

= Ala (demon) =

An ala or hala (plural : ale or hali) is a female mythological creature recorded in the folklore of Bulgarians , Macedonians , and Serbs . Ale are considered demons of bad weather whose main purpose is to lead hail @-@ producing thunderclouds in the direction of fields , vineyards , or orchards to destroy the crops , or loot and take them away . Extremely voracious , ale particularly like to eat children , though their gluttony is not limited to Earth . It is believed they sometimes try devouring the Sun or the Moon , causing eclipses , and that it would mean the end of the world should they succeed . When people encounter an ala , their mental or physical health , or even life , are in peril ; however , her favor can be gained by approaching her with respect and trust . Being in a good relationship with an ala is very beneficial , because she makes her favorites rich and saves their lives in times of trouble .

The appearance of an ala is diversely and often vaguely described in folklore . A given ala may look like a black wind , a gigantic creature of indistinct form , a huge @-@ mouthed , humanlike , or snakelike monster , a female dragon , or a raven . An ala may also assume various human or animal shapes , and can even possess a person 's body . It is believed that the diversity of appearances described is due to the ala 's being a synthesis of a Slavic demon of bad weather and a similar demon of the central Balkans pre @-@ Slavic population . In folk tales with a humanlike ala , her personality is similar to that of the Russian Baba Yaga . Ale are said to live in the clouds , or in a lake , spring , hidden remote place , forest , inhospitable mountain , cave , or gigantic tree . While ale are usually hostile towards humans , they do have other powerful enemies that can defeat them , like dragons . In Christianized tales , St. Elijah takes the dragons ' role , but in some cases the saint and the dragons fight ale together . Eagles are also regarded as defenders against ale , chasing them away from fields and thus preventing them from bringing hail clouds overhead .

= = Origin = =

While some mythological beings are common to all Slavic ethnic groups , ale seem to be exclusive to Bulgarian , Macedonian and Serb folklore . Even so , other Slavic groups also had demons of bad weather . Among East Slavs , this witch was called Baba Yaga , and was imagined as a woman of gigantic stature with a big nose , iron teeth , and protruding chin ; it was believed that she ate children , and her presence brought thunderstorms and cold weather . The term baba is present in customs , beliefs , and toponyms of all Slavic groups , usually as a personification of wind , darkness , and rain . This leads some scholars to believe there was a proto @-@ Slavic divinity or demon called Baba , associated with bad weather .

Traces of beliefs in that demon are preserved among South Slavs in expressions for the bad weather common in early spring (baba Marta , babini jarci , babine huke , etc .) . Brought to the Balkans from the ancient homeland , these beliefs combined with those of the native populations , eventually developing into the personage of the ala . The pre @-@ Slavic Balkan source of the ala is related to the vlva , female demons of bad weather of the Vlachs of Serbia , who , like ale , led hail clouds over crops to ruin them , and uprooted trees . A Greek female demon Lamia might also have contributed in the development of the ala . Just like ale , she eats children , and is called gluttonous . In southern Serbia and Macedonia , lamnja , a word derived from lamia , is also a synonym for ala . The Bulgarian lamya has remained a creature distinct from the ala , but shares many similarities with her . The numerous variations in form of ale , ranging from the animal and half @-@ animal to the humanlike concepts , tell us that beliefs in these demons were not uniform .

= = Etymology = =

The demon ? s name in the standard Serbian , ala , comes from dialects which lost the velar fricative , while hala is recorded in a Serbian dialect which has retained this sound and in Bulgarian . For this reason , it is believed that the original name had an initial h @-@ sound , a fact that has led Serbian scholar Ljubinko Radenkovi? to reject the etymology given by several dictionaries ,

including that of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts , by which the demon 's name comes from the Turkish word 'ala' (snake) as that word lacks the h @-@ sound . The name may instead stem from the Greek word for hail , 'xalaza' (pronounced ['xalaza] ; transliterated chalaza) . This etymology is proposed by Bulgarian scholar Ivanichka Georgieva , and supported by Bulgarian scholar Rachko Popov and Serbian scholars Slobodan Ze'evi' , and Sreten Petrovi' . According to Serbian scholar Marta Bjeleti' , ala and hala stem from the noun * xala in Proto @-@ South @-@ Slavic , the dialect of Proto @-@ Slavic from which South Slavic languages emerged (x in xala represents the voiceless velar fricative) . That noun was derived from the Proto @-@ Slavic root * xal- , denoting the fury of the elements . A possible cognate in Kashubian language might be ha'a - " a large creature or thing " .

= = Appearance = =

Dragon or serpent like demon connected with the wind , and thunderstorm and hail clouds . It was believed in the Gru'a region of central Serbia that the ala is invisible , but that she can be heard ' her powerful hissing resonated in front of the dark hail clouds .

In Bulgaria , farmers saw a horrible ala with huge wings and sword @-@ like thick tail in the contours of a dark cloud . When an ala ' cloud overtook the village , villagers peered into the sky hoping to see an imperial eagle emerging there . They believed that the mighty bird with a cross on its back could banish the ala ' cloud from the fields . In eastern Bulgaria , ala appeared not in clouds , but in gales and whirlwinds . In other regions of Bulgaria , the ala was seen either as a " bull with huge horns , a black cloud , dark fog or a snake @-@ like monster with six wings and twelve tails " . The ala is thought to inhabit remote mountain areas or caves , in which she keeps bad weather . In Bulgarian tradition , thunderstorms and hail clouds were interpreted as a battle between the good dragon or eagle and the evil ala .

Serbs in Kosovo believed that the ala lowers her tail to the ground and hides her head in the clouds . Anyone who saw her head became instantly insane . In a high relief carved above a window of the Visoki De'ani monastery ' s church , an eagle clutches a snakelike ala while an eaglet looks on . According to a description from eastern Serbia , the ala is a very large creature with a snake ' s body and a horse ' s head . A very common opinion is that the ala is the sister of the dragon , and looks more or less like him . In a spell from eastern Serbia , the ala is described as a three @-@ headed snake :

By a description recorded in the Boljevac region , the ala is a black and horrible creature in the form of wind . Similarly , in the Homolje region of eastern Serbia , the people imagine the ala as a black wind moving over the land . Wherever she goes , a whirlwind blows , turning like a drill , and those who get exposed to the whirlwind go mad . In Bulgaria too , the ala is a violent wind that sweeps up everything in its way and brings havoc :

A belief from the Leskovac region states the ala is a monster with an enormous mouth who holds in her hand a big wooden spoon , with which she grabs and devours everything that gets in her way . One story has it that a man kept such an ala in his barn ; she drank thirty liters of milk every day . Another warns that ale in the form of twelve ravens used to take the crops from vineyards .

In eastern Serbia it was believed that ale who interact with people can metamorphose into humans or animals , after which their true selves can be seen only by so @-@ called 'estaci' men with six fingers on both hands and six toes on both feet ' though human @-@ looking ale cause houses to shake when they enter . By a belief recorded in the Homolje region , ale that charge to the Moon also display shapeshifting abilities : they repeatedly shift from their basic shape of two @-@ headed snakes to six @-@ fingered men who hold iron pitchforks , black young bulls , big boars , or black wolves , and back .

= = Effect on humans = =

Ale primarily destroy crops in fields , vineyards , and orchards by leading hail storm clouds overhead , usually during the first half of the summer when grain crops ripen . Ale are also believed

to ? drink the crops ? , or seize the crops of a village and transport them to another place in their huge ears , thereby making some villages poor , and others rich . This was held as the reason why the Aleksandrovac region in central Serbia was so fruitful : it was where ale transported their loot . The people of Kopaonik mountain believed the local ala defended the crops of the area from other ale . If hail destroyed the crops , it was thought that an ala from another area had defeated the local ala and ? drunk the crops ? . Ale can also spread themselves over fields and thwart the ripening of the crops , or worse , consume the field 's fertility , and drink the milk from sheep , especially when it thunders . Ale also possess great strength ; when a storm uprooted trees , the people believed that an ala had done it . This resulted in a saying for a very strong man : jak kao ala , " as strong as an ala " .

At the sight of hail and thunderstorm clouds , i.e. the ala that leads them , people did not just sit and wait ? they resorted to magic . In the Pomoravlje region , this magic was assisted by ala ? s herbs , picked in levees and the places on a field where a plow turns around during plowing . These locations were considered unclean because ale visited them . In folk spells of eastern Serbia , a particular ala could be addressed by a female personal name : Smiljana , Kalina , Magdalena , Dobrica , Dragija , Zagorka , etc . An expression for addressing an ala ? Maate paletinke ? is of uncertain meaning . One of the spells that was used upon sighting hail clouds , and which explicitly mentioned an ala , was shouted in the direction of the clouds :

Another spell was spoken by a vra?ara , a woman versed in magic , while she performed a suitable ritual :

As several other supernatural entities were also held responsible for bringing hail and torrential rains , when the entity is not explicitly named , it is often impossible to conclude to which the magical measures apply . There was , for example , a custom used when the approach of a thunderstorm was perceived : to bring a table in front of the house , and to put bread , salt , a knife with a black sheath , and an axe with its edge directed skywards on the table . By another custom , a fireplace trivet with its legs directed skywards , knives , forks , and the stub of the Slava candle were put on the table .

Another characteristic attributed to the ala is extreme voracity ; in the Leskovac region , she was imagined as a monster with a huge mouth and a wooden spoon in her hand , with which she grabbed and devoured whatever came her way . According to a widely spread tradition , ale used to seize children and devour them in her dwelling , which was full of children ? s bones and spilt blood . Less often , they attacked and ate adults ; they were able to find a hidden human by smell .

People in eastern and southern Serbia believed that ale , in their voracity , attacked the Sun and the Moon . They gradually ate more and more of those celestial bodies , thereby causing an eclipse . During an eclipse , the Sun turned red because it was covered with its own blood as a result of the ale ? s bites ; when it shone brightly again , that meant it had defeated the ale . The spots on the Moon were seen as scars from the ale ? s bites . While ale devoured the Sun or the Moon , many elderly people became depressed and even wept in fear . If ale succeeded in devouring the Sun , the world would end . To prevent that , men shot their guns toward the eclipse or rang bells , and women cast spells incessantly . There was a notion in the Homolje region that , if ale succeeded in devouring the Moon , the Sun would die from sorrow , and darkness would overwhelm the world .

Ale were believed to be able to make men insane ; in eastern Serbia there is a special term for such a man : alosan . When people encountered an ala on a road or field , they could get dangerous diseases from her . Ale are also responsible for dogs ? rabies , although indirectly : a skylark that reaches the clouds and encounters an ala there goes mad (alosan) , plunges to the ground , and so kills itself ; a dog that finds and eats the bird goes mad too .

Traversing a crossroads at night was considered dangerous because it was the place and time of the ala ? s supper ; the unfortunate person who stepped on an ? ala ? s table ? could become blind , deaf , or lame . Ale gather at night on the eves of greater holidays , divert men from their ways into gullies , and torture them there by riding them like horses .

Ala can ? sneak ? into humans , gaining a human form while retaining their own properties . A tradition has it that an ala sneaked into St. Simeon , which made him voracious , but St. Sava took her out of him . In a tale recorded in eastern Serbia and Bulgaria , a farmer killed an ala who

possessed a skinny man living in a distant village , because the ala destroyed his vineyard . In another story , an ala gets into a deceased princess and devours the soldiers on watch .

A human going into an ala ? s house , which is frequently deep in a forest , but may also be in the clouds , in a lake , spring , cave , gigantic tree , or other hidden remote place , or on an inhospitable mountain , can have varied consequences . If he approaches the ala with an appeal , and does not mention the differences between her and humans , he will be rewarded . Otherwise , he will be cruelly punished . According to one story , a stepdaughter , driven away from home by her stepmother , comes to an ala ? s house ; addresses her with the word mother ; picks lice from the ala ? s hair full of worms ; and feeds the ala ? s ? livestock ? of owls , wolves , badgers , and other wild animals ; behaving and talking as if these things are quite normal to her , and is rewarded by the ala with a chest filled with gold . When the stepmother ? s daughter comes to the ala ? s house , she does the opposite , and the ala punishes her and her mother by sending them a chest of snakes , which blind them . In another example , when a prince asks an ala for her daughter ? s hand , she saves him from other ale , and helps him get married . But when a girl to whom an ala is the godmother visits the ala with her mother , the ala eats them both because the mother talked about the strange things in her house .

That even a dead ala is bad is seen in the legend explaining the origin of the Golubatz fly (*Simulium colombaschense*) , a species of bloodsucking black fly (of the genus *Simulium*) that can be lethal to livestock . The legend , recorded in the Po?arevac District in the 19th century by Vuk Karad?i? , tells how a Serbian man , after a chase , caught and wounded an ala , but she broke away and fled into a cave near Golubac (a town in the district) , where she died of the wounds . Ever since , her body has bred the Golubatz flies , and in late spring , they fly out of the cave in a big swarm , spreading as far as ?umadija . People walled up the cave ? s opening once , but when the time came for the flies to swarm , the wall shattered .

= = = Aloviti men = = =

In Serbia , men believed to possess properties of an ala were called aloviti (ala @-@ like) men , and they were given several explanations . An ala may have sneaked into them ; these were recognized by their voracity , because the ala , in order to satisfy her excessive hunger , drove them to eat incessantly . They may also have survived an ala blowing on them ? an ala ? s breath is usually lethal to humans . These people would then become exceptionally strong . Alternatively , they could be the offspring of an ala and a woman , or could have been born covered with the caul . It was believed that aloviti men could not be killed with a gun or arrow , unless gold or silver was used .

Like ale , aloviti men led hail @-@ producing and thunderstorm clouds : when the skies darkened , such a man would fall into a trance , and his spirit would fly out of his body toward the clouds as if his spirit were an ala herself . There was , however , a significant difference ? he never led the clouds over the fields of his own village ; the damage was done to the neighboring villages . In this respect , aloviti men are equivalent to zduha?i . Besides leading clouds away , an aloviti man could also fight against ale to protect his village . Children , too , could be aloviti , and they fought ale using plough beams . In these fights they were helped by the Aesculapian snake (smuk in Serbian) , and for this reason people would not hurt these snakes .

There is a story about an aloviti man , who is described as unusually tall , thin , bony @-@ faced , and with a long beard and moustache . When the weather was nice , he worked and behaved like the other people in his village , but as soon as the dark clouds covered the sky , he used to close himself in his house , put blinds on the windows , and remain alone and in a trance as long as the bad weather and thunder lasted . Historical persons believed to be aloviti men are Stefan Nemanja , and Stefan De?anski .

In modern Serbian adjective ' ' alav ' ' still signifies voracious appetite .

= = Adversaries = =

Ale have several adversaries , including dragons , zmajeviti (dragon @-@ like) men , eagles , St. Elijah , and St. Sava . The principal enemy of the ala is the dragon ; he is able to defeat her and eliminate her harmful effects . Dragons are thus seen as guardians of the fields and harvest , and as protectors against bad weather . When an ala threatens by bringing hail clouds , a dragon comes out to fight with her and drive her away . His main weapon is lightning ; thunder represents a fight between ale and dragons (during which ale hide in tall trees) . An instance of a more abundant crop at a particular point is explained in the P?inja region as a result of a dragon having struck an ala with lightning just over that place , making her drop the looted grains she had been carrying in her huge ears . If an ala finds a dragon in a hollow tree , however , she can destroy him by burning the tree .

Ale can be defeated by zmajeviti men , who have a human mother , but a dragon father . They look like ordinary people except for little wings beneath their armpits ; such men are always born at night after a twelve @-@ month term . Much like a zduha? , a zmajeviti man lives like everybody else when the weather is nice , but when an ala leads threatening clouds into sight , he falls into a trance and his spirit comes out of his body and flies up to the clouds to fight with the ala , just like a dragon would do . A story from Banat , which was held as true until the 1950s , says that before World War I , an exhausted ala in the form of a giant snake fell from the clouds onto a road . The explanation of the event was that the ala was defeated in her fight with a zmajeviti man ; people gave her milk to help her recover .

In a Christianized version , the duel involves the Christian St. Elijah and the ala , but there is a belief that the saint and the dragons in fact cooperate : as soon as St. Elijah spots an ala , he summons the dragons , either takes them aboard his chariot or harnesses them to it , and they jointly shoot the ala with lightning . Arrow @-@ shaped stones , like belemnites or stone @-@ age arrowheads , are regarded as materialized lightning bolts imbued with a beneficial magical power , and finding one is a good omen .

In a more Christianized version , St. Elijah shoots lightning at the devils who lead the hail clouds ; the devils in this case are obviously ale . As shown by these examples , beliefs with various degrees of Christianization , from none to almost complete , can exist side by side .

An eagle ? s appearance in the sky when thunderclouds threatened was greeted with joy and hope by people who trusted in their power to defeat an ala ; after defeating the ala , the eagle led the clouds away from the fields . An explanation for this , recorded in eastern Serbia , is that the eagles which nest in the vicinity of a village want thunderstorms and hail as far as possible from their nestlings , so coincidentally protect the village ? s fields as well . The role of eagles , however , was controversial , because in the same region there was a belief that an eagle flying in front of thunderstorm clouds was a manifestation of an ala , leading the clouds toward the crops , rather than driving them away .

= = Connection with Baba Yaga = =

Comparing folk tales , there are similarities between the ala and the Russian Baba Yaga . The aforementioned motif of a stepdaughter coming to an ala ? s house in a forest is recorded among Russians too ? there a stepdaughter comes to Baba Yaga ? s house and feeds her ? livestock ? . Similar are also the motifs of an ala (by Serbs) and Baba Yaga (by Russians) becoming godmothers to children whom they later eat because the children discover their secret . In the Serbian example , the mother of an ala ? s godchild speaks with the ala , and in the Russian , the godchild speaks with Baba Yaga .

Serbian tale

(...) Yesterday , the woman went to the ala ? s house with her child , the ala ? s godchild . Upon entering the first room , she saw a poker and a broom fighting ; in the second room , she saw human legs ; in the fourth ? human flesh ; in the fifth ? blood ; in the sixth ? she saw that the ala had taken off her head and was delousing it , while wearing a horse ? s head in its place . After that , the ala brought lunch and said to the woman , ? Eat , kuma . ? ? How can I eat after I saw a poker and a broom fighting in the first room ? ? ? Eat , kuma , eat . Those are my maids : they fight about which

one should take the broom and sweep . ? ? How can I eat after I saw human arms and legs in the second and third rooms ? ? And the ala told her , ? Eat , kuma , eat . That is my food . ? ? How can I eat , kuma , after I saw the sixth room full of blood ? ? ? Eat , kuma , eat . That is the wine that I drink . ? ? How can I eat after I saw that you had taken your head off and were delousing it , having fixed a horse ? s head on yourself ? ? The ala , after hearing that , ate both the woman and her child .

Russian tale

(...) On her name day , the girl goes to her godmother ? s house with cakes to treat her . She comes to the gate ? the gate is closed with a human leg ; she goes into the yard ? there a barrel full of blood ; she goes up the stairs ? there dead children ; the porch is closed with an arm ; on the floor ? arms , legs ; the door is closed with a finger . Baba Yaga comes to meet her at the door and asks her , ? Have you seen anything , my dear , on your way to my house ? ? ? I saw , ? the girl answers , ? the gate closed with a leg . ? ? That is my iron latch . ? ? I saw a barrel in the yard full of blood . ? ? That is my wine , my darling . ? ? I saw children lying on the stairs . ? ? Those are my pigs . ? ? The porch is closed with an arm . ? ? That is my latch , my golden one . ? ? I saw in the house a hairy head . ? ? That is my broom , my curly one , ? said Baba Yaga , then got angry with her prying goddaughter and ate her .

The two examples witness the chthonic nature of these mythological creatures : a hero can enter the chthonic space and discover the secret of that world , but he is not allowed to relate that secret to other humans . Both the ala and Baba Yaga can be traced back to an older concept of a female demonic divinity : the snakelike mistress of the underworld .

= = Annotations = =