

“All gods”

The Origin of the Concept of Pantheon and its Lithuanian Counterpart *Visi dievai*

Summary

All previous researches into ancient Lithuanian pantheon meant by it some more or less exact number of gods to be identified, their functions established, and their names explained. And never was the very concept of pantheon inquired about. However, it is very instructive.

Firstly, the gods are drawn up into a pantheon by their names, so the features of the god-name, e.i. the theonym, must directly influence the concept of pantheon. The main feature of the theonym is that it does not strictly differ from epithet, or eponym. That is, an epithet of some god can branch off and evolve into an (relatively) independent theonym and, consequently, a name of god, in its turn, can be considered as a former epithet of another one (cf. the eloquent case of Indian *Rudra* and *Śiva*; Lithuanian *Medeina* and *Žvorūna*, and also probably *Laumė*; Lithuanian *Perkūnas* and *Dundulis*, etc.). So the status of the theonym is sliding, not at all fixed. Therefore, at least due to this feature of theonyms, the content of a pantheon in principle can not be definitely determined. This is dealt with in the first part of the study.

Then, in the second part, the origin and the original meaning of the word *pantheon* is examined. As is known, it derives from the Greek *πάνθειον* (*ἱερόν*), namely “(temple) of all gods”, as the famous Pantheon at Rome. Compound adjective n. *πάνθειον*, m. *πάνθειος*, in its turn, refers to the collocation *πάντες θεοί* “all gods” not rare in the Greek writings beginning with Homer. This collocation appears to be a term denoting a definite mythological and religious concept, the “All gods”, known also in other Indo-European and not only Indo-European lores. One of its most distinct feature is that it usually denotes not all the gods of a given tradition but, quite paradoxically, some limited group of gods, even of secondary importance, among other groups. The concept of the “All gods” is especially well attested in the Vedic and Hindu tradition as *viśve devāḥ* or, in compound, *viśvadevāḥ*,

and relatively large part of the study is devoted for that. It should be observed that the *viśve devāḥ* might, on the one hand, be even identified with the highest Deity and, on the other, considered as quite insignificant group of rural gods of secondary importance.

As it were, the Indian *viśve devāḥ* have their exact counterpart in Lithuanian *visi dievai* “all gods”, and these make the subject of the third part of the study. The term is attested in Old Russian, German and Polish historical sources since the 13th century and at present, as compound, in the toponym *Visdievai* (the village near Obeliai in Rokiškis district). Moreover, the local oral tradition until recently relates about the temple consecrated to the All gods by the village from which it has got its name. Some historical sources also report of such a temple in the prechristian Vilnius, capital of Lithuania. Anyhow, the term *visi dievai* or compound *visdievai* “all gods”, in connection with the temple *Visdievy* “Of all gods”, would be the real Lithuanian “pantheon” – not the arbitrary list of names baselessly and unsuccessfully wanted by students of Lithuanian mythology for the last several centuries.

In the addendum, the cosmological origin of the number twelve, as the number of the “principal gods” of many pantheons, is shortly discussed. That is, the concept of the twelve “principal gods” around the one highest Deity very probably derives from the number of months in one solar year, or “around” the sun.