Non-Iranian origin of the Eastern-Slavonic god *Xŭrsŭ/Xors*[*]

Constantine L. Borissoff

*The paper examines the traditional explanation of the Eastern-Slavonic deity Xors as an Iranian loan from the Persian xwaršēδ/xoršid 'sun' and advances an alternative etymology via the Indo-Aryan root hṛṣ-, Indo-European *ĝhers- and its cognates in other Indo-European languages. Based on the linguistic and mythological comparative analysis Xors is interpreted not as an abstract 'solar god' but as a 'sun fertility hero' viewed as the development of the ancient archetype of the 'dying and resurrecting god' comparable in role to Dionysus. The paper closes with a brief outline of some new venues for research following out of the proposed reinterpretation of Xors.*

Keywords: Slavonic mythology, Slavic paganism, *Xors*, *Hors*, Vladimir's pantheon, *Dionysus*, fertility cult

1 Introduction

1.1. *'Iranian origin' theory of theonym 'Xors'*

It has become a tradition to begin every account of the Eastern-Slavonic deity *Xors*[1] with the assertions 'one of the most mentioned' and 'one of the most mysterious'. This reflects the specific position of *Xors* in the Eastern Slavonic heathen pantheon. Indeed, in Russian ancient chronicles and religious texts *Xors* is the second most often mentioned heathen deity after *Perun* (Vasil'ev 1998) but we know next to nothing about his religious function despite the plethoric literature on this topic. The aim of this article is not to give yet one more assessment of various views on the nature of this deity[2] but to open a new perspective by applying methods of comparative linguistic and mythological analysis.

Even for the earliest researchers etymologising *Xors* presented a challenge. Interestingly, some of them (Tatiščev 1768; Glinka 1804; Russov 1824) connected this deity with

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[1] Cyrillic is conveyed according to the Scholarly (Scientific) transliteration system in which the Russian Cyrillic 'X' is transliterated as Latin 'X' and not as Latin 'H' but the Bulgarian Cyrillic 'X' is conveyed as 'H'. In most of the old written sources the name appeared in Cyrillic as '*Хърсъ* (*Хŭрsŭ*)' while the form '*Хорс* (*Хors*)' is traditionally used in contemporary Russian literature. In some direct quotes using other transliteration systems it may be conveyed as '*Hors*'.

[2] For the recent assessment of the history of this topic see Vasil'ev (1989; 1998) and Beskov (2008).

Greek *Bacchus (Dionysus).* The reason for this comparison of *Xors* with *Bacchus* is not clear but Tatiščev (1768: 16) referred to Maciej Stryjkowski (ca. 1547–1593): "Strykovskij in b[ook] 4, ch[apter] 4 relates from an ancient chronicler: [...] 4.) Xors is similar to Bacchus[3]" (1768, 17) which was later echoed in Glinka (1804: 13) as "Kors – the god of drunkenness[4]". This etymology was also supported by Stepan Russov (1824: 9) though he mistakenly derived *Xors* from the epithet of *Bacchus* 'corymbifera' (wearing garlands of ivy-berries).

At first glance, the reference to Maciej Stryjkowski regarding *Xors* may appear puzzling because nowhere in his description of the pre-Christian religious rites of the Slavs and Balts did Stryjkowski make a direct comparison of *Xors* with *Bacchus*. He wrote about *Bacchus* only once in his account of Greek deities: "[o]n the isle of Naxos [they venerate] Liberum or Baccus[5]" (1846[1582]: 136) without any connection with *Xors* whom Stryjkowski only briefly mentioned in this chapter two pages further: "[t]hey [the Poles] praised also the Russian gods namely Piorun, Strib, Mokoss, Chorsum and others[6]" (138). However, on p.142 Stryjkowski described the Old Prussian deity *Curcho* as "named Gurch who, as they believed, had power over livelihood, bread and people's food[7]" and thus remotely resembling *Bacchus*. We shall return to *Curcho* later (3.3.2) but at this point it is noteworthy that in the early Russian studies *Xors* was clearly associated with *Bacchus-Dionysus* via the Baltic deity *Curcho.*

One of the first to suggest the Iranian link was P. G. Butkov who in his comments on *Slovo o polku Igoreve* named *Xors* "the Slavonic Phoebus[8]" and pointed out that 'sun' in Persian was "xuršit[9], in Ossetic xur, xor; in Ossetic xorošŭ, xorsŭ, xorsu also means dobro, xorošo [kindness, good][10]" (Butkov 1821: 61, cited by Vasil'ev 1998). Similarly, analysing *Slovo* Prejs (1841) also identified *Xors* as a solar god, noting though that "Xors is not just the sun but a mythological personality[11]" (36). In his view, the phonetic form of this word with the initial *x* was not native to the Russian speech: "[t]he word *Xors* [...] is an alien word; it is borrowed from the Aryan branch of languages[12]" (35). The Iranian origin was also supported by Bodjanskij (1846) who took *Xors* as "an alien word: namely Zendish[13]". Although Sreznevskij (1846: 49–50) did not name *Xors* as a direct Iranian loan, he too wrote: "[o]ur scholar Prejs rightly compared Xorsŭ = Xorŭsŭ with the New Persian *Xor* or *Xur* and with the name of the Persian King Koreš = Xoreš also meaning the sun[14]".

[3] "Стрыковский в кн. 4 гл. 4 из древнего летописца сказует: [...] 4.) Хорс подобны Бахусу" (here and henceforth old Russian sources are quoted using modern spelling for simplicity; if not indicated otherwise, translations were done by the Author).

[4] "Корс, бог пьянства".

[5] "W Naxos wyspie Liberum albo Baccus".

[6] "Chwalili nad to i Ruskie bogi, to jest Pioruna, Striba, Mokossa, Chorsuma i inszych".

[7] "Gurch nazvany, który jako oni wierzyli, nad wszelkimi żywiołami, zbożym i pokarmy ludskimi moc miał."

[8] "славянский Феб".

[9] Depending on the transliteration convention used this word is spelled *xwaršēδ/xvaršēt* (modern Western Persian *xoršid/xuršit*).

[10] "по-персидски хуршит, по-осетински хур, хор; на осетинском же языке хорошъ, хорсъ, хорсу значит еще добро, хорошо".

[11] "Хорс есть не просто солнце, но лицо мифологическое".

[12] "[с]лово *Хорс* есть чуждое [...]: оно заимствовано из Арийской ветви языков".

[13] "Хорс есть слово чужое, именно зендское".

[14] "Наш ученый Прейс справедливо сравнивал слово Хорсъ = Хоръсъ с Ново-Персидским именем солнца *Хор* или *Хур*, с именем Царя Персидского Кореш = Хореш, означавшим также солнце".

1.2 *Controversy of 'Iranian origin' theory*

This etymology persisted into the 20th century and remains generally accepted today. Roman Jakobson most clearly expressed its essence as follows: "Хŭрсŭ is an obvious borrowing from the Iranian expression for the personified radiant sun (*Xuršid* in Persian)" (1949: 1027). This was later elaborated by Toporov (1989: 26–27) who believed that the name *Xors* was brought to Kiev with the solar cult by soldiers of the Khoresm garrison allegedly stationed there near the time of Vladimir's reign[15].

Among the recent supporters of the solar nature of *Xors* is Mixail Vasil'ev, however, he was far from taking *Xors* as a straightforward Middle Persian (recent) borrowing but rather as:

> *[...] an Iranian god by origin, a Sarmato-Alanian heritage in the Eastern branch of Slavonic, one of cultural reflexes of the deep Slavonic-Iranian interaction in Southern Europe existing for a long time in the first millennium B.C. which resulted in the imperceptible assimilation of Sarmato-Alans*[16]. (Vasil'ev 1998).

While explaining *Xors* through *xwaršēδ/xoršid* is firmly established among historians, linguists are more cautious about the presumed Iranian origin. In the relevant entry of the authoritative *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* Max Vasmer had to admit:

> *The common derivation from Iran[ian], Avest[an] hvarə xšaētəm, mid.--Pers[ian] xvaršêt, new-Pers[ian] xuršēt "radiant sun" is not free of phonetic difficulties* [...][17] (Vasmer 1958: 3.265).

Iranian *hva-* cannot explain the short vowel *ъ (ŭ)* in *Хŭрсŭ* and the Iranian *š*, being a product of retraction of *s* after *r* due to the 'RUKI sound law'[18], could not become *s* in Slavonic. According to the same phonetic law, it would be expected to become *x* or, at least, remained as *š* if borrowed after the RUKI law stopped to operate.[19]

There are also other, non-linguistic objections to the Iranian origin theory. Having identified *Xors* with the sun, Prejs still made this important observation:

> *It remains to be mentioned that also the notions connected with the notion of Xors, do not have a root on the Slavonic soil. There is no doubt that the Slavs venerated the sun. However, if we trust the testimony of folk songs, in which antiquity often dwells unconsciously, the sun in Slavonic understanding was*

[15] See Valil'ev (1998) for a detailed criticism of this theory.

[16] "богом иранским по происхождению, сармато-аланским наследием у восточной ветви славянства, одной из культурных рефлексий существовавшего в течение длительного времени в I тыс. н. э. глубокого славяно-иранского взаимодействия, симбиоза на юге Восточной Европы, завершившегося нечувствительной ассимиляцией сармато-алан."

[17] "Die verbreitete Herleitung aus d. Iran., avest. *hvarə xšaētəm*, mpers. *xvaršêt*, npers. *xuršēt* 'leuchtende Sonne' ist nicht ohne lautliche Schwierigkeiten [...]".

[18] Sound change attested in some IE languages (Albanian, Armenian, Baltic, Indo-Aryan, Slavonic) leading to the transition of the 'original' *s* to *š* or *š/x* (Slavonic) in positions after *r, u, k* and *i* . The change works without exceptions in Indo-Aryan (for which thus 'law' was originally formulated) but is not consistent in the Baltic languages. In Slavonic languages the change is regular but it only happens in positions with a following vowel where *s* changes to *x*, except for the front vowels *e/i* and the palatal approximant *j* where it becomes *š*.

[19] See more on this in Abaev 1965: 155.

> *an entity different from Xors. It appears not as a master, as in "Slovo" but as a mistress.*[20] (Prejs 1841: 37).

The word **sŭlnĭce* 'sun' is neuter in Slavonic and clearly feminine in the related Baltic languages. Also, in many world's mythologies almost every major god was connected with the sun[21] so defining *Xors* as 'solar god' does not explain much. Moreover, from the context of *Xors* in *Slovo* some historians considered him, not without a reason, a lunar deity (e.g. Maksimovič 1859: fn. 45. pp. 110 – 111). Another objection was raised by Valil'ev:

> *Based on historical facts it is indeed impossible to explain when and under what conditions the Eastern Slavs or their ancestors could borrow from the inhabitants of Iran their cult of the Sun.*[22] (Vasil'ev 1998).

Certainly, this could not have happened near the period of Vladimir's reign (980 – 1015 AD) because by that time Persia had already been converted to Islam. Also, to be borrowed and positioned as the second most important god, the Persian *Xwaršēδ/Xoršid* should have been a prominent Iranian deity but in New Persian this word simply means 'sun' without any religious connotation. In Zoroastrianism, the sun and other astral phenomena were indeed deified as 'nature gods' (Boyce, 1979: 6) but *Hvar* 'sun' was only one of many deities. Obviously, the name *Xors* could not have derived directly from *Hvar* (because of the final *-s*) and also from the Avestan *hvarə xšaētəm* since this expression only became contracted to *xwaršēδ/xoršid* in Middle Persian close to the period of the Sassanid dynasty (224 – 654 AD). By that time the functions of the sun god *Hvar* had already been largely transferred on to *Mithra*/*Miθra* (Gershevitch, 1959: 35 – 40) due to the rise of Mithraism in the pre-Sassanid period (Boyce, 1979: 99). The central deity of Mitharaism became *Mihr* (mid-Persian form of *Mithra*) which was also used as a synonym of 'sun'. The early Sassanid epoch was marked by the iconoclasm when statues of deities were removed from shrines replaced by sacred fires (ibid, 107). Therefore, by the time the proposed Iranian etymon *xwaršēδ/xoršid* appeared, any anthropomorphic images or statues of the sun-god (if they existed) had been destroyed and this word was losing its religious connotation and becoming to mean simply 'sun' as in modern Persian, while the functions of the sun-god *Hvar* were assumed by the reinterpreted *Mithra/Mihr*. It is indeed hard to imagine how the Eastern Slavs could have borrowed *xwaršēδ/xoršid* from Persia in this short period not only changing it to *Xŭrsŭ/Xors* (such a radical phonetic change is not characteristic of the attested Iranian loans in Slavonic) but also setting him up as one of the principal gods next in significance to the supreme deity *Perun*.

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[20] "Ещё остаётся упомянуть, что и понятия сопряженные с понятием о Хорсе, не имеют корня на Славянской почве. [...] Нет сомнения, что Слявяне чтили солнце. Но если верить свидетельству народных песен, в которых очень нередко древность живет бессознательно, то солнце в понятиях Славян было существом отличным от Хорса. Оно является не господином, как в «Слове», но госпожою."

[21] E.g. in *Rig Veda* apart from the principal solar god *Sūrya* (light, sky) various aspects of the sun were represented by many deities: *Savitar* (instigator), *Mitra* (antagonist of darkness), *Pūṣan* (vital energy), *Uṣas* (dawn), *Agni* (fire) etc. (Elizarenkova 1993: 14).

[22] "Опираясь на факты истории, действительно, невозможно объяснить, где, когда и при каких обстоятельствах восточные славяне или их предки могли бы заимствовать у жителей Ирана их культ Солнца."

1.3 *Possibility of 'non-Iranian' origin*

As we can see, at closer examination the seemingly unquestionable explanation of *Xors* as a loan from Iranian and as 'solar god' is a facile solution having serious inherent flaws. Although not being a linguist, the Soviet ethnologist B. A. Rybakov, perhaps intuitively, felt the inconsistency of the Iranian loan theory since he suggested that the name *Xors* might not be a recent direct loan but could descend to the remote times of pra-Slavonic-Aryan contacts in the Eneolithic (Copper Age) period (Rybakov 1987: 440) thus pushing its origin back to at least the third millennium BC.

It is believed that at least from the 8th century BC the vast area along the northern shores of the Black Sea was the domain of Iranian-speaking Scythians. The ethnolinguistic identity of Scythians remains a controversial issue but the prevailing opinion is that they spoke Eastern-Iranian dialects. This implies that they arrived to the Pontic-Caspian steppes from the region of today's Central Asia. If so, the Scythians represented a back-wave of an earlier eastward Indo-European (I-E) migration (Szemerenyi 1980: 5) which probably originated in the Pit-grave (Yamna) culture off the northern shore of the Black Sea at the end of the 3rd – beginning of the 2nd millennia BC (Kuz'mina 2007: 451). Therefore, the language of the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture could be rightfully considered as 'Proto-Indo-Iranian'. The Indo-Iranian homeland is usually located in the steppes north of the Black and the Caspian seas (Mallory 1989; Kuz'mina 2007) from where they are believed to have migrated to Southern Siberia (Andronovo culture ca. 1800–1400 BC) and then to Iran and Hindustan so, according to Kuz'mina (ibid.), the separation of the two branches happened within the Andronovo period.

The alternative and generally more plausible theory was offered by Safronov (1989)[23] who placed the Indo-Iranians deeper in time (ca. 3rd millennium BC) and more westward to the Carpathians as part of the secondary Baden archaeological Proto I-E culture defined by him as the Graeco-Aryan-Thracian complex. Within this theory, the early Yamna culture (ca. 3600 BC) was considered as ancient Indo-Iranian splitting at a later stage into the ancient Indo-Aryans (Kuban-Dnieper chariot culture) and ancient Iranians (the late Yamna culture) around 2500 BC (Safronov 1989; Nikolaeva 2007). Close to the time of the appearance of the bearers of the Catacomb culture (ca. 2800–2200 BC) in Eastern Europe, the ancient Iranians departed eastwards beyond the Volga and then to Central Asia and the territories of modern Iran while the ancient Indo-Aryans crossed into Mesopotamia via the Caucasus and then to India (p.c. Nikolaeva 2014).

There is some linguistic evidence that an ethnos directly continuing the 'proto-Sanskrit' (non-Iranian) dialects lingered on in the northern Circum-Pontic area until the Sarmatian[24] times:

> *At least in the 1st millennium BC the right-bank Ukraine was already a part (periphery) of the Slavonic linguo-enthnic space. Since the complexity of the ancient ethno-geography of Scythia is now revealing itself more and more insistently and we are arriving to the constatation of the actual preservation in its part (parts) along with the Iranian (Scythian) also of the Indo-Aryan (pra--Indian) component or its relics, there arises the rightful question about the re-*

[23] See a brief summary of his theory in Nikolaeva (2010).
[24] Identified with the Maeotae by Trubačëv.

ality of also Slavo-Indo-Aryan contacts approximately in the Scythian time.[25] (Trubačëv 2003: 51).

This theory was not unanimously accepted but even Trubačëv's opponents had to admit that such an approach would be justified because there is some linguistic support[26] for the possibility of the division of Iranian and Indo-Aryan branches before their eastward migration (Raevskij, 2006, 503 – 507). The main objection of Raevskij, that it would be problematic for the descendants of Proto-Indo-Aryan dialects to keep their linguistic and cultural identity surrounded by Iranians, is based on a circular logic a priori presuming that all peoples occupying the vast Circum-Pontic area were 'Iranians', so it cannot be taken as a decisive argument. Besides, Trubačëv's opponents acknowledged that this did not "exclude, in principle, the possibility of preservation of certain Indo-Aryan relics[27]" (Grantovskij & Raevskij, 1980). Of these 'Indo-Aryan (pra-Indian) relics' the sacral lexicon and theonyms would have had a higher chance of being preserved.

The earliest attested form of Indo-Aryan is the language of the Vedas which is commonly referred to as 'Vedic (Sanskrit)'. The Eastern (Iranian) branch of Indo-Aryan was represented by Avestan. Sanskrit and Avestan are largely inter-comprehensible but have some significant differences in phonetics. One of the most obvious features is the change of the original I-E *s*, well preserved in Sanskrit, into *h/x* in Iranian. As the result, words as the Skr. *svar* 'the sun, sunshine, light, lustre; heaven (as a paradise and as the abode of the gods)' became *hvar-*, automatically excluding any chance of explaining the prominent Eastern Slavonic supreme deity *Svarog* as an Iranian loan. Because of the remarkable phono-semantic affinity it would be most natural to connect *Svarog* with the Sanskrit *svarga* 'heaven, the abode of light and of the gods' the only obstacle being the extreme spatial gap excluding any chance of a recent direct contact. However, this problem could be resolved if we hypothesise the existence of the non-Iranian 'Indo-Aryan (pra-Indian) component or its relics' on the linguistic periphery of the Slavonic world.

A detailed review of all aspects of Trubačëv's findings is beyond the scope of this article, however, the important implication is that we should not necessarily seek the origin of presumed Iranian loans in Slavonic ('Iranisms' in the Russian linguistic terminology) only in Avestan or middle and late Iranian dialects because some of them may derive from the residual Indo-European (Proto-Indo-Aryan) dialects. If we accept that

[25] "Правобережная Украина по крайней мере в I тыс. до нашей эры уже была частью (периферией) праславянского лингвоэтнического пространства. Поскольку сейчас сложность древней этногеографии Скифии вырисовывается все более настойчиво и мы приходим к констатации реального сохранения на части (частях) ее территории наряду с иранским (скифским), индоарийского (праиндийского) ее компонента или его реликтов, встает уместный вопрос о реальности также славяно-индоарийских контактов приблизительно в скифское время."

[26] The possibility of separation of Indo-Aryans and Iranians within the Central-Eastern European homeland was particularly supported by Safronov (1989). At the linguistic level this is confirmed by the unexplainable lack of proper 'Iranian' influence on Slavonic: "[t]his absence of Iranian influence on Slavonic is surprising in view of the repeated incursions of Scythian tribes into Europe, and the prolonged occupation by them of extensive territories reaching to the Danube. Clearly at this later period the Slavs must have remained almost completely uninfluenced politically and culturally by the Iranians. On the other hand at a much earlier period (c. 2000 BC) before the primitive Aryans left their European homeland, Indo-Iranian and the prototypes of Baltic and Slavonic must have existed as close neighbours for a considerable period of time. Practically all the contacts which can be found between the two groups are to be referred to this period and this period alone" (Burrow 1955: 22).

[27] "в принципе не исключает возможности сохранения отдельных индоарийских языковых реликтов."

the origin of *Svarog*[28] could be Proto-Indo-Aryan then it would be justified to assume that the name of the other important deity *Xors* could also come from the same non-Iranian (Proto-Indo-Aryan) source.

2 Non-Iranian Etymology of Xors

2.1 *Indo-Aryan parallels*

The perception of *Xors* as a solar god of Iranian origin is still prevailing but there have been alternative theories[29]. For instance, S. P. Obnorskij considered *Xors* as an old borrowing from Ossetic *xorz* meaning 'good' and explained the Russian adjective *xorošij* 'good' as originally meaning "of Xors, belonging to Xors" (Obnorskij 1929). This etymology found support in Abaev[30] (1949: 395–396) but was firmly rejected by Vasmer[31] (1958: 3.265). Although Toporov did not support Ossetic as the immediate source of either *Xors* or *xoroš*, he too was inclined to see the connection between the two words:

> *The only Russian word which has really been connected by researchers with the name of Xors is – xorošij. This link now appears unquestionable [...]. Unquestionable is also the direction of the word formation: Xors → xorošij. It is only the concrete Iranian source of the name Xors that raises doubts.*[32] (Toporov 1989: 37).

The last phrase about the lack of a doubtless 'concrete Iranian source' is important as a frank admission that neither the Iranian *xwaršēδ/xoršid* nor the Ossetic *horz* provide an uncontroversial etymology of *Xors*. The attempt by Vasil'ev (1998) to resolve this problem by suggesting the hypothetical Sarmato-Alanian appellative **xors/*xūrs* 'King Sun', derived by means of a complicated chain of assumptions, appears equally implausible because of the late origin of the contracted form *xwaršēδ/xoršid* and the phonetic difficulties discussed above. However, the obvious connection between *Xors* and *xorošij* could be of key significance if we refute the presumed 'Iranian' origin and examine the (non-Iranian) Vedic *hṛṣu*[33] 'glad, happy'.

This link was first mentioned in Gorjaev (1896: 400) but it has not been taken seriously mainly because of the controversial attitude towards any Russian word with an

[28] Other religious Slavonic words, commonly taken as 'Iranisms' e.g. *rai* 'paradise', can equally be explained from Indo-Aryan (cp. Vedic *rai* 'wealth, riches'). As for the Slavonic *bog* 'god', after an in-depth assessment Trubačëv (2004: 49–51) concluded that it was not possible to determine with certainty if it was a loan or an ancient inherited word.

[29] For a recent comprehensive criticism of the 'Iranian' theory see Beskov (2008: 75–124).

[30] The extreme 'Irano-centrism' of Abaev was noted by Trubačëv (1999: 15) who quoted Abaev's words "[a]nything that cannot be explained from Iranian in most cases is unexplainable" (Abaev 1949: 37).

[31] "Unwahrscheinlich ist Ableitung von *Xopc* 'Sonnengott' [...]".

[32] "Единственное русское слово, которое действительно связывалось исследователями с именем Хорса, – *хороший*. Сама эта связь представляется теперь несомненной [...]. Несомненно и направление словопроизводства: *Хорс → хороший*. Сомнения вызывает конкретный иранский источник имени *Хорса*."

[33] Sanskrit ṣ is the exact equivalent of the Russian *š* – both conveying the voiceless retroflex sibilant [ʂ]; Sanskrit *ṛ* is a syllabic alveolar trill, probably, close to the Russian palatalised *r'* [rʲ]. English translations of Sanskrit words follow Monier-Williams (1963).

initial *x*[34]. Since the initial *x* is considered non-native to Slavonic phonology, there is a tendency to view such words as loans, particularly as 'Iranisms' because of the large number of *x-* and *h-* initial words in Iranian languages arising from the original **s*. In reality, Slavonic *x* only accidentally coincided with Iranian *h/x* (Trubačëv 2003: 51).

Apart from the difficulty with the initial *x*, Rus. *xoroš-* is a remarkably exact phono-semantic match to *hṛṣu*. In the Southern Slavonic languages the Sanskrit syllabic *ṛ* would be expected to correspond to *-ŭr-* and in pleophonic Eastern Slavonic languages to *-oro-* so *h-ṛ-ṣu* and *x-oro-š* agree phonetically in every detail. Semantically, while in Russian the cardinal meaning is only 'good' in a broad sense (nice, beautiful, pleasant, worthy etc.), the range of meanings of *hṛṣ-* is much wider. Its oldest (Vedic) meaning is (1) bristling, erection (esp. of the hair in a thrill of rapture or delight), (2) joy, pleasure, happiness; to be anxious or impatient for' and also 'to thrill with rapture, rejoice in the prospect of smth., exult, be glad or pleased' (also personified as a son of *Dharma*[35], (3) erection of the sexual organ, sexual excitement, lustfulness, (4) ardent desire. Thus, *hṛṣu* is about a specific kind of joy the nature of which becomes transparent if we consider the cardinal meaning of the respective verb *hṛṣ – harṣati*: 'becomes sexually excited; becomes erect or stiff or rigid, bristles (said of the hairs of the body)'. As one can see, *hṛṣu* means more than just 'pleasure' but specifically an utter carnal joy and pleasure when the hairs of the body bristle.

2.2 *Indo-European perspective*

Traditionally, *hṛṣ* is related to the non-conflicting hypothetical 'proto-form' **ĝhers-/*ghers-* 'to bristle' (Watkins, 2000, 30) or ** g'ʰers-(eh1)-* (De Vaan, 2008: 289–290). It is believed that **ĝh/*g'ʰ* yielded *χ* (kh*)* in Greek and Proto-Italic: Greek *chaírō* (*χαίρω)* 'to be glad' and Proto-Italic **xors-ē-* 'to be stiff' leading to Latin *hirsutus* 'prickly' and *horrere* 'to bristle, shudder, look frightful'. According to the same theory[36], the reflex of **ĝh /*g'ʰ* in Slavonic is *z* (as in Avestan) and *ž* in Baltic while in Sanskrit its reflex would be *h* (as in *hṛṣ).* We do not know the timing and the causes of the presumed **ĝh/*g'ʰ* > *z* change in Slavonic and Iranian and > *h* in Indo-Aryan but there is a possibility that this split was already a feature of different 'Proto-Indo-Aryan' dialects. In fact, Trubačëv (1999: 239) gave three[37] *h*-initial words in his list of the reconstructed relic Proto-Indo-Aryan vocabulary of which at least one word *harmisia* 'fortress' is clearly related to I-E **ĝher* 'enclosure'.

According to De Vaan (2008: 290) "[t]he verb can be old, and so can the derivative in **-ōs-*". At the late I-E stage the three *g*-less branches: Proto-Italic, Proto-Greek and Proto-Indo-Aryan probably overlapped in the area between the Balkans, Thracho-Phrygia, Danube and the Carpathians (Safronov 1989: 179–217; Nikolaeva 2007: 9) where the already *g*-less **hr(V)s* could had been taken into the proto-Slavonic and proto-Baltic dialects with certain ancient loan-words.

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[34] For a recent assessment of various views on this controversial issue see Bičovský (2009).

[35] Law or Justice personified.

[36] There are many variations of the reconstructed I-E phonetic system but the current 'mainstream' consensus is expressed in the recent textbook by Clackson (2007: 37–38).

[37] **harmisia* 'fortress' = Skr. *harmya* 'large house, palace'; **hava* 'sacrifice, oblation' = Skr. *hava* 'oblation, burnt offering, sacrifice' and **hingula* 'vermellion' = Skr. *hiṅgula* 'vermellion'.

Alternatively, it could have escaped the presumed Slavonic **ĝh/*g'h* > *z* change due to various reasons (being an emphatic word, religious term, dialectal word etc.).

Exploring the etymology of *xoroš(ij)* 'good' Toporov (1989: 36–37) considered as its possible cognates *xoroxorit'sja* 'to swagger, to boast (lit. 'to stick up' – said of a cock's comb), *xorzat'* 'to get a swelled head, to boast' and *xarzit'(sja)* 'to become exited or angry'. He rightly noted that both words had a common semantic element 'to grow big, increase in size' but considered them as a development of Iranian *xvar* 'sun' based on a doubtful comparison with the sun rising and getting optically bigger at sunrise/sunset. While such etymology is questionable, these words may indeed be related if we view them in connection with the secondary meaning of *hṛṣu* 'telling lies' (i.e. boasting) and the nominative form *harṣa* having a wide array of meanings mentioned in 2.1.. In this context Rus. *xoroš-* may be viewed as a relic of the ancient fertility cult[38] developing semantically along the line 'worthy, good' < 'fertile' < 'sexually potent' < 'erect' < 'to bristle'. This chain of logical connections may appear far-fetched but De Vaan (2008: 290) proposed the same course of development for the reconstructed I-E etymon **g'herǝ-i-* : "'to enjoy' < 'to be excited' < 'to stick out (?)'" leading to the Greek *chaírō* (*χαίρω)* 'to be glad', and Sanskrit *harayati* 'to enjoy'.

It is important to stress that although the theonym *Xors*, Russian *xoroš, xorošij* and Sanskrit *hṛṣu* may come from the same ancient root, this does not mean that they derive directly from one another. Understanding the primordial semantics of this root may help in explaining the otherwise obscure meaning of *xoroš* as 'lover', as well as the mysterious *xorošul'* 'type of round ritual bread' preserved in some Russian dialects (Dal' 1909: 1224; Rybakov 1980: 434) and also give us a glimpse into the nature of 'mysterious' *Xors*.

2.3 *'Sun god' or 'sun fertility hero'?*

To summarise, we may say that the ancient root *hṛṣ* belongs to the deepest layer of the archaic lexicon relating to procreation and fertility and, by its association with *Dharma*, it is also linked to the fundamental concept of *ṛta* 'fixed or settled order' which, in its turn, is organically connected with the notions of *kāla* 'a fixed or right point of time, a space of time, time (in general)[39], season' and *kālacakra* 'the wheel of time' taken as the eternal cycle of rebirth and death expressing the Vedic world-view:

> *[...] the ancient nucleus of the RV [Rigveda] is represented by the myths of the cosmogonic theme and the primary meaning of the whole collection was to serve the ritual connected with the change of the yearly cycle which was understood as the destruction of the universe, its sinking into the chaos and its new resurrection i.e. restoring the cosmic order.*[40] (Elizarenkova 1982: 25).

[38] The term 'fertility' is taken here in the wider meaning as the 'eternal cycle of re-birth of nature' and not just 'the ability to produce offspring' or the "basic human need" as in Campo (1994: 162).

[39] Cp. Slavonic *kolo* 'circle, wheel'. Also Ukrainian *koli* 'when?, at what period of time?' and Skr. Locative *kale* 'in a fixed or right point of time, season'.

[40] "[...] древнее ядро РВ [Риг-Веда] представляет собой гимны космогонической тематики и первоначальное значение всего собрания заключалось в тем, чтобы сопровождать ритуал, связанный со сменой годового цикла, понимаемого как разрушение вселенной, погружение ее в хаос и новое ее восстановление, т.е. сотворение космического порядка."

Importantly for this discussion, as a noun *hṛṣu* was also used as a theonym and stood for (1) *Agni* or fire[41], (2) the sun and (3) the moon. In the Hindu tradition *Agni* is the second in importance to the thunder-god *Indra* and this kind of relationship exactly mirrors that of *Perun* and *Xors*. Although *Agni* is mainly a personification of the sacrificial fire (cp. Slavonic **ognĭ* 'fire') he also has clear solar features: he shines like the sun and disperses darkness. Like *Apollo, Agni* drives a shiny golden chariot drawn by two ruddy steeds and even the sun is regarded as his form. His animal form is a bull or a horse but he often takes the form of a divine bird: an eagle of the sky. He is a son of Heaven and Earth. As a fire being produced every morning *Agni* is ever young. Notably, one of his many epithets is *dvi-janman* 'having two births' (Macdonell 1917: 1–3). Thus the character of Agni combines the features of *Helios*, *Eros*, *Ares* and *Dionysus*.

The closely related *harṣa* was also used as an epithet of an *Asura*[42] and as an appellation of the son of *Krishna*. In the popular Hindu mythology 'son/daughter of god' should not be taken literary in terms of conventional genealogy because god's offspring were often seen as personifications of certain features of the parent deity and its incarnations (Avatars)[43]. *Krishna* gained a special importance in the post-Rigvedic period but in the earliest texts he was mentioned primarily as the full incarnation of the Rigvedic *Vishnu*. They were so closely interrelated that *Krishna* was sometimes directly identified with *Vishnu* so E. W. Hopkins (1915: 3) occasionally used the joint name *Krishna-Vishnu*[44]. Importantly, in *Mahābhārata*[45] one of the forms of *Krishna – Krishna-Gopala*[46] was depicted as a "young and amorous shepherd with flowing hair and a flute in his hand" (Monier-Williams 1899: 306). Although indirect, the intricate union of the 'young and amorous god', so reminiscent of Cretan young *Zeus,* Greek *Dyonisus* and *Kouros* and being the important part of the 'Hindu triad' *(Brahma* – creator, *Vishnu* – preserver and *Shiva* – destroyer), with *harṣa* is significant.

If we accept this new etymological link (putting aside for now the problematic *s*||*š* correlation) then instead of an abstract 'solar god' or the even more abstract "deity of the solar disc" (Rybakov 1987: 444) *Hṛṣu/Xors* would emerge as a typical 'fertility hero' or a 'sun hero'. Of course, a sun hero is related to the sun by decent but, as Eliade noted:

> *[...] we must be careful not to reduce the sun hero to being simply a physical manifestation of the sun; neither his structure nor his place in myth is confined to merely the phenomena of the sun (dawn, rays, light, twilight, and so on). A sun hero will always present in addition a "dark side", a connection with the world of the dead, with initiation, fertility and the rest.* (Eliade 1958: 159 – 150).

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[41] Possibly, also influenced by the partial homophone *haras* 'flame, fire'.

[42] In the Vedic period *Asuras* were believed to be benevolent deities.

[43] A good example of the typical god-son relations is the story of *Gādhi* in Mahabharata: "Kuṣika [name of a prince] is permeated with Indra, and Gādhi, son of Kuṣika, is in reality son of Indra; in other words, for the purpose of having a son Gādhi, Indra becomes incorporate; Gādhi is Indra on earth" (Hopkins 1915: 3).

[44] Kṛṣṇa - Viṣṇu.

[45] *Mahābhārata* is by far the largest and one of the most important pieces of the Indian Sanskrit literature. It is sometimes referred to as 'The Great Epic' by analogy with the Greek epic poems. Although it was composed in the post-Vedic times, it represents the culmination of a lengthy tradition of oral poetry (Brockington 1998). Some of the personages of the Epic can be traced to legends and tales going back to the beginning of the Vedic times (Hopkins 1902: 286).

[46] Sanskrit *gopāla* 'cowherd' may be literally interpreted as 'protector of cattle'.

Refuting the interpretation of *Xors* as an abstract 'solar god' or the 'personification of the sun' opens new interesting venues of research. Because of the limited volume of this paper, they can only be briefly outlined. The following text should not be treated as the Author's endeavour to give bold solutions to various mythological topics, many of which have been debated for decades, but solely as a tentative try to cast an alternative view from a different perspective and, possibly, stimulate a discussion.

3 Outlook

3.1 *Archaism of Slavonic language and mythology*

In early historical linguistic studies Slavonic was routinely presented as 'young language' and a target for borrowing from more 'ancient' surrounding languages. Oleg Nikolajevič Trubačëv in his book *Ėtnogenez i kul'tuta drevnejšix slavjan* (2003) questioned such widespread presumptions and also the theory of the recent 'arrival' of Slavs from a small 'homeland'. Instead, he postulated the inherent multi-dialectal character of early Slavs spread over a large territory of Central and Eastern Europe with the core in the Middle Danube Region. As to the dating of these dialects Trubačëv wrote:

> *Currently, there is an objective tendency to deepen the dating of ancient Indo-European dialects. This also applies to Slavonic as one of the Indo-European dialects. However, the question now is not that the history of Slavonic may be measured by the scale of the II to III millenniums B.C. but that we can hardly date the 'emergence' or 'separation' of pra-Slavonic or pra-Slavonic dialects from Indo-European dialects because of the proper uninterrupted Indo-European origin of Slavonic.*[47] (Trubačëv 2003: 25).

The concept of the "Indo-European archaism of Slavonic Language and culture[48]" (182) and its inherent poly-dialectal nature should equally apply to the Slavonic mythology and pre-Christian religion. Trubačëv spoke against simplistic attempts to 'reconstruct' the Indo-European religion only as a retrospective projection of the elaborated pantheons of Greece, Rome and ancient Indo-Iran. Such an approach would be particularly unfruitful for establishing the I-E identity of Slavonic heathen deities as it is often impossible to link them clearly to the prominent figures of classical pantheons. He believed that the reason for this was not the scarcity of written sources or some particular 'forgetfulness' of Slavs but the difference in the cultural stage. According to Trubačëv, it would be "[m]ore natural and logical to presume with pra-Slavs in these cases the reflection of a more archaic stage[49]" (2003: 196). The archaism of Slavonic culture was also noted by E. Gasparini who wrote that "the Slavic society presents

[47] "В настоящее время отмечается объективная тенденция углубления датировок истории древних индоевропейских диалектов, и это касается славянского как одного из индоевропейских диалектов. Однако вопрос сейчас не в том, что древняя история праславянского может измеряться масштабами II и III тыс. до н.э., а в том, что мы в принципе затрудняемся даже условно датировать "появление" или "выделение" праславянского или праславянских диалектов из индоевропейского именно ввиду собственных непрерывных индоевропейских истоков славянского."

[48] "индо-европейский архаизм славянского языка и культуры"

[49] "[г]ораздо естественней предположить у праславян в этих случаях отражение архаической стадии".

itself as the most archaic one to which the ethnological sciences permit to descend in Europe[50]" (1960: 21).

Importantly for the following discussion, Trubačëv particularly stressed that for Slavs the characteristic feature was not the worshipping of a set of formal anthropomorphic deities but, mainly, "seasonal rituals similar to those related to the name of a straw doll at seeing-off of spring[51]" (2003: 196). Thus, if one has to draw parallels between Slavonic and Greek cults, the comparison should be done with the most archaic layer such as the Minoan religion which similarly "lacked genuinely aesthetic representations of its divinities" (Persson 1942: 8) and was also focused on seasonal fertility rituals. At the centre of these rites were the *Great Goddess* and her mortal but ever resurging male consort resembling the Phrygian *Attis* (Evans 1921: 161–162) and *Dionysus* to whom Farnell referred as "Zeus-Dionysus of Crete" (1896: 612).[52]

3.2 *'Dyonisiac complex' and fertility cult*

Although *Dionysus* is commonly known as the 'god of wine', this is only one aspect of the nature of this important deity intricately connected with the cult of fertility. The rites associated with his cult "were ecstatic and sensual" (De Rose & Garry 2005: 21) which precisely matches the cardinal meaning of *hŗṣu*. *Dionysus* was also worshipped as the god of trees and vegetation in general (Frazer 1922: 387; Seaford 2006: 22–23) but at the same time he was often imagined in an animal form as a bull or a goat having clear ithyphallic traits:

> *The Hellenes regarded the bull and the goat as his [Dionysus] frequent embodiments, and in ritual employed the phallos, the human generative organ as the symbol of his productive powers [...].* (Farnell 1909: 97).

These obvious links with fertility and the manhood are in perfect agreement with the semantics of *hŗṣu*. In this context the Latin *hircus* 'he-goat, buck' can hardly be a mere coincidence.

The origin of the Dionysian cult is believed to be Thraco-Phrygian (Farnell 1909: 86). Although the solely Thracian origin is now debated (e.g. Archibald 1999: 432), even if it originated elsewhere, the fact that this cult was particularly strong close to the area where Trubačëv (2003) placed the core of the proto-Slavonic tribes is highly significant. It is also important that it is in the Balkans where we find the names like *Krestonia* (*Κρεστονία)* and *Cherso* (*Χέρσο)*[53], Bulgarian place names *Hărsovo*[54], Romanian city *Hârșova (Hîrșova)* and also words like the Greek *cháris* (*χάρις)* 'beauty, delight' and Bulg. *haresam* '(I) like, love' – all phonetically and semantically compatible with *harṣa*. Not only do these words fall into the semantic field of *hŗṣu/harṣa* but they obviously come from non-RUKI dialects since they keep the unchanged *-rs* as in *Xors*. The possible connection of *Hărsovo* and *Xors* has already been proposed by Kalojanov (2000). He gave

[50] "la società slava si presenta come la più arcaica alla quale le scienze etnologiche permettono a resalire in Europa."

[51] "сезонные обряды вроде того, который обозначается названием соломенной куклы на проводах весны".

[52] See more on the Cretan connection of Dionysus in Kerényi & Manheim (1976).

[53] Where, incidentally, was located the temple of *Dionysus* (Farnell 1909: 90).

[54] Хърсово.

an impressive list of Bulgarian place names with the root *hărs-* but being constrained by the conventional interpretation of *Xors* as an Iranian solar deity could not convincingly ground his theory of its South-Eastern and Balkan origin.

The obvious similarities between the traits of *Dionysus* and other deities related to the concept (archetype[55]) of the seasonal "decay and revival of vegetation" (Frazer 1922: 393) and the idea of the seasonal cycle of death and re-birth (the dying and resurrecting god) of nature are well known (e.g. Seaford 2006: 23). Among the most prominent figures are Middle-Eastern *Attis*, Egyptian *Osiris* and Greek *Adonis*. Given the archaism of Slavonic culture, relics of this ancient archetype should be reflected in its mythology. Exploring the history of the 'Dionysiac complex' Toporov (1984) saw its clear manifestations in the Slavonic folklore and rituals connected with marriage, new-year traditions and seasonal feasts.

3.3 *'Dionysiac complex' in Slavonic and Baltic mythology*

3.3.1 *Thracian Dionysus and the Slavs*

As mentioned earlier, seasonal rites were central to the religion of the early Slavs. They survive to this day in the form of folk festivals where the main event is the chasing away of winter, welcoming of spring and the start of the new calendar year. Spring festivals are common across Europe but this tradition is especially popular with Slavonic peoples to such an extent that some German scholars believed that it was Slavonic in origin (Frazer 1922: 309). More likely, though, that it continues the extremely ancient base myth[56] known as *hierós gámos* (*ἱερός γάμος)* 'the divine marriage' which may be traced to the cult of the 'Great Mother (Goddess)' taking its beginning in the Palaeolithic times. Central and Eastern Europe was the area of the oldest 'Great Mother' figurines bearing explicit fertility connotations. One can see here a continuous tradition stretching back to at least 25–30 Kya., subdued during the Last Glacial Maximum but springing up again in the "Mythological crescent" (a term proposed in Haarmann & Marler 2008) around the 8th millennium BC. In South-Eastern Europe these figurines reappeared in mass in the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture from ca. 5500 BC and the Great Mother had remained the centre of the earliest Thracian, Phrygian and Minoan cults:

> *In the houses, statuettes have been found that must be interpreted as idols. They are mostly female with strongly stressed sex properties. Male statuettes are phallic. We can infer that the religion of this agricultural population was centred on a fertility cult whose main figure was a Mother Goddess.* (Katičić 1976).

It is believed that the main function of 'Great Mother' was "the creation and maintenance of the Universe in the form of the constant cycle of rebirth of life"[57] (Nikolaeva 2010a: 101).

We may assume that traces of this ancient cult should be preserved in the Slavonic mythology and religion, at least due to the geographical closeness. Indeed, the Slavonic New Year festival *koljada* reflects the 'dyonisiac complex' in all major details:

[55] The term 'archetype' is used here in its usual dictionary meaning 'original model or type' and largely corresponding to 'common ancestral myth' by Witzel (2012: 48) without the Jungian mentalistic connotation.

[56] The term 'base myth' is used in this article in a general sense and not in the specific understanding promoted by Ivanov & Toporov (1974) as the universal myth of the fight of a divine hero with a serpent-demon.

[57] "создание и управление Вселенной в форме постоянного возрождения жизни".

> *To die, give birth and be reborn are agrarian concepts of the vegetal and animal life, whence the scenes of coitus, killing and the birth of koljada.*[58] (Gasparini 1973: 445)

Dionysus is not a Thracian word but the names of *Zamolxis* and *Sabazios*, attested in some Thracian inscriptions, could have been his local appellations (Farnell 1909: 94). These names are, obviously, difficult to connect phonetically with *Xors* yet there may be a link joining the Thracian *Dyonisus* with the Slavs. According to Herodotus, the Thracians worshipped the triad: *Dionysus*, *Ares* and *Artemis*. The latter may be the Greek equivalent of the local goddess *Semele*. Importantly, *Semele* is cognate with one of the I-E words for 'earth' well preserved in Slavonic: *zemlja/zemja*. We may thus connect the Thracian *Semele* and Phrigyan *Zemélō* (*ζεμέλω)* 'Earth-mother' (Fasmer 1964–1973: 2,93) with the Slavonic archetype of *Mat'-(syra)-Zemlya* 'Mother-(moist)-Earth' and Lithuanian *Žemė Pati* 'Earth Spouse' or *Žemyna* – the female deity of the earth, harvest and fertility[59]. Since *Dionysus* was believed to be the son of *Artemis/Semele,* she could be an important link bridging the ancient Thracian and Slavonic cults and implying the existence in the Slavonic and Baltic mythology of a fertility deity similar in role to *Dionysus* of Thrace.

3.3.2 *Parallels in Baltic mythology*

As mentioned earlier, *Xors* could not have derived directly either from the *-rṣ* RUKI form *harṣa* or, even less so, from the Persian *xwaršēδ/xoršid.* Its original proto-form should have been **h(V)rs-* (*V* stands for 'vowel') which would be expected to remain unchanged in the non-RUKI languages but become **h(V)rx* in the *-rx* RUKI languages (Slavonic) and **h(V)rš* in *-rš* RUKI languages (Baltic, Indo-Aryan) if it were inherited directly from I-E, or remain as **h(V)rs* if borrowed from a non-RUKI dialect. Finding the relevant reflexes of the etymon **h(V)rs-* in Slavonic and Baltic among deities similar in role to *Dyonisus* would deliver the final blow to the 'Iranian loan' theory.

Indeed, we do find in the Baltic area the *-rx* reflex in the name of the Old Prussian god of vegetation *Curcho*[60]. According to some historians (Mone 1822; Grunau and Perlbach 1876), *Curcho* came to the Prussians from the neighbouring Slavonic Mazurians (*-rx/-rš* RUKI language). Phonetically, the development **h(V)rs* > **kh(V)rs*[61] > **k(V)rx* (RUKI law) to the Old Prussian **kurk* would be natural since Old Prussian did not have a phonological *x (kh)*. The mentioning of the Sorbian deity *Kruh* by Christian (1767: 22) in relation to *Curcho* gives some extra support to the Slavonic origin theory.

The religious function of *Curcho* has been debated (e.g. Pisani 1950; Puhvel 1974; Toporov 1984; Narbutas 1995; Kregždys 2012) but there is a consensus that this deity was related to the sphere of fertility. Interpreting *Curcho* purely as a fertility god was particularly promoted by Rolandas Kregždys (2009; 2012) based on the attested association of *Curcho* with a well-known fertility symbol – the bull. Notably, the bull was also believed to be the embodiment of *Dyonisus*. A direct attempt to associate *Curho* and *Xors* was

[58] "Morire, partorire e rinascere sono concetti agrari sia della vita vegetale che animale, d'onde le scene di coito, di uccisione e di parto della koljada."

[59] See the in-depth research of the Slavonic and Baltic concepts of the *Earth-Mother* in Toporov (2000).

[60] Also attested as *Curche* and spelled *Kurkas* in modern Lithuanian texts. Old Prussian and Lithuanian do not have a phonological *x (kh)* which is usually reproduced as *k* in borrowed words (Sudnik 1972: 61).

[61] Transition of *x* > *k* is not uncommon also in some Russian dialects (Šaul'skij & Knjazev 2005: 13).

done in Hanusch (1842: 226) and it was later developed in Narbutas (1994: 156): "Curcho may be compared with the Kievan god Chors[62]". Although this theory was based on some questionable presumptions, for which it was rightly criticised in Kregždys (2009: 261–262), the new etymology proposed here could give this comparison a more sound basis. The characteristic features of *Dyonisus* (seasonal deity, hilarious god of wine) are also easily recognizable in the description of *Curcho* by Franz Mone:

> *The image of the Curcho was destroyed after the harvest and re-done annually, he was the protector of all field fruits, food and drink was in his care, he was a cheerful table God*.[63] (Mone, 1822, 95).

It is also significant that some researchers (Narbutas, 1995) saw *Curcho* as a relic of the ancient Mother Goddess cult being the son or husband of *Žemyna* whose connection to the Thracian *Semele* and her son *Dyonisus* has already been mentioned.

We may also tentatively bring up the Lithuanian 'corn spirit' *Kuršis* personified by a straw figure (Ivanov and Toporov, 1987: 154). Phonetically, *Curcho* could not have given *Kuršis* since it is believed that within the RUKI process both *-rx* and *-rš* forms developed from *-rs* independently. Therefore, we may hypothesise that Prussian *Curcho* and Lithuanian *Kuršis* could be parallel developments of **h(V)rs*[64]: the former coming via Slavonic and the latter being the Baltic form.

3.4 *Slavonic 'sun fertility hero'*

3.4.1 *Zeleni Juraj, Jarowit and connection with Thracian Heros*

As for the Slavs, we do not have to look far to find several similar characters in Slavonic popular rites albeit under different names. Closest to the Thracian area is the mythical personage central to Slavonic spring festivals – a young hero known as *Zeleni Juraj (Zeleni Jurij)* in the Balkans, *Jarowit* (*Herowit*, *Gerowit*) with the Western Slavs, *Jarylo* with the Eastern Slavs and his Christianised continuation *Jurij/Egorij/Georgij*. At first glance, these names do not appear to be directly related to *Xors* phonetically, however, they all derive from the root *jar-* contained in Rus. *jar*, Bulg. *jara*, Czeck. *jaro*, Pol. & Slovak. *jar* – all meaning 'spring' i.e. the beginning of a new yearly cycle. Traditionally, this root is derived from the hypothetical I-E **iero*; **ioro* 'year; spring'. The same root is in the words *yaryj* 'fierce, vehement, boisterous, rough' and Serbian *jara* 'heat' both being compatible semantically with the cardinal meaning of *harṣa*. Importantly, the exact Lithuanian analogue of *jaryj* is *aršus*[65] 'fierce' (cp. also *aršytis* 'excited') which effectively bridges the Skr. *hrṣ* 'excited' and the *h*-less Slav. *jar-* 'fierce, boisterous'. At a deeper level both roots may be related to the fundamental Vedic radical *ṛ/ār* 'to move, excite, erect, raise; to put in or upon, place, insert; to deliver up, to give; to praise' (one of its derivatives is *ārya* 'praising, one who is praised').

[62] "Curcho galima palyginti su Kijevo dievu Chorsu."

[63] "Das Bild des Curcho wurde jährlich nach der Aernte [Ernte] zerbrochen und neu gemacht, er war der Beschützer aller Feldfrüchte, Speise und Trank war in seiner Obhut, er war ein fröhlicher Tischgott."

[64] According to Kregždys, *Curcho* and *kuršis* are not related. See his alternative etymology in Kregždys 2012 (131, f.135).

[65] Lithuanian does not have a native phonological [h] or [x].

The common feature of *Zeleni Juraj, Jarowit*, *Jarylo, Jurij/Egorij/Georgij* is that they were usually imagined as heroes on a (white) horse[66] from which we may draw a direct parallel with the images of the 'Thracian horseman' – *Heros*. It is important that depictions of the *Heros* often contained ritualistic objects and symbols of fertility: altar, fire, snake, the sacred tree etc. (Toporov 1992) but were also clearly connected with the cult of the dead (Boteva 2011: 100).

The Greek *hḗrōs (ἥρως)* 'hero' is usually etymologised as 'protector' and associated with Latin *seruāre* 'to safeguard' (e.g. Partridge 1977: 1417) but Toporov (1992) offered a radically new etymology through the same I-E **iero*; **ioro* 'year; spring' thus directly linking *hḗrōs* with *hṓros* (*ὥρος)* 'time, season', Avestan *yar-*, 'year', German *Jahre* (id.), Slavonic *jara* 'spring; vehement, fervent' and, consequently, with *Jarowit* and *Jarilo*. The name *Xors* could not derive directly from *hḗrōs* since the final *-s* in the Greek word is morphological (Nom., m., sing.) but it may be otherwise related to *Heros* because certain Thracian inscriptions are interpreted by some scholars in the sense that "where the Thracian Horseman is concerned the meaning of 'Heros' is not entirely similar to the Greek word" (Boteva 2011: 86). Dilyana Boteva believed that the name might be connected with Greek *Érōs (Ἔρως)*[67] 'Eros < love, mostly of the sexual passion' and not with *hḗrōs* (2002: 819). She quoted from Plato's *Syposium* an account of *Eros* as a messenger between the worlds of men and gods (idem) and drew direct parallels with the Thracian *Heros*. Commenting on the draft of this paper, Dilyana Boteva noted that her interpretation of *Heros* as a divine messenger "leads in a totally different direction" (p.c. 2013). In fact, the new vision of *Xors/ hṛṣu* exactly matches the character of *Eros* and is also not in conflict with the parallels with *Dyonisus* who was similar to *Eros* in many ways:

> *Another peculiar pair of divinities in classical religion is Aphrodite and Eros. I am not at all convinced that Eros is to be considered as the first personification within Greek religion. It is my opinion that he is the direct successor to the young Cretan god, closely related to Adonis and Attis, and* that all of them are associated with the great Goddess of Fertility, the Goddess of Love. (Presson 1942: 151).

The role of *Eros*, described in *Syposium* as a messenger, may also be fully applied to Vedic *Agni* one of whose epithets was *hṛṣu*:

> *He* [Agni] *both takes the offerings of men to the gods and brings the gods to the sacrifice. He is thus characteristically a messenger*[68] *(dūtá) appointed by gods and by men to be an 'oblation bearer'.* (Macdonell 1917: 2)

Some researchers believe that *Heros* could be directly linked to the name of the legendary Prince *Rhesos* (*Ῥῆσος*) featured in Thracian epic tales as having a chariot drawn by white horses (Farnell 1909: 100) and the Thracian king *Rhesos* mentioned by Homer (Toporov 1992: 12). In the beginning of a word *Ῥ* is pronounced as *hr* so *Rhesos* and *Xors* are compatible phonetically. While the final *-s* is clearly morphological, the medial *-s-* is part of the root.

[66] See more on this in Ivanov & Toporov (1974: 180–216) and Sokolova (1979: 155–185).

[67] Of unknown etymology.

[68] E.g. in Rig Veda verse 1.059.02: "mūrdhā divo nābhir agniḥ pṛthivyā athābhavad aratī rodasyoḥ" [Agni (is) the head of the Sky, the navel of the Earth. He became the messenger of the two worlds].

Importantly, in the legend *Rhesos* was directly compared to *Dionysus*. After his death *Rhesos* was placed in a cavern "of the silver land, half-human, half-divine with clear vision (in the dark), even as a prophet of Dionysos took up his abode in the rocky Pangaean Mount" (Farnell 1909: 100)[69]. Liapis (2011) highlighted the striking parallels between the characters of *Heros* and *Rhesos* and the obvious links with the Thracian Orphic and Dionysiac cults.

Finally, it is possible that the name of the 12th century Macedonian ruler *Dobromir Hrs* could also be related here as proposed by Čausidis (2003: 236–247). Moreover, *Rhesos* would be in all respects more plausible as the possible source of the Slavonic theonym *Xors* than the controversial Iranian *xwaršēδ/xoršid*.

3.4.2 *Kresnik, Vesnik, Kurent and Xors*

Another interesting personage closely connected with *Zeleni Juraj* is the Slovenian *Kresnik (Krsnik, Skrstnik)* who is also dubbed "controversial and mysterious" (Šmitek 1998) like *Xors*. The origin of the name and the function of this deity are not clear. There have been attempts to link *Kresnik* with *Xors* but they were lost in the wake of the presumed Iranian origin of *Xors* as a 'personified sun'. In Russia the first historian to connect, although indirectly, *Xors* and *Kresnik* was Efimenko (1868): who, although mistakenly linking *xort* 'hound'[70] with *Xors,* mentioned that *Xors* could be related to the Old Czech *kres* 'fire' and O.C.S *kresŭ* 'revival, resurrection'. Both words do not have a reliable explanation but the new etymology proposed here may give a fresh impetus to this theory since the meaning of *Xors/Hṛṣu* unites the concepts of the personified fire and the sun with the archetype of the ever reviving sun fertility hero. The nature of *Kresnik* combines the distinct features of a 'young sun hero'[71] attributed to the Eastern Slavonic thunder-god *Perun* by Mikhailov (1996, 1998) but also those typical of the Slavonic spring fertility mythological complex:

> *His [Kresnik] belonging to the celestial spheres, certain connection with the weather and atmospheric phenomena (thunder, lightning, storm) and fertility is more than obvious*[72]. (Mikhailov 1996: 137).

Krestnik appears as a hero warrior but also as a benevolent fertility god fused in many ways with the spring deity *Vesnik*: "myths about him [*Vesnik*] are difficult to keep separate from those of *Kresnik*" (Copeland 1931). The story of *Kresnik's* death is characteristic: on the one hand, it has clear analogies with the 'dying and resurrecting god' concept since *Kresnik* does not really die. Like the mythical *Rhesos* "[h]e is only under a spell, and waits in his grave or in a mountain cavern for the hour of his awakening and return to true life" (ibid.). On the other hand, there is a direct link with another Slovene mythical hero *Kurent* personifying a variation of the same general mythologeme: a hero retreating to the realm of death (the moon in this case) and returning again. The new vision of *Xors* as reflecting the 'Dionysiac complex' at the core of the Slavonic mythology may help to clarify this ambiguity.

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[69] See more on this and an excellent up-to-date bibliography in Liapis (2009, 2011).

[70] Slavonic *hort* 'hound' is most probably directly related to Skr. *hṛt* 'bringing, carrying, carrying away, seizing' which is an exact description of the purpose and qualities of a hunting dog.

[71] "Sončni junak Kresnik" in Kelemina (1997[1930]: 11).

[72] "Более чем очевидны его принадлежность к небесным сферам, определённая связь с погодой и атмосферными явлениями (гром, молния, буря), а также с плодородием."

3.5 *Inherent duality of 'sun fertility hero'*

In the oldest Laurentian Codex (PVL 1377: 25) *Xors* appeared as a doublet *Xŭrs Daž'bog*[73] so Rybakov believed that *Xors* was an "inseparable addition to the image of Daž'bog-Sun[74]" (1987: 444). Such duality, which is difficult to explain of a purely solar deity, may become clearer if we look at *Xors* as a sun fertility hero, the inherent duality of whom has already been mentioned, and compare *Xors* with *Dionysus*:

> *His personality is marked by ambiguities: born twice Dionysos displays divine, human and animal traits. [...] Dionysos has both masculine and feminine traits. Embodying the vitality of life on one hand, he also has marked connection with the dead and afterlife on another. He comes and disappears.* (Versnel 2011: 38).

Double-faced representations of *Dionysus* as *Zeus* (as the *Zeus's* youthful aspect) are among the oldest in Greece (Deedes 1935: 217–218). In his article Deedes gave an interesting image of *Dionysus* on a *lekythos* as two bearded masks hung back-to-back on a pillar. The young face could be taken as the image of Zeus-young-hero (*Kouros*) and the old face for *Zeus* as 'Father of Gods and men'. It is significant that it was Crete where "both the cult of *Dionysus* and that of *Zeus* were celebrated [...] in orgiastic manner" (Deedes 1935: 219) and it was also the place where the cult of the Great Goddess flourished[75]. Importantly, Thracian *Dionysus* and *Ares* were also often perceived as a single deity so Farnell even used in their respect a compound name *"Ares-Dionysus"* (1909: 104).

Dionysus has also been associated with the double axe from early times (Georgoudi 2011: 56). Depictions of *Zeus-Dionysus* as a double faced profile with the double-axe on the reverse became common in the Aegean area from 500 BC. According to Margaret Waites (1923), the double axe was originally a symbol of the great earth-goddess symbolising the union of her male and female elements (Deedes 1935: 211). With the 'masculinisation' of the ancient cults this duality could become reinterpreted as the union of *Zeus* and *Dionysus*. This custom of a double-faced *Zeus-Dionysus* spread later to Italy, Sicily, Central Europe and the British Isles although instead of the double axe on the reverse of the coins appeared either a club, representing the life-giving bow of the Tree of Life, or a horse (sometimes a boar) which are well-recognised fertility symbols.

3.5.1 *Xors-Daž'bog as the Eastern-Slavonic reflection of duality concept*

Nikos Čausidis (2000) explored the puzzling dual nature of *Daž'bog* combining both solar and chthonic aspects and proposed the existence of "two Dažbogs: an Estern-Slavic, Solar Dažbog and the chthonic deity of the South Slavs" (2000, 41) stemming from a 'common prototype': "primary male deity" (ibid.). The new interpretation of *Xors-Daž'bog* as a 'sun fertility hero' and as a Slavonic analogue of the *Zeus-Dionysus* concept may add clarity to this complicated issue. The parallels with the Iranian triad: 'primo-

[73] "ХЪРСАДАЖЬБ[ОГ]А".

[74] "неотъемлимое дополнение к образу Дажьбога-Солнца".

[75] Recent genetic studies have revealed a remarkable affinity between the modern inhabitants of the Cretan Lasithi Plateau (the centre of the Great Goddess cult) and the Balkan peoples: "Y-STR-based analyses demonstrated the close affinity that R1a1 chromosomes from the Lasithi Plateau shared with those from the Balkans, but not with those from lowland eastern Crete" (Martinez et al. 2007) so the striking resemblance between the ancient Cretan and Balkan fertility cults may not be accidental.

genitor' *Z'rvan* = *Svarog* and his sons *Ormazd* (*Ahura Mazda*) = *Svarožič* and *Ahriman* = *Dažbog* drawn by Čausidis appear correct but, in my opinion, there is no need to seek the explanation solely in the presumed Iranian[76] influence on Slavs as this may be a parallel development of the same ancient base myth. The Indo-Aryan analogue of *Xors-Daž'bog* could be the Hindu concept of *Rudra-Shiva* displaying a similar duality:

> *[…] Rudra-Śiva is both the god of procreation and destruction. He impersonates the generating power worshipped in the liṅga[77]; similarly he reduces to ashes the god of 'desire' or sexual love, Kāma […].* (Charkavarti 1994: 45).

Another parallel may be drawn with the Prussian *Curcho* who, being a fertility deity, also has chthonic features (Kredzys 2009: 293–294) and the concept of the 'sun fertility hero' in general.

An even more archaic reflection of the ancient duality concept can be found in the Eastern Slavonic vernal and summer rites where the main heroes *Kostroma* and *Jarilo* display a mixture of male and female traits.

3.6 *'Sun fertility hero' and archetype of divine trinity*

As already mentioned, the Thracians worshipped the trinity: *Dionysus*, *Ares* and *Artemis*. The concept of trinity is pervasive in the Indo-European mythology. Waites sought its origin in the "idea of a division of the divine nature between a god and a goddess who, together with their child, form a natural trinity, glorifying and repeating on their divine plane the life of the human family" (1923: 34). In the process of 'masculinisation' the female goddess was replaced by the sky-god and the two male elements became perceived as twin-gods: "[w]ith the predominance of the Father, we should expect the development of another double type, this time of two like gods" who in the course of time started to be differentiated by age (ibid.: 39). Waits gave a list of examples of such triple groups of gods in the Greek cults showing this gradual development.

Xors-Daž'bog and the supreme deity *Perun* form a triad which is reminiscent of the Thracian triad *Dionysus*, *Ares* and *Artemis* where the dual *Dionysus-Ares* may be paralleled with *Xors-Daž'bog*. The earlier, female dominated concept of the trinity could have been preserved in one of the most common motifs of the traditional 'tripartite' Slavonic embroidery showing the central figure of a woman and two horse riders (Slavonic analogue of *Ashvins/Diouskuri?*) with many details (e.g. rhombi with X-form crosses in place of the horses' genitals and between the woman's legs) having clear fertility connotations.

Such vision of the nature of the concept of trinity may also help to understand the Slovene mythological complex *Kresnik-Vesnik/Kurent,* forming a similar trinity with the mythical *Deva/Vesna*.

In the Baltic mythology the same idea is easily recognisable in the triple deity group: the sky-god *Perkūnas*, the young god of streams and nature *Patrimpos* and the chthonic deity *Patulos* described as an old bearded man (Ivanov and Toporov 1987; Balsys 2012).

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[76] Nikos Čausidis did mention the possible existence also of the Indo-Iranian pra-Slavonic substrate sometime between the end of the second and the beginning of the second millenniums BC (2000: 31).

[77] In Hinduism "the male organ or Phallus (esp. that of Śiva worshipped in the form of a stone or marble column […]" (Monier-Williams 1963: 901).

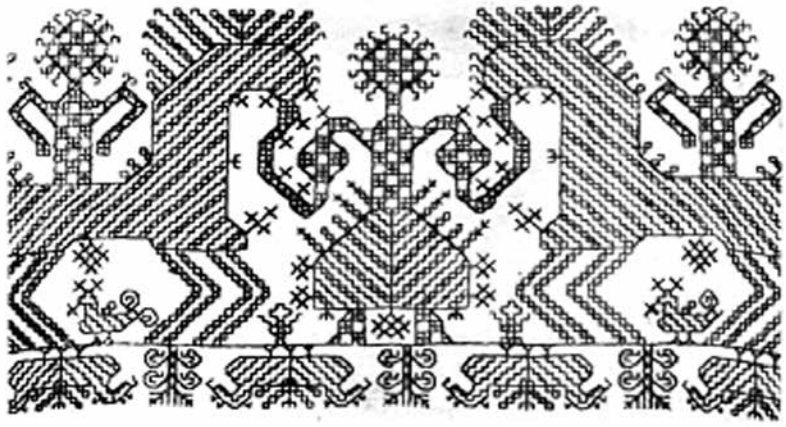

Fig.1: Towel end. 19–20th century. Vonguda village, Archangelsk region, Russia. From the collection of the Russian State Museum (Boguslavskaja 1972: fig. 25. p. 142).

3.6.1 *'Sun fertility hero', Dioscuri and the horse*

The intricate relations between the dual nature of *Dionysus/Xors/Hṛṣu* and the concept of 'Divine Twins' (*Dioscuri*) could be another promising area of research[78]. This fundamental concept extends beyond the Indo-European mythology (Harris 1913). The West Semitic (Palmyrene) twin-gods *'Arṣû* and *'Azîzû* appear particularly interesting because of the connection of *'Arṣû*, strikingly similar phonetically to *Xors*, with the pre-Islamic North Arabian deity *Ruḍâ "alias* Orotalt, locally identified with the Nabataean Dushares, under the name Dionysos, worshipped as the child of god, borne by 'the young girl and virgin' *alias* Aphrodite – Urania" (Hvidberg-Hansen 2007: 95).

Finally, the well-known association of 'Divine Twins' with horses may be reviewed in the light of the proposed etymology *Xors/Hṛṣu*. The possible connection of Germanic *hros/horse* with the name of the legendary Anglo-Saxon *Horsa* and the Slavonic *Xors* was first proposed by Faminicyn (1884) but it was rejected out of hand at that time. This theory re-appeared in Chadwick (1946: 86) who dismissed the Iranian origin of *Xors* as "extremely improbable both in itself and also on philological grounds" (1946: 86, f.3). Although Chadwick's definition of *Xors* as an "exact equivalent of the A[nglo].S[axon]. *hors*, O[ld].N[orse]. *hross*, 'a horse'" was indeed one of her notorious "facile identifications" (Puhvel 1974: 81) for which she was rightly criticised by Tixomirov (1975), the parallels she drew between *Xors*, the phallic fertility god *Freyr* and the Norse *Völsi blót* ritual[79]could have been a remarkable insight. Of course, the Slavonic *Xors* is not a Germanic loan as Chadwick imagined and neither the Germanic *horse/hross* directly derives from *Xors,* yet these words may share the same common root[80] going back to the ancient fertility cult.

[78] For an in-depth analysis of possible relation of Xors-Daž'bog with the '*Dioscuri* complex' see Beskov 2008.
[79] Sacrifice of the penis of a stallion that appears strikingly similar to the Roman 'October Horse' ritual as described in Vanggaard (1997: 89).
[80] The word 'horse' does not have a reliable etymology.

4 Conclusion

The traditional explanation of *Xors* as a late Iranian loan from the Persian *xwaršēδ/xoršid* '(radiant) sun', conceived in the early stage of Historical Linguistics, has become an anachronism. It is not viable linguistically and is also a methodological dead-end because defining *Xors* as an abstract generic 'solar god' or the 'god of the solar disc' does not really explain anything.

Slavonic mythology and pre-Christian religious cults directly continue the Proto-Indo-European and Indo-European traditions so one should view the Slavonic deities not as detached 'exotic' entities or endless 'borrowings' from surrounding peoples but as local developments of the common ancient base-myths. The new etymology of *Xors* as a relic of the I-E **ĝhers-* and the Proto-Indo-Aryan **hrs-/*hṛṣ-*, preserved to this day in toponyms in the Balkan and Circum-Pontic areas and also in numerous cognates in the principal I-E language branches, integrates *Xors-Daž'bog* into the mainstream of the pan-European and Eurasian mythology. It also helps to understand the intricate deep connection of the multitude of seemingly diverse Eurasian cults and myths which may all decent to the same fundamental Palaeolithic archetypes of 'Great Mother', 'Divine Marriage' and the eternal 'wheel' of birth and dying repeated at all levels from plants, animals, humans to the seasonal and cosmic cycles.

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Неиранское происхождение восточнославянского бога *Хърса/Хорса*.

Константин Л. Борисов

Несмотря на то, что в древнерусских исторических и религиозных источниках *Хорс* является вторым по частоте упоминаний после верховного языческого бога *Перуна,* о его роли в пантеоне древних славян практически ничего не известно. В этой статье делается попытка нового осмысления функции Хорса через метод сравнительного лингвистического и мифологического анализа.

В самых ранних исторических исследованиях Хорс описывался как славянский аналог греческого *Бахуса (Дионисия),* а также сравнивался с древнепрусским божеством плодородия *Curcho*. Однако, с середины девятнадцатого века прочно утвердилась теория об иранском происхождении имени *Хорс*, как прямого заимствования из персидского *xwaršēδ/xoršid 'солнце-царь'*. На этом основании *Хорс* представляется как 'солнечный бог' или как некое абстрактное 'божество солнечного диска'. Такая интерпретация *Хорса* и сегодня является общепризнанной среди историков. При этом игнорируются объективные сложности произведения имени 'Хорс' из иранского *xoršid.* Такая радикальная трансформация звучания не характерна для известных иранских заимствований в славянский. В частности, необъясним предполагаемый переход иранского *š* в *s.* Кроме того, слово *xwaršēδ* появилось в средне-иранском языке относительно поздно (не ранее IV в. до н. э), как сокращённый вариант Авестийского *hvarə xšaētəm* 'солнце сияющее, правящее', и не является собственно теонимом. С последующим развитием Зороастризма функции солярного бога *Hvar* перешли к переосмысленному *Mumpe (Mihr),* и само его имя стало уже использоваться как синоним солнца. В современных иранских языках *xoršid* также имеет значение 'солнце', но без какого-либо религиозного подтекста.

Наряду с лингвистическими есть и культурно-исторические препятствия иранского происхождения теонима 'Хорс'. Несмотря на то, что образ солнца занимает важное место в славянском фольклоре, зачастую солнце представлялось как 'девица'. Однако главной проблемой в теории об иранском происхождении *Хорса* является вопрос о том, когда и при каких условиях славяне вообще могли заимствовать солнечный культ и название солнечного бога у иранцев.

Изначальная проблематичность теории прямого заимствования из иранского заставляла многих исследователей искать альтернативные объяснения. В частности, были попытки использования фонетической близости восточнославянского 'хорошо/хорош'. При этом, как правило, не подвергался сомнению постулат о солярной сущности *Хорса* и его иранском происхождении. Основная трудность на этом пути состоит в том, что отсутствует надёжная этимология самого слова 'хорошо/хорош' и его конкретный иранский источник. Возможность прямого родства с практически полностью фоно-семантически совпадающим древне-индийским *hṛṣu* 'радостный, довольный' не рассматривается *a priori,* ввиду якобы невозможности прямого контакта древних славян с индо-арийскими языками в силу их географической удалённости и установившимся предубеждением, что любые схождения сакральной и религиозной лексики славянского с индо-иранским следует рассматривать исключительно как заимствования из иранских языков посредством скифского.

Данная работа опирается на возможность сохранения в Северном Причерноморье этноса или языковых реликтов прото-индо-иранского языка, восходящего ко времени Ямной культуры (3600—2300 до н. э.), до его предполагаемого разделения на индо-иранскую и иранскую ветви. Отталкиваясь от кардинального значение корня *hṛṣ* в древне-индийском, как ‘ощетинивание, эрекция’, возводимому к праиндоевропейскому этимону * *ĝhers(*g'hers-)* ‘ощетиниваться’, теоним ‘Хорс’ интерпретируется как божество плодородия, сочетающее функции ‘солнечного героя’ и ‘хтонического бога’, сравнимого по функции с греческим *Дионисом* и его аналогами в других европейских и восточных культах.

В заключительной части коротко описываются некоторые перспективы сравнительного мифологического анализа, которые открываются благодаря новой интерпретации образа Хорса как отражения древнего ‘дионисийского комплекса’.