, but the motifs contained in the legends are archetypical, directly linked to the myth of **mythical heroes - demiurges or cultural heroes**. (These motifs can be linked to the features of some ancient mythical heroes, or to the features of Krali Marko, who had supernatural powers even when he was a kid, as well as those of Dete Golomeshe etc.). Even as a child, Christ managed to craft the Sun, the Moon and the Stars out of dirt while playing:

*“God was walking, wandering around and dropped by his son, Christ, to check up on him. When he saw the mud on his hands and clothes, he stopped to see what Christ was up to, how come he had so much mud on him.*

*- How come you are so stained, my son? - God asked him. - Where does the mud come from?*

*- I am making playing balls, father - Christ replied. (...)*

Christ obeyed his father with great joy, grabbed *the large ball* and flung it *high in the heavens*. *God blessed the ball*, so it went very far and stopped in one spot, and then turned into **the Sun**. At once there was a light that looked like it was coming from the morning sun, when it shines in man’s eyes and he can’t look at it. Christ shielded his eyes with both hands, so that the sunbeam does not injure his eyes.

- My son, do you see how I made the large ball shine like a sun? Throw all the balls up, so that they become like it.

- I will throw them, father, all of them - Christ said - but please do not make them like the big ball, which shines so bright that I cannot look at it. (...)

Christ immediately grabbed all balls with both hands and tossed some to the right, others to the left, some up, some down, *and they all spread across the broad heavens and each small and large ball stopped in the spot where God said it would stop. God said that one of these balls should be the Moon, the other should be large stars, while the smallest balls - the smaller stars...*” (MFS 7/530 1972: 5-6).

The materials presented above reveal the basic mythic code of **the divine character of the Heavens and Upper Earth**. That is where God lives side by side with the other deities and demonic creatures or, in the Christianized varieties, the saints: “... **God was on top**, we were in the middle”(NMM 2/27 1998: 31). All the mythical creatures related to the celestial and natural activities, such as the sun, the rain, the lightning and thunder, the wind etc. carry out their activities in the Heavens and in the Upper Earth. The well-being on Earth hinges on the will and benevolence of some of these divine creatures. In that sense, the activities of the people, God and the Deities (saints) in the Heavens are inextricably linked. The principle of harmony between them is the basis for **cosmic unity**. That unity is achieved in the moment of establishment of the holy relationship between the Earth and the Heavens, i.e. between those who inhabit the Earth and those who inhabit the Heavens.

If the belief that the Heavens was put “*on top of the earth as a vrsnik over a crepna*” (NMM 2/529 1998: 5) was to be analyzed, the motif of *cosmic hierogamy* - the marriage between the earth and the heavens would be discovered. This motif is common and present in the national traditions and folklore of many peoples, and many authors are currently analyzing it (Лафазановски 2000: 52). In his study entitled *Macedonian Cosmogonic Legends*, E. Lafazanovski lists several examples from the Macedonian national tradition that show the motif of cosmic hierogamy: “When snow fell, *it covered the earth*. The snow tells *the earth*: *I am getting a wife, let us get married already...*” (italic set by Lj. R.). The Earth<sup>21</sup> wished it could find a best man, and, while searching, it found the south. When the south came and started blowing - the snow melted. This motif, abundant in symbolic meanings, probably does not illustrate the Earth’s attempt to “dodge” the wedding, but its wish to “postpone” or “move” it to a more suitable date, which, in fact, perfectly fits the climate throughout the calendar year, so that the holy cosmic hierogamy between the Earth and the Heavens (the snow) happens when it begins to melt, and the Earth gets drenched and receives water. In fact, the sacred marriage comprises the act of the divine, holy **conception/fertilization**, which in all cosmogonic beliefs is represented by **water**, that is **the holy dew, rain**. The matter at hand is no “ordinary rain”, but holy rain, which helps the holy act of linking the Heavens and the Earth only if it falls in a specific moment and in particular conditions. One should recall the motif of **the rain falling on St. George’s Day**. The folk legend about the creation of one of the most significant cult locations in Ovche Pole and beyond, **Govedarov Kamen** (*shepherd’s stone*), talks about how the king, in an attempt to find his lost son, the shepherd, devised a special method. He entered a beautiful coach (in some variations this coach was *golden*) and roamed his kingdom, asking people how much his coach was worth. When he arrived in Ovche Pole, he came across the shepherd, his son, and asked him how much he thinks the coach is worth. The shepherd answered: “**The coach is worth as much as a rain falling in the Ovche Pole on May 1st!**” (NMM 2/190 1998: 136). In another version, recorded in 1999, when the King asked: “What do you think, kid, how much are the coach and the horse worth,” the answer was: “Let me be honest, they are worth **as much as the rain that falls in May**”. (“And you know, if there’s water in May, the field will be fruitful. The whole field will be fruitful...”). The explanation of the storyteller, given in brackets, elucidates the perception of the meaning of the spring rain that should fertilize the earth even more. Unquestionably there must be analogies with the calendar rituality that begins at the end of the winter and the start of the spring agricultural cycle, when most of the activities are focused on the creation of beneficial conditions for **the holy fertilization** (Цивљан 1988: 340-351, Михайлов 1994: 57-76). The activities that are quite important in the spring rituality and that have to do with the young girls and maidens who go out to pick herbs, especially *rosen*<sup>22</sup>, as well as collect the morning dew and roll in the dew-covered meadows, should be interpreted in that context.

Identically important are the motifs from the stories about the *zmey* that snatches the girl from the village green. If one recalls, just briefly, the basic mythical features

21 AIF, ML 1497/1, Interlocutor Panov Gosho Ivche, born in 1882 in the village of Kriva Krusha. Recorded by Angel Andreev Kjulavkovski, Veles, Cited by Lafazanovski 2000: 53.

22 the Macedonian term for the plant *Dictamnus albus*, *rosen*, resembles the word *rosa* (dew) (translator’s note)

of the *zmey* as a mythical creature that commands the thunder and lightning and usually safeguards the regions or the fields from the negative, destructive influence of the *lamia*, a few of its codes unequivocally surface that would help one find out the mythic cosmic structure of the Heavens and Earth. The *zmey* is a typical representative of **the cosmic principle, the heavens**, or to be more specific of **the male heavenly principle**. Apart from snatching the most beautiful maidens from the Earth, he is also the master of **thunder and lightning**, which is sufficient to demonstrate his power, with which he can even cleave the Earth. Even though he lives on the Earth, his usually *golden palace* is located in the high mountains, the deep caves or in lairs. These folklore elements show that the place where the *zmey* lives is not quotidian, mundane, but on the contrary, it has been chosen in line with the special rules of popular thought, so that the thick web of mythic structure can be woven completely. The high holy mountain comes close to the Upper Earth, to the divine heights, on the one hand, while the cave or the underground palaces bring him close to the Nether Earth, the opposing Realm, which in terms of mythic features comes quite close to the Upper Realm.

Thus, the moment comes when the holy act of the sacred marriage between the Heavens and Earth should be ratified, the moment when the *zmey* grabs the most beautiful maiden from the village green, and precisely on Easter at that. Having in mind the significance of the time of year when the Easter holiday is also celebrated, the period when the *zmey* is most active was certainly not selected by chance. That is the time of year when Earth greatly needs **holy fertilization**, for the sake of its existence.

In the same mythic context, the ethnographic and folklore materials from Macedonia related to the ideas of the opening of the skies during Annunciation should also be considered. Annunciation is connected to the popular belief that during the eve of the holiday a strange thing happens, called **the opening of the skies**: “The skies opened, everything was visible, all of the became huge. **They were descending with the sky**. The stars amassed! Around, for sure, the Moon and the Sun. The stars clustered together and dispersed immediately afterwards... Nobody was allowed to leave their home at Annunciation! (...) When **midnight strikes, at twelve o’clock, the earth will shake like in an earthquake**” (NMM 2/36 1998: 38-39). When the skies opened, according to popular belief, the trees bowed to the Heavens, and the Annunciation is considered to be a major holiday, “**tezhnik**<sup>23</sup> - **that is, it is very strong, powerful**” (NMM, vol. 2, 1998: 41, no. 39). The data outlined above give a comprehensive insight into the mythic context of the situation of one of the most significant moments in the cosmic time and existence - **the joining of Heavens and Earth**, which, among other things, may even be considered the sign for the beginning of the new agricultural year and the new life cycle.

The quite popular motif of *the marriage between the Sun* and the most beautiful girl on Earth also contains the mythic code of a marital relationship between the heavenly and earthly nature (Јафазановски 2000: 54-58).

According to the cultural perception of Macedonians, the **rainbow** is an absolute sign of Upper Earth, of what lies on the other side. Its appearance is believed to be a result of divine providence, and in this way God is signalling to the people after the flood that it will not happen again (NMM 2/122-134 1998: 93-98). The people from the villages who are versed in nature can tell whether there will be more grain or wine in the year to

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23 the word *tezhnik* signifies something very heavy (translator’s note)

follow on the basis of the dominant rainbow colours. However, as most of the common people did not know much about this natural occurrence, the rainbow was compared to the belt of the folk dress, *as a belt of God, God's belt*: “*When the rainbow appears - it is like God putting on his belt. The rainbow is also divided in three. Red, green, blue. God's belt is also colourful like that...*” (NMM 2/133 1998: 98). This is the basis for its other mythic features, because of which it is believed to be a very important border between this and the other world, between our and the other mythic reality. The beliefs that those who will succeed to pass the rainbow will also succeed in passing their gender demonstrate its border quality quite clearly: “*...They say, if you go under them, if you're a man - you'll become a woman...*” (NMM 2/131 1998: 97). Besides, the Rainbow is also a link between the Earth and Heavens. Namely, it is believed that when it appears, water is moving between these two strata. The “head” of the rainbow usually appears in places where the Earth abounds in water, so that the Earth can move the water to the Heavens, to the clouds, and then the water would again return to Earth as a fruit-bearing and as the most significant fertilizing element: “*...It will take the water, he says, directly from the sea and give it to the heavens...*” (NMM 2/130 1998: 96). This mythic network establishes the circle and the uninterrupted connection between the Earth and Heavens.

This paper has analysed and established the basic mythic codes related to the creation of the World, and in the process two basic codes that constitute *the mythic foundation of creation* have been emphasised: **code no. 1 - primordial elements**: *air, water, fire/light, earth, soul* and **code no. 2 - movement**. This is followed by an analysis of the mythic ideas about Man, and in this context it is interesting to mention that the process of cultural familiarization of his own body was/is experienced and was/is carried out through the forms of the everyday contacts with the outside world. Thus, the complex symbolic systems, in which the body is allocated the roles and the function of a medium, are created by means of two mutually linked relations:

- the body as a unique entity, structure, micro-world, microcosm;
- the World, the macro-world or the macrocosm, according to the parameters of the human body as a micro-world, or microcosm.

The mythic beliefs related to the interpretation of the spatial structure of the Earth and the Cosmos contain the most archaic, initial codes of structuring human thought.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn from the ethnographic and folklore materials related to the ideas about the Earth, we may say that the mythic logic of traditional thought still mirrors **the tripartite structure** of the organization of Space on a vertical axis. According to mythic logic, the Earth is made up of **three ingredients, three earths or three strata**. The human Earth, our Earth, i.e. the one we know best, is **Middle Earth**, then we have the Earth below us, i.e. **Nether Earth**, and the one above us, **Upper Earth**.

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