

## MYPHOENCYCLOPEDIA AND LINGUOPOETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAGES OF "WATER" AND "FIRE" IN WORLD CULTURE

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### Summary

The article discusses the mythological, encyclopedic and linguo-poetic characteristics of the images of "water" and "fire" in different ethnic groups and societies. The image of "water" is an ancient universal symbol of all cultures of the world, as it is associated with the primordial matter and birth, as a result of which *water* is considered as the guardian of life, symbolizes its beginning and end. *Fire* is most often seen as a male substance and as a symbol of vital energy, the heart, the fertilizing force, enlightenment, the Sun. The image of "water" is not a holistic image, it consists of many forms: *sea, river, ocean, lake, dew, stream, rain, downpour, thunderstorm, storm, ice, fog, well, spring*. The image of "fire" is also objectified by different forms: *a fireplace a candle, a flame, a bonfire*. Much attention is paid to the description of the meanings of the main linguistic and mythopoetic characteristics of the images "water" and "fire" in the world, as well as in the Slavic mythopoetic picture of the world.

**Keywords:** mythology, symbol, water, fire, mythopoetic picture of the world, linguomithopoetic characteristic.

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### 1. Introduction

Relation of the language with culture and history of the ethnos are multidimensional and diverse. In studies of recent decades, the understanding of the language "as a mirror of folk culture, folk psychology and philosophy" is widespread (*Snitko, 2000: 15*). In the context of modern research, it became relevant to consider the language not only as a tool for cognition and communication, but also as a cultural code of the nation.

The most important role in the mythology of different ethnic groups and societies is played by mythological and mythologized images of water, earth, fire, animals and plants, interpreted as special creatures with magical properties.

Water as a primary element has always attracted the attention of all representatives of mankind. After all, the existence of all life on planet Earth depends on it. It has the power to give life and take it away. It is not for nothing that the sacred books of many peoples talk about water as something that existed even before the creation of heaven and earth, and folklore sources note the ability to magically influence a person and the world around him.

Fire was previously associated with sacred power, a gift sent by the god Svarozhich, and only then with a home, that is, with a family among our Slavic ancestors. Fate of a person depended on fire, as well as on water, and hence the preservation of his life. In such a sacred book as the Bible, fire often fulfills the will of the Lord, acts as His servant. All these tell us about extremely important role of fire in life and consciousness of man, therefore this phenomenon could not be left without the attention of linguists.

The purpose of this article is to study the mytho-encyclopedic and linguo-poetic characteristics of the images of "water" and "fire" in world culture.

## 2. Water as an ancient symbol

In all mythologies of the world, *fire* and *water* act as the primary elements of being, despite the fact that for different peoples of the world, content of the concept of "primary elements of being" is not the same. For example, Russians believe that there are four primary elements of being: water, fire, earth, air; and the Chinese – five elements: water, fire, wood, earth and metal.

In the mythologies of the world, *fire* and *water* are associated with various deities and spirits, but comparing these most important elements of the mythological picture of the world, we can talk about the functional similarity of these phenomena in mythological systems. Fire and water are the two great – active and passive – principles of the universe. Fire and water are in constant conflict, but in the form of heat and moisture they are necessary for all life (Cooper, 1995: 222).

For a person who thinks in alchemical categories, four elements form a cross, which is also a world square. This figure can be formed by two pairs of basic states: hot and dry – cold and wet. Fire is just hot and dry, while water is cold and wet (Biedermann, 1996: 295).

According to N.I. Kostomarov, who characterizes the main features of Slavic cosmogony, "the passive position of water in nature served as a reason for a person to see a female being in her. Without the life-giving power of light, motionless water fills space; but when light and warmth (embodied in the symbol of fire) awaken it, it diverges and, under the influence of light, gives birth and nourishes the annual world (Snitko, 2000: 76). Thus, the marriage of fire and water is considered by the Slavs as a manifestation of love in the universe. That is why on the feast of Ivan Kupala, the scientist argues, they make a stuffed animal called Morena, jump over fire with it and drown it in water, which in its own way symbolizes the marriage of light with water (Potapenko, 1997: 217-219).

The image of "**water**" is an ancient universal symbol of all cultures of the world, as it is associated with the primordial matter and first birth, as a result of which water is considered as the guardian of life, symbolizes its beginning and end; often becomes an intermediary between other primary elements (air, fire, earth). Water acts in an ambivalent way: already in the pagan consciousness there were ideas about water as a saving, sacred principle and at the same time a source of evil, death, death, which is reflected in the language (Yuan, 1965: 76-78).

The myths of many nations claim that water existed before the creation of the world and will exist after its death. The Greek philosopher Thales believed that water is the fundamental principle of everything, and the earth in the form of a flat circle floats in the waters of the boundless ocean (Encyclopedia, 1997: 92).

In all known legends about the origin of the world, life originated from the primordial waters, the female symbol of potency, devoid of form. It was believed that pure water, especially dew, spring and rain water, have healing properties and are a form of divine grace, a gift from

mother earth (spring water) or heavenly gods (rain and dew). The myths of the Flood, in which the sinful humanity is destroyed, are an example of the symbolism of purification and rebirth (*Tresidder, 1999: 43*). The symbolism of water as a transitional state explains a large number of myths in which rivers or seas separate the worlds of the living and the dead. Many deities were born in water or could walk on water (*Tresidder, 1999: 45*).

In Chinese mythology, the creation of the world is associated with two great spirits – Yin and Yan. This well-known myth is recorded in a book called *Huainan-zi* in the 2nd century BC. In ancient times, the world was only a gloomy formless chaos. In this darkness, two great spirits Yin and Yan began to order the world (*Yuan, 1965: 46*). In Chinese mythology, water, a symbol of Yin power, is opposed to fire as a symbol of Yan power, the solar principle (*Cooper, 1995: 223*).

Water has also been compared to wisdom; Thus, in Taoism, the image of water, which finds its way around obstacles, is a symbol of the triumph of apparent weakness over strength (*Tresidder, 1999: 44*). Lao Tzu paid considerable attention to this cyclical meteorological process, which is at the same time physical and spiritual, and noted that: “Water is never at rest, day or night. When it flows from above, it causes rain and dew. As it flows below, it forms streams and rivers. Water has an outstanding ability to do good. If a dam is built on its way, it stops. If you make a path for it, it flows along it. That's why they say she doesn't fight. And yet she has no equal in destroying what is strong and solid” (*Kerlot, 1994: 118-119*).

At the same time, there is another series of symbolic meanings of *water*, generated by the fact that it is necessary for human and plant life. In Judaism, the Torah is traditionally compared with water, since this holy book, firstly, attracts all those who are thirsty, secondly, it spreads throughout the earth, thirdly, it serves as a source of life, fourthly, it comes from heaven, fifthly, renews the soul, sixthly, cleanses, seventhly, flows from top to bottom and turns a simple vessel into a jewel, and, finally, serves as food for growth (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 93*).

### 3. The meanings of the images of "water"

The image of "water" is formed by a number of private images, having their own meanings.

**Rising water** symbolizes danger to life; water depths are a symbol of the unknown, incomprehensible and dangerous (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 92*).

Water in the form of a **stream** or **sea** carries the meaning of an insurmountable or insurmountable barrier – a metaphor especially popular in Buddhism, where "to cross the stream" means to pass through the world of illusions and gain enlightenment. The **stream** of water symbolizes the inexorable flow of time – this "river that cannot be entered twice." From here comes the symbolic connection of flowing water with oblivion, which gave rise to images of the border rivers of the underworld – Acheron, Styx and Lethe, and, perhaps, it was precisely because of this connection that the ancient Slavs sent their dead downstream the rivers (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 92-93*).

Water in the form of an **ocean** is a dream element, representing states from extremely deep to stormy or serenely contemplative. In ancient Greek mythology, he is a *river* washing the earth. According to Hesiod, this is Titan, the son of Uranus and Gaia, the brother and husband of Tethys, from whom he had a thousand daughters, oceanides, and a thousand sons, river streams. In the extreme west, it forms the boundary between the world of life and the world of death (*Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1997: 359*). It is generally regarded as the origin of all life, and science confirmed that life actually began in the sea (*Kerlot, 1994: 357*).

The **river** is a powerful symbol of passing time and life. For many large civilizations, whose well-being depended on the irrigation of fields with natural waters, rivers were important symbols of the constantly replenished wealth of nature, purification and movement. Often, rivers were presented as boundaries separating the worlds of the living and the dead (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 304*). It is also a symbol of direction: its direction determines her destiny. The rivers in the land of the Dead are Lethe and Acheron. Charone transports the dead through Acheron; after drinking water from Lethe, they forget everything they remembered before (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 416*).

**Ice** represents two main ideas. The first is those changes that occur with water under the influence of cold, i.e. "freezing" in its symbolic meaning. And the second is the paralysis of the possibilities of water. Therefore, ice is defined as a clear boundary between the reasonable and the unreasonable (or between other similar dynamic levels) (*Kerlot, 1994: 288*).

**Rain** contains the original and obvious symbolism of the fertilizing principle and refers to the general symbolism of life and water. The symbolism of rain comes from the fact that it comes from heaven. Hence its communion with light. Here is an explanation of why in many mythologies rain is considered as a symbol of the "spiritual influences" of the heavens descending on the earth (*Kerlot, 1994: 179*).

However, rain can be a source of flood and destruction, a manifestation of the wrath of God (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 159*). It was common to imagine that it depended on the gods whether there would be a drought, whether a downpour of destructive power would fall, or whether a pleasant, blessing-like rain would fall, giving life to nature (*Tresidder, 1999: 81*).

**Thunderstorm** is God's power. Indians of North America heard in peals of thunder sounds made by the mighty eagle wings of the Thunderbird, usually acting in the protective role of the sky god. The symbolism linking the bird and thunder is also found in the mythology of the peoples of Siberia. The prevailing tradition is to identify the thunderstorm with male gods, such as the Scandinavian Thor, or with blacksmith gods. But sometimes this natural phenomenon is represented by lunar and earth goddesses, who give fertility and rich harvest. In Asia, thunderstorm was associated with dragon (especially in China), drum, rumbling wagon, taking away souls of dead people, and wrath or joy of the gods (*Tresidder, 1999: 67*).

**Storm.** In mythology and symbolism, it is mostly emphasized that, unlike the wind, it is a powerful manifestation of the divine sphere, as well as an instrument of the divine will (*Biedermann, 1996: 30*).

**Dew** is purity, spiritual enlightenment, rejuvenation, the nectar of immortality (*Tresidder, 1999: 310*).

**Lake** – according to myths and legends, a magical place, which is a natural analogue of a mirror, the water of a calm lake means opportunity to contemplate both its own reflection and the spirits of the lake, who lived, presumably, in palaces full of jewels (*Tresidder, 1999: 250*).

However, the meaning of lake, associated with the concept of level, is rather related with human consciousness. In this case, everything at low level in space is identified with what is considered "low" in spirituality (something negative, destructive and even fatal). That the symbol of water has much in common with the symbol of the abyss confirms the fatal implication of the meaning of the lake: liquid particles always provide the transition from life to death, from solidity to gaseousness, from formed to unformed. While the lake as such or even its very surface – smooth surface – have the meaning of a mirror, personify contemplation, reflection and revelation (*Kerlot, 1994: 356*).

The **fog** is a symbol of the uncertainty of things, or the fusion of the elements of air and water, and the inevitable obscurity of the main features of every aspect and every phrase

of the evolutionary process. "Fire Mist" is the stage of cosmic life that follows the state of chaos and corresponds to the three elements that existed before the solid element – earth (Kerlot, 1994: 525).

The **well** is salvation, life, knowledge, truth, purity. In most traditions, especially the Jewish and Islamic ones, wells have a sacred meaning as sources of life. Water flowing out of the earth symbolizes female fertility. In China and some countries, the well was directly associated with uterus and vagina (Tresidder, 1999: 156).

So, the image of "water" is not a single, holistic image, it consists of many forms that represent particular embodiments of the elements of water, natural states: *water, sea, river, ocean, lake, dew, stream, rain, downpour, thunderstorm, storm, ice, fog, well, source, spring water, rain water*.

In modern science, it is customary to consider and characterize private incarnations of the image of "water", as evidenced by many mythological dictionaries and symbols, as well as research in this area (Tresidder, 1999: 156). However, the conclusion about the mythological and encyclopedic characteristics of the image "water" can be drawn from the presented set of meanings of specific water images.

Thus, in world culture, *water* is the fundamental principle of all living things, it is associated with the first matter and birth; symbolizes the beginning and end of life; acts as a saving, sacred principle and at the same time a source of evil, death, death; has healing properties; symbolizes the unknown, incomprehensibility and danger; carries the meaning of an insurmountable or insurmountable barrier; personifies the inexorable passage of time; associated with oblivion; acts as a boundary between reasonable and unreasonable; symbolizes "spiritual influence"; acts as a source of flood and destruction; symbolizes purity, spiritual enlightenment, rejuvenation, the nectar of immortality; personifies self-contemplation, reflection and revelation.

#### 4. Linguomithopoetic characteristic of the image of "water"

O.A. Petrichenko studied the image of "water" in the works of N. Gumilyov, A. Akhmatova, L. Gumilyov and offers the following characterization of the mythopoetic meanings of this image:

**Water** – 1) One of the main elements of the universe, living, spiritualized, changeable, ambivalent. 2) The beginning, the initial state of all things, the equivalent of primitive chaos // Environment, agent and principle of universal conception and generation. 3) Cleansing and healing power, pure and holy (Christ.). 4) The border of the afterlife, a link with the world of ancestors. 5) The equivalent of all the vital "juices" of a person – blood and tears. 6) Prophetic power, an attribute of divination and magical rites. 7) The personification of danger, a metaphor for death, the global finale (the motif of the flood) // An ominous element that requires sacrifice. 8) A niche of mythological worlds, various spirits and deities (Petrichenko, 1998: 33).

In the study of O.N. Samusenko points out that "the core of the linguomithopoetic hypostasis of the image "water" include the following range of meanings: all-consuming chthonic element, symbol of fertility, reproduction, symbol of cleansing and regenerating power, symbol of the beginning and end of everything that exists, mediator between the polyworlds of the universe, between life and death, symbol of love, girl, health, keeper of sacred information, spatial niche of mythological worlds" (Samusenko, 2003: 38).

So, the main linguistic and mythopoetic characteristics of the image of "water" in the world, as well as the Slavic mythopoetic picture of the world, can be reduced to a number of the

following meanings: 1) the feminine; 2) mediator between real and unreal worlds; 3) source and keeper of life; 4) symbol of purification and rebirth; 5) the border separating the worlds of the living and the dead; 6) the border between reasonable and unreasonable; 7) beginning and end of life; 8) salvific, sacred principle; 9) source of evil, destruction, death; 10) symbol of wisdom, knowledge; 11) healing power; 12) symbol of goodness, life, helper, divine blessing; 13) symbol of the passage of time, a symbol of movement; 14) personification of danger, insurmountable obstacle, destruction; 15) natural analogue of a mirror, personification of truth.

## 5. The image of "fire" in world culture

Generally, **fire** is seen as a male substance (as opposed to water as a female substance) and as a symbol of vital energy, heart, fertilizing force, enlightenment, the Sun (see Phoenix) (*Biedermann, 1996: 185*). In the most primitive cultures, fire was the demiurge arising from the sun and its earthly representative. Therefore, it correlates, on the one hand, with a ray of the sun and lightning, and on the other hand, with gold (*Kerlot, 1994: 352*).

The symbolism of fire has received a deep dimension, since fire is a metaphor for describing God himself (Yahweh is a giving birth fire). Fire from ancient times not only warmed, but also gave hope, fire does not deceive, it gives support (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 355*).

Fire is the only one of all elements that a person can reproduce himself, with improvised means, so this could really serve as evidence of the god-likeness of a person (*Biedermann, 1996: 184*). Fire is both a master and a slave, since it depends on the availability of firewood and the person who has to make a fire (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 355-356*). The myth of Prometheus, who produced fire for a man, passing it on in a hollow reed, is not only a theme of theomachism. This is not only the theft of fire in the sense of theft, but rather the taking of the Sacred Fire, revealing to mortal man secrets of the gods (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 355*).

The ancients considered fire to be a living being, feeding, growing, dying, and then being born again. Holidays suggesting that fire is the earthly incarnation of the sun, so it largely shared its symbolism (*Tresidder, 1999: 246*).

The symbolism of fire associated with the resurrection is personified by the image of the Phoenix bird and the salamander and is manifested in the Easter rituals of the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox churches, during which candles are solemnly extinguished and then lit with "new fire". The tradition of New Year's lights comes from the rites of magic, it symbolizes the return of sunlight and warmth (*Tresidder, 1999: 248*).

Fire is an image of energy that can be found both on the level of animal passion and on the plane of spiritual force (*Kerlot, 1994: 248*).

Once a year, in the mountains of Scotland, fireplaces in houses are blew out, and fire is burn in the hills. Livestock is circled around it several times in order to protect it from troubles and misfortunes. Fireplaces are kindled again through coals from these fires after the ritual (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 357*).

The result of fire is ashes. Sprinkling ashes on the head is a sign of the irreversibility of grief. But in the Scandinavian sagas, the hero Tetleyye, before setting out on another feat, lay in ashes. This motif of magical transformation is also known in the fairy tale "Cinderella" (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 357*).

According to the type of bonfires, various predictions were made. For many peoples, fire carried elements of a taboo. It was impossible to spit in it (otherwise a pimple would pop up on the tongue), urinate (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 357*).

It is known that the servants of the ancient Slavic pagan cults maintained an eternal flame as a sign of a constant good connection with the gods and the continuity of life, the well-being of the clan and tribe. In Russia, there were rituals associated with fire: for example, picking a cuckoo with the color of your lips and throwing it into the fire, accepted as the fulfillment of desires, or jumping over the fire on Ivan Kupala was a rite of purification by fire. Black aconite (fire-color) glows at night. He also grants all desires. Previously, one could see peasants in the villages coming out of the forest with wreaths of aconite. In Russia, two types of fire are known – hellish and heavenly (*Encyclopedia, 1997: 356*).

The **fireplace** is a kind of “domestic sun”, symbol of home, combination of the male element (fire) with the female (receptacle) and, therefore, with love (*Kerlot, 1994: 376*).

A **candle burning** – like a lamp, symbolizes individualized light and, therefore, the life of the individual, as opposed to the life of the cosmos and the universe (*Kerlot, 1994: 456*).

**Spark** – the image of the spiritual principle, giving birth to each individual, also refers to the Kabbalistic concept of souls dispersing from the center outward into the outer world in the form of sparks. Therefore, for Jung, it is a symbol of the heavenly father (*Kerlot, 1994: 231*).

The Slavs especially revere living fire (a living, unopened fire, obtained by friction from a tree and not yet serving people), “woody, forest, new, living, medicinal or king-fire” (*Snitko, 2000: 18*) and the fire of a fireplace, acting as symbol of family happiness, home, comfort; maintaining the eternal flame was a sign of constant connection with the gods, the continuity of life and the well-being of the family (*Snitko, 2000: 27*).

So, the image of “fire” is objectified by different forms: *fireplace, candle, flame, bonfire*, and others, but their symbolic meanings are too close.

Thus, the image of “fire” in world culture acts as a vital energy, a fertilizing force; symbolizes enlightenment; is the demiurge arising from the sun, and his earthly representative; there is a metaphor for describing God himself; represents the return of sunlight and warmth; associated with resurrection; acts as a metaphor for sexual desire; symbolizes the continuity of life, the well-being of the clan and tribe; has a cleansing and healing power; personifies family happiness, comfort.

The main linguistic and mythopoetic characteristics of the image of “**fire**” in the world, as well as in the Slavic mythopoetic picture of the world, can be represented by a number of such meanings: 1) male substance; 2) symbol of rebirth and transformation; 3) cleansing, healing power; 4) symbol of destruction and destructive power; 5) symbol of rebirth and creative power; 6) mediator between life and death; 7) sign of constant good connection with the gods and the continuity of life; 8) earthly incarnation of the sun; 9) symbol of family happiness, prosperity, well-being of the clan, tribe; 10) the embodiment of energy; 11) metaphor for sexual desire; 12) symbol of hope, support; 13) symbol of resurrection.

The coincidence of the mythological meanings of fire and water lies in the fact that both images of “water” and “fire” are considered mediators between the real and unreal worlds; cleansing and healing power.

## 6. Conclusions

In world culture, water is the fundamental principle of all living things, it is associated with the primordial matter and birth; symbolizes the beginning and end of life; acts as a saving, sacred principle and at the same time a source of evil, death, death; has healing properties; symbolizes the unknown, incomprehensibility and danger; carries the meaning of an insurmountable or

insurmountable barrier; personifies the inexorable passage of time; associated with oblivion; acts as a boundary between reasonable and unreasonable; symbolizes "spiritual influence"; acts as a source of flood and destruction; symbolizes purity, spiritual enlightenment, rejuvenation, the nectar of immortality; personifies self-contemplation, reflection and revelation.

The main linguistic and mythopoetic characteristics of the image of "water" in the world, as well as in the Slavic mythopoetic picture of the world, can be represented by a number of the following meanings: feminine; mediator between real and unreal worlds; source and keeper of life; a symbol of purification and rebirth; the border separating the worlds of the living and the dead; the boundary between the reasonable and the unreasonable; beginning and end of life; saving, sacred beginning; source of evil, death, death; a symbol of wisdom, knowledge; healing power; symbol of goodness, life, helper, divine blessing; symbol of the passage of time, symbol of movement; the personification of danger, insurmountable obstacles, destruction; natural analogue of a mirror, personification of truth.

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