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SLAVIC NYMPHS FROM WIŚLICA?¹

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes a lost archaeological artifact discovered between 1949 and 1960 at the stronghold in Wiślica: a horn frame decorated with a unique frieze of six female busts. Originally interpreted by Zofia Wartołowska as depictions of Slavic nymphs (*wiła*, *rusałka*), the object is re-examined here in the context of comparative archaeology. The authors discuss analogies with other early medieval bone and wooden mountings, such as those from Preslav, Wolin, and Scandinavia, which are often viewed as multi-faced idols, amulets, or ritual ob-

jects. The Wiślica artifact stands out in this context due to its depiction of full female busts rather than isolated faces. The study further confronts the archaeological find with medieval written sources and linguistic data regarding the *wiła*. Etymological analysis connects these beings to wind, rotational movement, and chthonic or funerary symbolism. The paper concludes that despite the frame's utilitarian traces, its iconography suggests a connection to the sphere of beliefs and lower mythology, potentially serving a magical function.

Keywords: Wiślica, Slavic mythology, lower mythology, *wiła*, anthropomorphic representations, horn frame

Between 1949 and 1960, extensive excavations were carried out at the stronghold in Wiślica, led by Professor Włodzimierz Antoniewicz and Associate Professor Zofia Wartołowska. During these excavations, a mysterious object was found, which will be the subject of this text. It was a small frame made of horn (Fig. 1, 2). It was 11.6 cm long and 2 cm in diameter at its widest point. The horn was hollowed out from the base, and there were small holes on both sides, suggesting that something could have been attached to the frame with a rivet or a pin. These features led the finders to interpret the artefact as a frame for a small knife or sickle.² However, what is most interesting about this object and what distin-

guishes it from hundreds of other frames of this type is its decoration. The handle was decorated with engraved lines forming three bands filled with a diagonal grid or diagonal lines. Between them ran single engraved lines. At its widest point, there was an ornamental band filled with carved busts. There were six depictions of human figures. Each had a clearly outlined face with an engraved line on the forehead, indicating a diadem, headband, or wreath. The heads were marked plastically, then the frieze was more concave in the neck and neckline area, to widen slightly again below (most likely at the bust). This gave rise to the assumption that these protrusions were formed intentionally, and thus that the busts depicted

¹ This text was prepared as part of research project no. 2021/03/Y/HS3/00052: „Pagans and Christians. Christianization in the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Kingdom of Poland in the Middle Ages,” carried out at the Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, which received funding from the National

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² Wartołowska 1962, 487.

female or girlish figures. One of the girls was larger than the others, the decoration on her head was marked with a triple (rather than double, as in the others) engraved line, and on the neckline, in addition to the lines marking the arrangement of the material in the robes or necklaces, engraved crosses were outlined.³ Human figures do not often appear in Slavic art, and where they are found, their functions are generally associated with statues of deities and, more broadly, with the realm of beliefs. This is how the images on the horn frame from Wiślica were interpreted. Zofia Wartołowska also concluded that the number of figures on the frame, their gender, and the location of the settlement where they were discovered (among meadows and wetlands by the river) provide grounds for interpreting them as *wiła*, *samowiła*, goddesses, water or field nymphs, *brzegini*, *brzegina* or *rusalka*. Unfortunately, the artefact in question has been lost. Its whereabouts are unknown. It is not in the collection of the Archaeological Museum in Wiślica, nor in the institution to which the museum belongs, i.e. the National Museum in Kielce. It is also not in the collection of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw. For this reason, its re-verification and documentation is currently impossible.

A direct analogy to the object discovered in Wiślica was published by Boris Rybakov⁴ (Fig. 3). Unfortunately, he did not specify the place of origin of the artefact, describing it only as an 10th–11th century stylus. It cannot be ruled out that the object he published is the artefact from Wiślica, but interpreted differently by him. Further analogies can also be found in bone mountings from the 9th–10th centuries (i.e. from the Christian period) from Preslav (Bulgaria) and Chuchur (Macedonia), as well as a bone needle case from the 10th century from Shestovitsa near Chernihiv.⁵ The object found inside the building in Preslav (Fig. 4) is a sharply pointed handle made of deer antler, measuring approximately 9.9×1.03 cm, decorated in the upper part with a frieze with four faces, and below with engraved alternating herringbone motifs and 6 or 7 circles with a dot in the centre. There was a hole between the two faces. The upper part of the object was hollowed out. Its chronology is estimated to be the 10th century. This object is interpreted as a knife or dagger holder, a piercing tool, a graver, or an amulet. The images depicted on it are supposed to personify the supreme deity.⁶ A similar bone object with two faces was found in Idnakar at the site of the Finnish Prikam culture (Fig. 5). This artefact dates back to the 10th–12th century.⁷ Zdenek Vana drew attention to the occurrence of polycephalic deities in both the Slavic and gen-



Fig. 1. Wiślica – Stronghold. Horn holder with anthropomorphic figures (after: Wartołowska 1962, Figs. 1 and 3).

eral Indo-European environments. Anthropomorphic representations on small objects are also known from such artefacts as a fragment of a bone figurine or an awl holder, which was discovered in a female cremation grave in Tunby, Sweden, dating back to the 10th century (Fig. 6:a); a bone figurine found in the burial of a woman from the 10th century in a cemetery in Väsby, Sweden (Fig. 6:b); the so-called Światowid from Wolin, found inside a building from the second half of the 9th century (Fig. 6:c); a wooden figurine dated to the 12th century

³ Wartołowska 1962, 487.

⁴ Rybakov 1987, fig. 68.

⁵ Komar, Chamajko 2013.

⁶ Georgiev 1984, 16–28, Fig. 3; Čausidis 1994, 464–465; Vana 1990, 40.

⁷ Vasil'evič et al. 1987, Fig. 5; Čausidis 1994, 462.



Fig. 2. Wiślica – Stronghold. Horn holder with anthropomorphic figures (photo by E. Buczek).

from Svendborg on the Jutland Peninsula in Denmark (Fig. 6:d) and a wooden figurine and fragment of a staff (?) from Riga, dated to the 13th century⁸ (Fig. 6:e). All these objects are decorated with multiple images of human heads or faces. They are also generally examples of figurines that may have been stuck into the ground to mark a sacred area. However, they do not bear any traces of use, as is the case with the artefact from Wiślica, on which, apart from the place where the probable blade was inserted, there are signs of wear and abrasion indicating working surfaces. Only the artefact from Tunby had a hollow hole that could have been used to insert an awl/blade. Further analogies can be found in small figurines/idols with a single representation of a human figure or face. This group includes figurines from Wolin: a wooden one depicting the head of a bearded man, dated to the first half of the 11th century (Fig. 7:a), a similar pendant/statue depicting a face in pointed headgear (Fig. 7:b) and two smaller, more schematic ones from the second half of the 10th and mid-11th centuries (Fig. 7:c,d) and a wooden anthropomorphic figurine found in Szczecin with a schematically marked head and legs from the 11th century⁹ (Fig. 7:e). Perhaps, however, these finds should be treated as personifications of domestic guardian deities, as interpreted in this way a wooden figurine found in Great Novgorod, dated to the 10th–11th century.¹⁰ The Wiślica frame, however, clearly stands out from the above-mentioned objects with multi-faced representations, primarily because the anthropomorphic images on it consist of entire busts, rather than just faces or heads, as is the case in other instances, the multiplied number of these representations, and above all, the fact that they are probably female figures.

Verification of archaeological interpretations and re-analysis of the lost artefact is not possible until the mon-

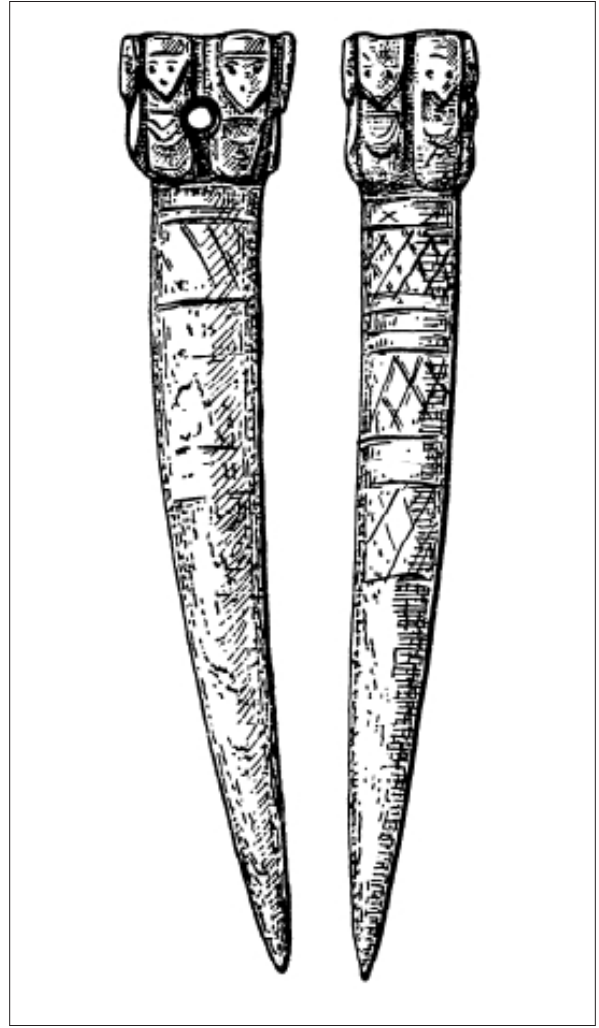


Fig. 3. Stilus from the 10th–11th century (after: Rybakov 1987, fig. 68).

ument is found. We are therefore reliant on the account and suggestion of an archaeologist from years ago.

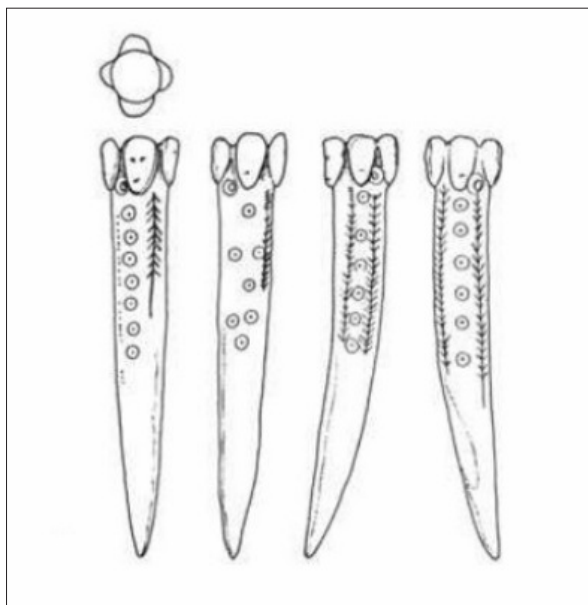
However, if the archaeological interpretation is plausible, it implies the need to clarify whether the mythical figures mentioned in the title are confirmed by medieval written sources. Unfortunately, we do not have a wealth of artefacts at our disposal in this area either. However, contrary to many opinions, this is not a wasteland without documents. Therefore, the statement once made by Stanisław Urbańczyk: Witches cause many difficulties for researchers seems to be a valid topic for discussion.¹¹ The eminent Slavist, like other researchers in the older state of research, did not know the entire basis in written sources and mentioned only one record, to which

⁸ Szczepanik 2013, 49–60, Szczepanik 2020, 146–153.

⁹ Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2013, 208–209.

¹⁰ Vana 1990, 129.

¹¹ Urbańczyk 1991, 54.



Ryc. 4. Bone holder from Preslav (after: Čausidis 1994, tabl. CV:1).

we will return later. This does not change the fact that, as in many other cases, the vast majority of the source material is linguistic material drawn from folklore, especially that of the southern Slavs, who are credited with believing in these small mythical creatures.¹² However, can the scepticism of Kazimierz Moszyński, who claimed radically that the Lusatians and Poles do not know the *wiła* at all, be maintained today?¹³

The source base in medieval documentation consists of a dozen or so records, mainly from the last two centuries of the 14th and 15th centuries. These are mainly Polish and Ruthenian sources. Of course, none of them are sufficiently detailed to finally unravel the mystery of the symbolism of the *wiła* beliefs. These are mainly attestations in the field of demononyms, laconic mentions limited to the name *wiła* in various linguistic variants. However, it would be risky to reject or disregard them. If we accept Martin Heidegger's line of thinking that 'language speaks' and 'there will be no things where there are no words' or Ernst R. Curtius's *nomina sunt consequentia rerum*, this leads us to the conclusion that a record in language, especially in vernacular form, reflects a thing or phenomenon.¹⁴ Of course, these records are also subject to source criticism, as the written word was subject to written reception (*verschriftliche Mündlichkeit*). In

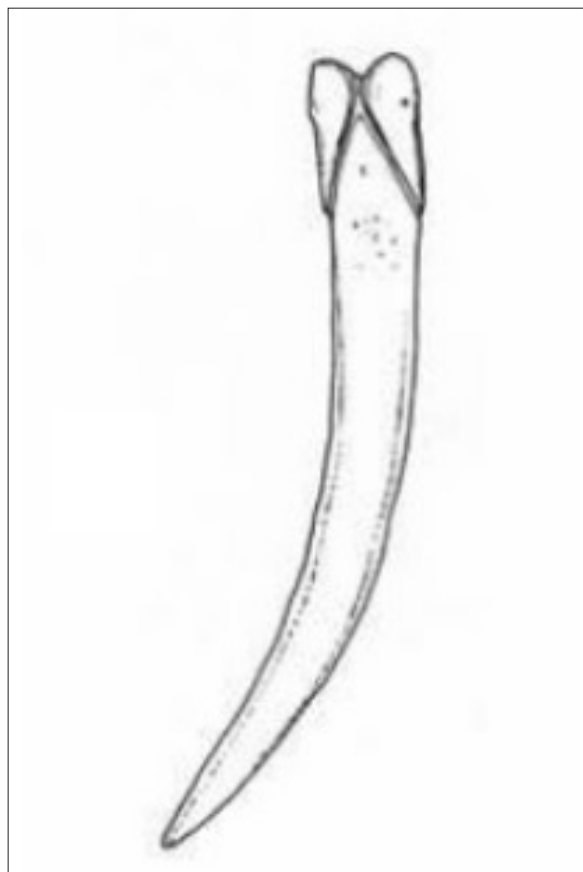


Fig 5. Holder from Idnakar (after: Čausidis 1994, tabl. CV:3).

other words, since we have written sources, i.e. the demononymia mentioned in old documentation, we ask about the phenomenon of belief, about the actual place in the pantheon of lower Slavic mythology of the vilas as minor mythical beings.¹⁵ Another thing is to unravel the mystery of their symbolism, genesis, origin, and function, which, in the light of laconic records without a broader narrative or plot, is a difficult task, entangled in a web of conjecture, assumptions, and hypotheses.

Let us therefore review the collection of the oldest medieval written sources, preceded by a brief linguistic recapitulation. The word derives from the root *wi-*, pie. **uej* – to twist; Proto-Slavic **vil-a*, similar to *wicher*, to twist – 'to spin around', which leads to the meaning of wind or the cause of wind, and in the case of a small mythical creature, 'twisting' in a dance resembling a whirlwind or an archaic form of circle dance¹⁶. St.

¹² Moszyński 1967, 685–689.

¹³ Moszyński, 685. Strzelczyk 1998, 230–231, expressed similar scepticism: 'The most beautiful creation of Slavic demonology, although some of these beliefs are probably of non-Slavic origin' and 'The meaning of the name is unclear, its Slavic origin uncertain'.

¹⁴ Heidegger 2000, 9, 137; Curtius 2005, 524; Tokarska-Bakir 1999, 32; 2000, 143.

¹⁵ Decyk-Zięba, Dubisz (eds.) 2008, 234; Urbańczyk 1991, 54, 157; Brückner 1985, 622; Vîla, in: V. Machek 1957, 566–567; Vinogradova 2000, 130.

¹⁶ Hensel 1976, 193–195.

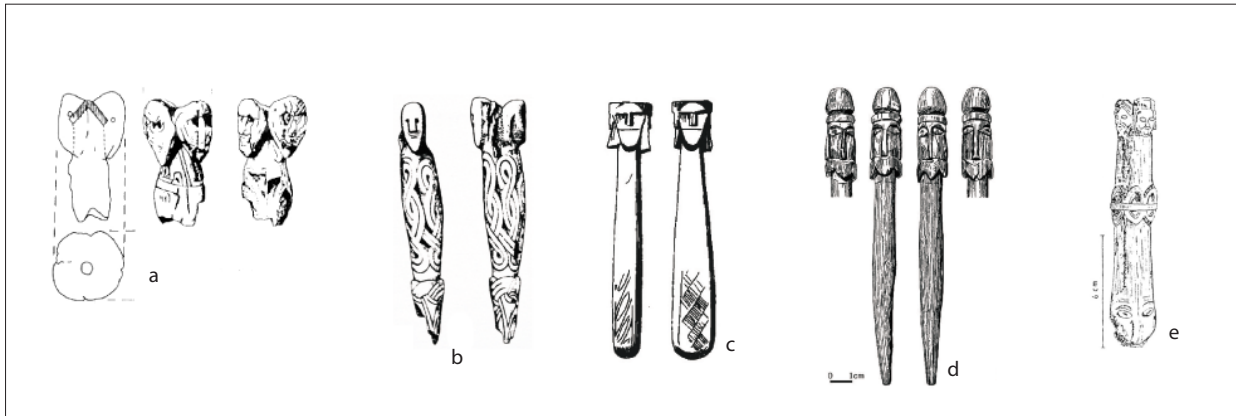


Fig. 6. Multi-face figures. a – a bone figurine or an awl frame from Tunba, b – a bone figurine from Väsby, c – the so-called Światowit from Wolin, d – a wooden figurine from Svendborg, e – a wooden figurine from Riga (after: Szczepanik 2013, Figs. 1-5).

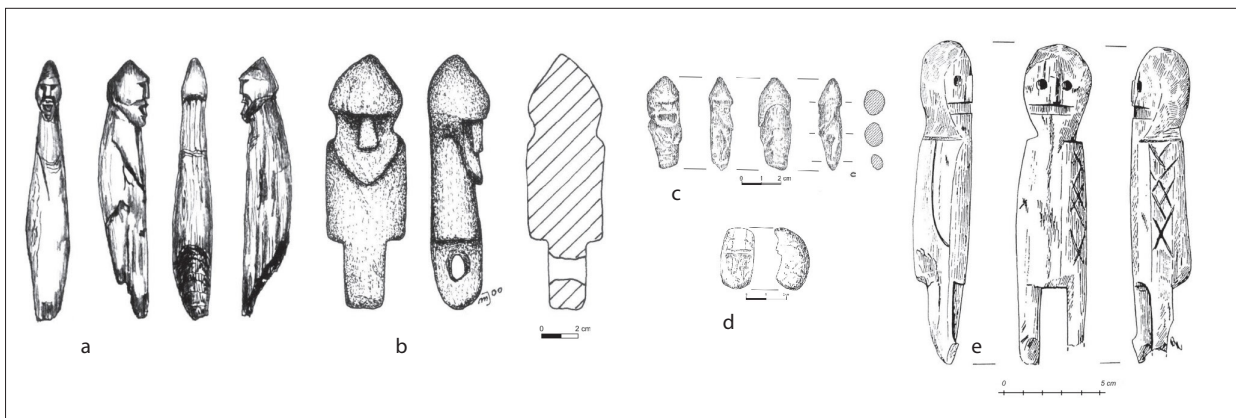


Fig. 7. One-faced figurines from Wolin – a-d and Szczecin – e (after: Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2012, Figs. 3-7).

Urbańczyk, whose interpretation I quote, added that the name was depreciated over time and later meant in Slavic languages a clown, a tightrope walker, a madman (*szatawila*), lecher, debauchee, madman, which means that the name corresponds to the association with the characteristic writhing movement, perhaps with erotic symbolism, of a creature luring people into a lecherous dance, similar to the luring song of water nymphs, *brzeźni*, mermaids and water nymphs.¹⁷ One of the oldest testimonies in the literature of the era is the frequently cited mention by the 6th-century Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea, who referred to the worship of 'rivers, nymphs and other spirits', although he did not mention the name of the Slavic *wila*, and the style of the mention suggests uncertainty and topicality rather than a closer knowledge of the subject.¹⁸

The oldest evidence of *wila* comes from two Russian sermons from the 11th–12th centuries: 'The Words of St. Gregory' and 'The Words of John Chrysostom', in which anonymous preachers condemn the belief in the use of spells and the invocation of the names of idols and minor mythical beings, including *wila*. In the first of these sermons, the author laments that 'after the holy baptism, when the Slavs rejected the god Perun and turned to Christ, people in remote places still worship the accursed god Perun, as well as Chors, Mokosh, and the nymphs, and they do so in secret and cannot break with this custom, from the times of paganism to the present day, to prepare a cursed second meal in honour of the rod, the rodanic, which for Christians is a temptation, and holy baptism is a disgrace and God's wrath'.¹⁹ In the second, the preacher complains similarly about the decline in faith, because

¹⁷ Decyk-Zięba, Dubisz (eds.) 2008, 234; Urbańczyk 1991, 54, 157; Brückner 1985, 622; Vīla, w: V. Machek 1957, 566–567; Vinogradova 2000, 130.

¹⁸ Procopius, *De bello gothico*, 61.

¹⁹ *Słowo sviatawo Grigorija*, in: Mansikka (eds.) 1922, 163–164, new edition: Dynda 2019, 259.

'people have forgotten about God (the true one) and have begun to make sacrifices to lightning, thunder, the Sun, the Moon, and others to Perun, Chors, the nymphs, Mokosh, vampires, brzeginia, whom they call 27 sisters, still others believe in Swarożyc and Artemis, and the uneducated worship her and kill chickens' as a sacrifice to her.²⁰ The discussion on the relationship between these two sermons and their source value has been going on for many years, from a perspective typical of sources critical of superstitions and relics of paganism. The last decisive voice in this matter was the study by Dieter Harmening, who, dealing exclusively with sources from the Latin cultural circle, attributed greater credibility to sources from the late Middle Ages, with content often drawn from personal experience, compared to early medieval writings produced up to the 13th century.²¹ He did not reject the value of early medieval sources, but drew attention to their topicality. Similar conclusions were also made by Viljo J. Mansikka in his polemic with Evgenij Aničkov.²²

In conclusion, we have two of the oldest source accounts of *wila*, which, however, are burdened with topicality and moralizing discourse typical of preaching. To be a credible and persuasive teacher and moralizer, the preacher incorporated numerous theonyms and demonyms into the text as material for depreciation, criticism, and condemnation. He knew some condemned customs from memory and personal experience, and some from the available literature. When criticizing sources and considering the specifics of the genre, historians must be careful to distinguish between these two sources of reception. Suggestions in older and more recent literature that the *wily wila* are of Serbian-Bulgarian origin do not close the subject or the credibility of the source material; on the contrary, they open up discussion.²³

The demonym *wila* can also be found in Latin sources from the late Middle Ages. Even Jakub Parkosz, author of what is probably the oldest Polish spelling textbook from the 15th century, knew about *wily*. When explaining the Latin letter 'V', he gave several examples of its use, including the name *vilalvidzaall vino*, associated with a vision.²⁴ In another Latin manuscript from the first half of the 15th century from the Jagiellonian Library, reference number 1299, containing a list of Gospel passages

for the First Sunday after Epiphany (Plenarium) for use by preachers, the copyist wrote in the margin: *Vocatus est autem Ihesus, id est salvator et discipuli eius, non hystriones, non cythariste, vulgariter ne wily, ne clamaczj, ne szpylmanij, ne potrōobacze, sicut hodie faciunt in oppositum*.²⁵ This is an example of preaching criticism of the custom of inviting and using the services of actors and musicians in medieval literature.²⁶ In the moralizing tradition of the era, authors – itinerant clerics, students, actors, singers (*fahrende Leute*) – were stigmatized as a group of unworthy professions. In Thomas of Chobham's three-part categorization of this professional group, the most pejoratively viewed were folk travelling actors and musicians who had no master and played in taverns or town squares with a bawdy repertoire.²⁷

In the aforementioned 15th-century manuscript, the *wila* appear as the Polish equivalent of histrions – actors, fiddlers, a group of condemned professions. Similar associations of *wila* with actors are noted in the Old Polish Dictionary in the light of eight sources from the 15th century. *Wila* appear in them in the Latin meaning of *scurris* (clowns, jesters), *ioculator*, *histrion*, *leccator*, *representator comediarum*, *insensate*, and the Polish: *kuglarz* or Latin-Polish: *mimesi podrzesznyacze, mimus podrzesznyacz* or *blazno*.²⁸ The witches appear in a different character in the Czech version of the 15th-century fairy tale (1472) about Jětrich Berúnský (Dietrich von Bern): *Genz mu byli dali wili. Tu swe ztratil wšecky syly. Nemože geho ginak dobyti. Poce gey biti y tlaciti. Llawrynek počewelmi kričeti*.²⁹ The *wily* are presented in a similarly pejorative sense. They are creatures that harm people, sucking their strength out of them. We find a similar context in The Conversation of Master Polikarp with Death (Polish: *Rozmowy mistrza Polikarpa ze śmiercią*). Polikarp, close to death, he 'fell to the ground and groaned. As he lay on his back like a fairy, Death spoke to him, They considered her a righteous fairy, but when the day of judgement comes, (...) The wise of this world will see / That God's reward is good' and 'He will marry as a whirlwind, And yet this thing is very dear to him'.³⁰

The source material is limited, so attempting to interpret the phenomenon is not easy. The images of *wila* probably stem from the mythologization of rotational,

²⁰ *Słowo swatego otca naszego Ioanna Zlatoustawo*, in: Mansikka (eds.) 1922, 174; new edition: Dynda 2019, 280.

²¹ Harmening 1979; 1990, 243–251.

²² Mansikka (eds.) 1922, 161; Aničkov 1914, 58; Dynda 2019, 217–223.

²³ Dynda 2019, 94–95.

²⁴ Jakub Parkosz, *Traktat o ortografii*, 63.

²⁵ „But Jesus, that is, the Savior, and his disciples were called not actors, not harpists, vulgarly not wily, not clamaczj, not szpylmanij, not potrōobacze, as they do today in the opposite

way', Plenarium, f. 21v (note on the margin). Por.: Brückner 1895, 82–83; Wolny 1969, 80.

²⁶ Kowalczyk 1984/1985, 71–89. Por.: Härter 2008, 1465–1470, for further literature; Bachfischer 1998; Schubert 1995; Weismann 1972, 197–203; Danennberg 2013, 81–95; Chaniecki 1980.

²⁷ Thomas de Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, dist. IV, qu. IIa, 292. Por.: Baldwin 1997, 635–663; Brandhorst 1994, 157–180.

²⁸ Urbańczyk (eds.) 1988–1993, 224; Lepszy 1899, 56–57.

²⁹ Hon (eds) 2008, 135. Por. Profantová, Profant 2004, 232.

³⁰ *Rozmowa Mistrza Polikarpa* 36, 60, 62.

whirling movements, which induce madness, loss of balance and even consciousness, and resemble the ecstatic function of dancing in a circle, which induced trance and a transfer of consciousness, but also madness (Proto-Slavic **viliti*, **vilovati* – to rage, to wander). Wandering, in turn, belongs to the ideas about the posthumous journey to the afterlife to the ultimate goal of the soul's existence, which is preserved in the Russian tradition as the unknown land (*nevedomaja strana*), i.e. the posthumous land that we do not know, and if we do not know the goal, we wander.³¹ The spinning motion, like the swirling wind, symbolized the twisting (in the opposite direction, to the left, or as ethnologists describe it, the inverted direction, towards the Sun, opposite to the apparent movement of the Sun) of time and space in a spiral.³² The swirling wind was, it seems, an ally accompanying the whirlwinds in their dance or the effect of a dancing spiral, which was eventually personalized.³³ K. Moszyński, following linguistic analysis, pointed to the connection between *vichrъ* and *viti-* in the sense of to spin, to twist, to spin the air, and the dominant image of *wiła* as beings causing winds, air vortices and, ultimately, *vila* as beings causing winds (he considered *vilo* to be an extension of the root *vi-* contained in the word *viti*).³⁴ Witold Klinger, in turn, pointed to the conjunction with the force of nature – wind, suggesting a connection with the ancient nereids, water nymphs, nymphs, sibyls and harpies, the latter of which sent the wind.³⁵ He saw the origin of the name *wiła* in the linguistic transformation of the name *sybilla*.³⁶

So what follows from this windy semantic substratum in the genesis of the symbolism of the *wiła*? The pejorative meaning of the *wiła* is associated with the concept of crooked, twisted, associated with a whirling motion that drives one mad. The synonymous concept **kribo* in relation to **lěvō* (Latin *laevus*) means twisted, crooked, lame, unjust, evil.³⁷ The opposite direction of the spiral's rotation, with which the *wiła* were probably associated, can be linked to the mocking words in The Conversation of Master Polikarp, when death mocks the secular, who 'Had the vilas for the righteous -/ But when the day of judgement comes,/ Where no one can hide,/ The wise of this world will see/ That God's reward is good'.³⁸

Although the phrase 'for the righteous' probably refers to ethical living, in language these concepts are interchangeable. Elsewhere, death warns: 'I will separate her[s] from her beloved,/ And leave her with the righteous with a scythe'.³⁹ Aleksander Gieysztor noticed the connection with the wind, pointing to the word **vei* – to blow, lit. *vyti* – to persecute, aw. *vayeiti* – to chase, which, according to him, indicated movement.⁴⁰ Let us add that, as mentioned above, it was a circular, spiral, spinning, counterclockwise (inverted) movement, based on magical inversion and directing upwards, lifting upwards, i.e. to the afterlife.⁴¹ The violent movement of air, an invisible but physically perceptible force, was associated with the journey of souls. Slavic nymphs are similar to Greek nereids or, as K. Moszyński delicately suggested, water nymphs, and even Germanic Valkyries.⁴² The wings with which the nymphs were depicted in South Slavic folklore may correspond to such a bird-like image.⁴³ The place of nymphs in lower Slavic mythology suggests symbolism attributed to harmful spirits with chthonic connotations, which is also confirmed in folklore.⁴⁴ The images of *wiła* form a meaningful sequence: whirlwind – air vortex – counterclockwise (crooked) direction – wandering – roaming – writhing, dancing around without order, spiralling upwards (loss of consciousness) – death – movement (journey) of souls to the afterlife. Chthonic symbolism was also emphasized by Lûdmila Nikolaevna Vinogradova, who associated *wiła* with related water nymphs and their epiphany in spring during the flowering of meadows, a space inscribed in Slavic afterlife symbolism as the pre-heaven (*grüne Wiese*). At that time, the ancient festival of *rosalia* (*dies rosae*, *rosationis*), referring to water nymphs, would correspond to *dies violae*, *violatinis*, *violaris* (Latin *viola* – violet), referring to the *wiły*.⁴⁵ If the connection with otherworldly vegetation symbolism is acceptable, then the association of the word *viola* with the name of the *wiła* must be subjected to linguistic analysis.

The presented overview of source references confirms the presence of *wiła* in many forms in medieval literature, although the basis of beliefs and archaic symbolism, still mysterious and raising more questions than answers, is mainly based on linguistic analysis, rather than based on

³¹ Bylina 1992, 15.

³² Wasilewski 1978, 84–89; 1979, 105.

³³ Material from contemporary folklore about whirling demons collected by Pełka 1987, 51–56.

³⁴ Moszyński 1967, 688.

³⁵ Klinger 1947, 293–296; 1949, 22, 32, 35, 39; 1958–1959, 307–314; Herzog-Hauser 1936, szp. 1–23.

³⁶ Klinger 1949, 39.

³⁷ Dukova 1992, 45; por. Kowalik 2004, 114.

³⁸ *Rozmowa Mistrza Polikarpa*, w. 425, 60.

³⁹ *Rozmowa Mistrza Polikarpa*, w. 292, 52.

⁴⁰ Gieysztor 2006, 262; Szyjewski 2003, 171.

⁴¹ Clark 1980, 98–127.

⁴² Moszyński 1967, 686; Szyjewski 2003, 174–175, recently Lehr 2013.

⁴³ Molina-Moreno 2015, s. 197–220; 2016, 357. The author noted that the Slavic female spirit beings he analysed did not have wings, except for the *wiła*.

⁴⁴ Molina-Moreno 2015, 688.

⁴⁵ Vinogradova 2000, 212–213; Puhvel, 1969, 64–69; Bylina, 1995, 16–17; Death beliefs, 151–154.

the overly laconic narrative plot of the aforementioned sources.

Let us take another look at the artifact from Wiślica. Could the female figures decorating it suggest a connection with the sphere of beliefs? The frame was found in the cultural layer of the fortified settlement. It bore traces of use. The context of the discovery does not directly indicate a connection with the performance of any ritual. However, this was also the case with other objects cited above as analogies. In their case, too, the connection with the sacred sphere is based on anthropomorphic representations. And, as is assumed, they could have had a ritual or magical function. The association of both multi-faced idols and figurines depicting a single human face or an entire figure with Slavic beliefs⁴⁶ also allows the artifact from Wiślica to be interpreted in this way. Objects with anthropomorphic representations are considered to be images of deities, other mythological figures, or deceased ancestors,⁴⁷ or are generally associ-

ated with the sphere of beliefs and interpreted as ritual or magical objects. A special group among them are, of course, objects with images of multiple faces, due to the presence of deities with multiple heads/faces in both Slavic and Indo-European cultures in general.⁴⁸ However, the frame from Wiślica represents a different type in this context, as it is the only artifact featuring female busts. It therefore refers to a different group of mythological figures and carries a different meaning. However, the occurrence of wil or brzeğin in written sources may suggest a connection between this object and the belief in the existence of such small mythical beings, and indirectly its non-utilitarian function.

If the eponymous archaeological artefact from Wiślica is found, it will provide a basis for renewing the discussion and confrontation between the two types of evidence concerning the relics of lower Slavic mythology.

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⁴⁶ Szczepanik 2020, 158–161, and further bibliography there.

⁴⁸ Vana 1990, 40n.

⁴⁷ Bylina 1992, 24, Wawrzyniuk 2004

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