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THE BELL AND ITS SYMBOLIC ROLE
IN SLOVENIA

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Subject: The symbolic representation of the bell in Slovenian culture.

Purpose of study: To analyze the phenomena of the appearance of the bell in Slovenian folk heritage, bell inscriptions, iconography, Christian and pre-Christian rituals.

Methods: Folklore, descriptive, historical.

Keywords: Bells, supernatural powers, baptism, folk literature, inscriptions, iconography, personification.

Instrumental folk music was an important accompaniment to human life in the past and was played at various occasions. The people listening to it, therefore, usually had the opportunity to be in the immediate vicinity of most of the instruments. They could see them, observed how they were played, touch them, play them, or even make them. In contrast, the bell – made by bell founders and placed in the bell tower – was distant, unseen, and intangible, and this is why its sound was at the center of people's perception. The bell tower was visited only by the bell players or sexton, and many people may have never even seen the parish bells. The loudness of the sound, enhanced by partials together with the Doppler effect, gave an impression of the mightiness of these instruments. This often stirred people's imaginations and evoked strong emotions resulting in the frequent incorporation of bells and their sound in folk literature.

It was not until the 1960s that Slovenian ethnomusicology took an interest in the use of bells in folk music. This is why the sources used in this paper are worth intense study to reveal the symbolic meaning that the bell had for people in the past. As Erich Stockmann stressed:

Their value lies in their origin, the folk. These instruments were seen through the eyes of the people and described in their language. And despite the subjectivity of such statements they can be considered authentic sources from a scientific point of view, though they may not correspond with the real objective facts (Stockmann 1965: 159).

Because of the inclusion of Christianity in Slovenian culture since the 8th century, bell ringing is subject to canon law. However, with the addition of local special features, the auditory message of the ringing developed much broader significance. This article first presents some facts about the use of bells in the Christian context, which underlay the broader use of bells emphasized by people's symbolic attributions. Secondly, I focus on the function and symbolism that the bell and its sound has for Slovenians with certain examples of its manifestation in customs and rituals, inscriptions and iconography on bells, and its appearance in folk songs, tales, legends, superstitions, proverbs, and sayings. Although there are many such examples, I will present only a few of the most significant, through which this symbolic role can be seen.

The Bell and Christianity

The use of bells for religious purposes, and in part for secular purposes as well, has ancient roots and is found throughout the world. The bell was adopted in faiths such as Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy, where it preserved a similar function, while experiences of the same sound created various symbolic representations through the centuries.

With the recognition of Christianity in the 4th century, the traditional use of bells to signal the beginning of the religious ceremony in Asia made its way through ancient Greek and Roman culture into Christian European culture. With its emancipation from other forms of belief, and then the transition of Christianity into the leading European faith, the need also grew for its sound as a call to worship to be heard as far as possible. Thus in the 5th century special towers (the first bell towers) appeared, in which bells still hammered out of thin metal were hung. With the development of bell casting, which was done at first by Benedictine monks, the first large bronze bells were made. Bell ringing came into wider use when Pope Sabinian (604–606) ordered the canonical hours to be marked by bells, which represented the first rule on the liturgical use of bells. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, as a reflection of marking the prayers of monks, the bells began to be rung three times to mark the first verses of the prayer "Angelus Domini". The bells started to ring in the evening for the first time in the 11th century, in the morning in the 14th century, and at midday in the 15th century. In the 16th century Pope Gregory XIII introduced the ringing of bells in memory of the poor souls in purgatory after the evening "Ave Maria" prayer (Ambrožič 1993: 25–27). Today, canon law states that every church and public chapel shall have a bell to call people to worship. A senior church figure decides how the bells are used. The bells served not only to signal the start of the Mass, but also had secular functions. For example, castles and buildings where the town council met also had bells.

It was not until the 17th century that the bell became an important part of social life in Slovenia. The functions it fulfilled can be divided into four broad groups. Some of them are in accordance with canon law, and others were developed by the people themselves:

1. Apotropaic: for driving out demons and evil spirits, and summoning divine intercessors and spirits;
2. Ritual: for accompanying religious or secular events (bell ringing and *pritrkavanje* (Slovenian-style rhythmic bell chiming) as part of Christian rituals, most often accompanying the beginning and end of the ritual, and in some cases also sounded during the ritual);
3. Signaling: for marking time, the end of the work week, prayers, the beginning of religious service, important events, accidents, dangers, etc.;
4. Musical: for creating music (especially *pritrkavanje*)¹.

The Supernatural Power

The use of bells as instruments with magical or holy power, the most universal feature in all religions, stems from the pre-Christian belief that metal can break spells and that noise can drive away demons (Price 1983: 128). Today this has largely yielded to rational thinking, but evidence of its presence in the past is seen through numerous superstitions.

The greatest symbolic meaning of bells is seen during Easter time, when the silencing of the church bells for three days stirred people's imaginations. Bell ringing was also often connected with the miraculous power of water. With the last ringing of the bells on Maundy Thursday, people would throng to the wells, especially women and girls, to wash themselves because they believed they would have beautiful skin or would see better, and that it would drive away lichen planus and rash, prevent freckles, relieve fever and illness, wash away sins, guard against the plague, and so on. Bell ringing was also thought to help girls find a husband if they swept the barn three times at the ringing of the bells on Christmas Eve. Each time they had to carry away the sweepings, and the third time they would encounter their future husband if they were to be married in the coming year (Kumer 1983: 24).

The appearance of bells in legends and tales is also common to other nations. The bell is most often presented as a magic bell, a silver bell, or a sunken bell with supernatural power. Demonic beings such as witches, will-o'-the-wisps and evil fairies disliked the sound of the bell. Its sound would turn evil fairies into stone, protect villagers, and grant wishes (wishing bells are still present at some spots such as on hills or at some chapels and churches). The bell very often had the power to drive away the Turks, as in a tale from the village of Čreta, where the wonderful ringing of a bell was heard by the sultan in Istanbul and he wished to have it proclaim the glory of Allah. With a mighty army he set off across the hills and valleys and, when he approached the little church, the bell fell silent, disappeared and was never seen again. Devout believers in the area can still hear its gentle voice (Kelemina 1997: 249). The popular Slovenian tourist destination of Bled has an island in the middle of a lake, with a church and a bell that was cast in Italy in 1534. Tourists still flock to the island to ring the bell and make a wish. Every year at Christmas

the tourism society in Bled arranges a play depicting the legend in which a widow, whose husband was killed by robbers, commissioned a bell in memory of him. When the bell was being brought to the island, a violent storm overturned the boat. The sailors were drowned, the bell sank, but afterwards the bell could be heard ringing from the depths of the lake. The young widow then withdrew to a monastery in Rome in sorrow. After her death, the pope sent another bell to the church on the lake, and whosoever rings it shall have his wish fulfilled (Radešček 1996: 83). The inhabitants of the village of Kobilje in the Prekmurje region are also said to hear the sound of a sunken church bell that they long ago threw into the village well to protect it from the Turks. In memory of the victory over the Turks, who were chased away to a mountain by a supernatural force during an attack, on a hill near Ljubljana the bells still ring half an hour early on Saturday. In another location, the wonderful sound of a silver² bell protected the villagers from the Turks when they began to ring their bells with all their might during an attack. The ground beneath the Turks' feet began to sink, and in memory of this event the villagers perform their Saturday evening bell ringing in the afternoon (Radešček 1983: 183–184).

The Meteorological Use of Bell Ringing

The Slovenian proverb *Po toči zvoniti je prepozno* 'After the hail it's too late to ring the bell' has its origin in the custom of ringing bells against storms and hail, which is also known among other European nations. The influence of vibrations on weather phenomena is still discussed today by meteorologists³ and physicists, and this phenomenon surely has its roots in superstition. People believed that demonic forces caused storms, lightning, and hail, and they tried to drive them away by ringing bells. The fact that the custom was already practiced in medieval times is testified to by the frequent inscription on medieval bells *Fulgura frango* 'I break the lightning'. Today this type of inscription is still one of the most frequent on bells. The custom of ringing bells during a storm started to be seriously questioned in the 18th century, and in some places the practice was forbidden and people were advised to seek shelter instead. In 1786 the Parliament of Paris signed an order that forbade bell ringing during storms because of the many victims among bell ringers. In his book *Bronto-Theologie, oder vernünftige und theologische Betrachtungen über den Blitz und Donner* (Bronto-Theology, or Reasonable and Theological Considerations about Thunder and Lightning), the theologian Peter Ahlwardt advised readers as early as 1745 to seek shelter as far from a church as possible, and he mentioned that during a terrific storm in lower Brittany on Good Friday in 1718, lightning struck only the churches ringing bells. Dr. Randy Cerveny, a geographer and climatologist at Arizona State University's Office of Climatology, notes that in a 33-year period in the Middle Ages, 386 lightning strikes on church bells killed 103 bell ringers (Matthews 1994). Benjamin Franklin's invention of the lightning rod in 1752 and his scientific explanation of the operation of lightning provided a rational response to theologians who had racked their brains over why almighty

God would allow lightning to strike a consecrated sanctuary. On the other hand, because it was maintained that lightning was a sign of God's wrath, the installation of lightning rods (referred to as the 'heretical rod') was often considered an impious act against the will of God (Seckel 2006).

In 1583 the Aquileian visitor Paolo Bisanzio (a.k.a. Pavel Bizancij) observed the custom of such bell ringing in Slovenia on All Souls Day or Midsummer Eve. Ringing the bells was believed to awaken the souls of departed ancestors and drive away storms and misfortunes. People also recited incantations and prayers against bad weather and storms. The following incantation makes it clear that in folk belief storms were also caused by witches who had no power within the range of church bells⁴:

Begone ye evil ones,
On the mountains, on the cliffs.
There, where the bells ring not,
The cocks crow not,
There ye have power⁵.

Ringling bells against storms and hail was very common in the past, but today there is nearly no trace of this⁶. Such bell ringing requires a special technique in which the clapper strongly strikes only one side of the bell (*biti plat zvona* 'to strike the side of a bell'). This technique was also used to announce fires and other calamities. It is still often used today in a figurative sense in sayings, for example, *Ni potrebno biti plat zvona* 'The problem is not so great that you need to strike the side of a bell'.

Easter Bell Ringing

The great symbolism of bell ringing at Easter, already mentioned above, is represented by the silence of bells. During the time from Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday the strictest regulations on silence as a mark of sorrow have long applied. The ringing of the bells on Thursday was a signal that symbolized the beginning of sorrow, and Saturday was the end of sorrow and beginning of joy at the resurrection of the Savior. This sorrow during the period of silence did not permit fieldwork, and in places they also kept the animals inside and did not even feed some of them. During this time the church bells, altar bells, and organ fell silent. People said that the bells were 'bound' or had 'gone to Rome' because they believed that they had disappeared from the bell tower and had gone to the Holy Father to be blessed (Kuret 1989: 151). For three days a wooden ratchet replaced the bells and announced the time, and even until the reorganization of the Easter ceremonies in the 1950s children made noise with ratchets both inside and outside the church. Today the ratchets lie dusty and forgotten in the bell towers or simply no longer exist. There are rare examples in which bell ringers reworked or even electrified the ratchets and sounded them during the period of silence at the exact hours when the bells would have rung.

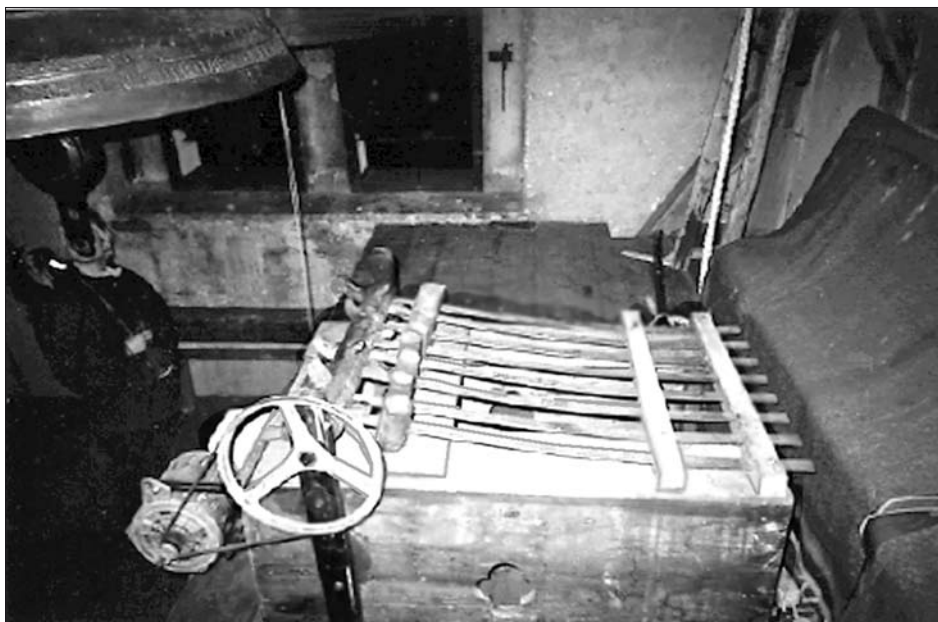


Fig. 1. Electrified ratchet in the bell tower at Smlednik.
Photo: Mojca Kovačič

The importance that people attached to bell ringing at their deaths can be seen in the fact that many said they “feared dying during Holy Week” because they could not be accompanied into the next world by bells (Kuret 1989: 151), testifying to the symbolic meaning of bells to accompany the souls of the dead. The most joyous event in the year for people was the “return” of the bells after the three days of silence. This was marked on Easter Sunday by ceremonial rhythmic bell chiming, which is still practiced in many places. Formerly the boys of certain villages would compete on Easter and Whitsunday morning to see which village would sound this rhythmic chiming first; they believed that the bells that sounded first had greater power against misfortune. In places they therefore began ringing the bells at 11 pm the evening before and rang them without stopping until morning. That was the shortest night of the year (Kuret 1989: 330).

Baptism

The ritual of baptizing the bells is known in all Christian countries and is not unique to Slovenia. The ritual has some special local features, but otherwise it is directed by the *Rituale Romanum*. The blessing of bells transforms a natural object into a sacral object – that is, a church bell – and gives the bell special power. Being the sponsor to the bell is a great honor that usually belongs to the biggest financial donor. The bell has sometimes even three or four sponsors, whose names can be inscribed on the bells. In places, the bell players honor them with rhythmic bell chiming at their funerals⁷.



Fig. 2. Baptism of the bell.

Photo: Archive of the Ljubljana Zalog Bell Chiming Association

Even before the Second Vatican Council, the church blessed bells with words that emphasized its apotropaic role:

As the voice of the Lord once calmed the waves of the sea, as the walls of Jericho were destroyed at the sound of the trumpets, may the sound of this bell strike down the bad weather of hail, lightning, storms... In the name of the holy cross, may this bell avert all catastrophes in the air, as holy water averts those on earth (Ambrožič 1993: 26).

Today only the ritual and functional role of the bell are emphasized in the blessing (Nežič 1989: 367–373). According to the rules of the *Rituale Romanum* adopted in 1984, which was ordered revised by the Second Vatican Council and proclaimed by Pope John Paul II, the blessing of the bells is to take place on a Sunday or holyday. Once the bells were blessed at the bell-foundry, but today this is usually done in front of the church. The blessing is performed by a priest or bishop. The *Rituale Romanum* also permits a brass band or other local musical group to participate in the ritual depending on local custom. This is followed by a speech to those gathered and may include expression of thanks to the casters, benefactors, and sponsors as well as a prayer of blessing that describes the importance of bells. Then there is a reading from the gospels and a psalm is sung, followed by prayers to God and a recitation of the Our Father. After the prayer of blessing, the priest or bishop blesses the bells with the aspergillum and thurible, and may also anoint them with chrism (olive oil and balsam) on four sides. The clergyman and sponsors strike each bell with a wooden hammer while those gathered sing. This is followed by a psalm and concluding song or instrumental music (Nežič 1989: 367–373). After

they are blessed, consecrated bells must only be used for church purposes unless the bishop permits otherwise. For example, when Slovenia entered the European Union, the Catholic Church in Slovenia permitted celebratory bell ringing or rhythmic bell chiming at all Slovenian churches. Rhythmic bell chiming has also become the practice for certain national and local holidays in some places.

Inscriptions and Iconography

The belief that the eye of God not only hears, but also sees, made people dedicate increasing attention to the exterior appearance of the bell as well (Price 1983: 127) and so began the decoration of bells with inscriptions and iconography. Richly decorated bells reached their peak in the 17th century. The images of saints, inscriptions about the role of bells, their casters, and their donators, crests, and other decorations testified to the dominance of esthetic properties over acoustic, and also caused bells to deteriorate in their acoustic quality. Today campanologists warn against excessive decoration, although it is clear that the desire of donators for rich ornamentation often prevails.

The people treated the bell as a half-divine being with a personality (Price 1983: 127). Thus the majority of inscriptions on bells are written in the first person. The oldest Latin inscriptions – such as *Vivos voco, mortus plango, flugura frango* ‘I call the living, I mourn the dead, I break the lightning’ or *Laudo Deum verum, plebem voco, congrero clerum, defunctos ploro, pestem fugo, festa decoro* ‘I praise God, I call the people, I gather the clergy, I weep for the dead, I drive away the plague, I embellish feasts’ – also testify to the apotropaic role of the bell.

Bells that were dedicated to a particular saint received his image, assumed his patron function, and were rung on precisely defined occasions (St. Donatus was invoked for protection against bad weather, especially in grape-growing areas, St. Florian against fires, etc.). A bell that was dedicated to a parish saint also received his name and hierarchically held the highest place among all the bells in the bell tower. It was also usually the biggest bell in size. Its symbolic role was to protect the bells, the bell tower, the church, and the entire parish. The fact that Easter was the greatest Christian holiday is testified to by the statistically most common bell iconography in Slovenia: the image of the crucified savior and crucifixion groups.

The Personification of the Musical Instrument

In addition to forms of personification such as the analogy of baptism, the naming of bells, and inscriptions in the first person, the bell also often appears in a personified form in Slovenian folk heritage, folk songs, proverbs, and sayings. Slovenian word combinations such as the bell *sings, cries, laments, has a tongue, feels pain, awakes, honors*, and so on anthropomorphize the instrument and create an intimate relationship with man as living and nonliving nature (Terseglav 1987: 58). Not infrequently, people also transformed its sound into human speech. People’s

songs with rhythmic text or singing imitated the ringing of the local bells (fig. 3) or rhythmic bell chiming (fig. 4):

Bežj. ba - ba. bežj. ba - ba, ci - ga - ni gre - do! Za -
 kaj bom be - ža - la, ko špe - ha ne - so.

Fig. 3. Song imitating bell ringing.⁸

Pe - čen, pe - čen, pe - čen ka - štron, A - na.
 Ja - kub, Pan - ta - lon, če - ni - an - gu - ria bo mu - lon, že ka - da - je biu svet An - ton.

Fig. 4. Song imitating *pritrkavanje*.⁹

Historical circumstances promoted more of a regional identity among the Slovenians, who limited themselves to the borders of their native village or parish as well. Because the church, and at the same time its bells, was the spatial and social center of village life, songs often transferred membership in the local church to affiliation with the church bell. Usually, one of the bells was consecrated to the same patron saint as its church. This form of affiliation is represented throughout Slovenia in the folk song *Prelepa je domača fara* (Our Beautiful Home Parish), in which the word *domača* ‘home’ and the name of the patron saint are replaced with the name of the place of the parish and the patron saint of the local church. Celebrating the parish bell through song expresses the pride of the village as well as its ownership since the purchase of bells is still made through the financial contributions of parishioners. The fact that bells acoustically define the territory of a local community can be seen from the content of certain folk songs and the well-known saying *Sem doma izpod tega zvona* – literally, ‘I come from under that bell’, that is, ‘I come from that place’. In the folk understanding, the home area extends to where the village bell can be heard (Kumer 1983: 22). Local affiliation gave rise to competition between parishes to have more and larger bells. Today bells remain a status symbol and pride for the village community since the high price of this musical instrument requires local financial support. In Slovenian folk heritage one frequently finds songs that use rhythmic text (in the same way as in fig. 3 and 4) to satirize the neighboring village by imitating the ringing bells of the others parish.

Conclusion

Liturgical practice of the Christian church employs symbolic language and elements of rites for the corroboration of people's faith. One such powerful language that is beyond speech level is the symbolic language of sound. That is why the bell was taken under the patronage of the Christian church and therefore developed from a signaling device to a symbolic object of Christianity. Its sound was the most appropriate to evoke, express, arouse and cultivate the religious feelings in people. As a *divine mediator* it made the imperceptible become audible and perceivable. It strongly effected people's senses and produced a communal religious experience.

Today's bell ringing is being lost to the sound of the modern world where human contact with the instrument is becoming unnecessary because of electrification. Increasing uniformity has also supplanted many local features of the message of these auditory signals, but the strong presence of the bell throughout Slovenian folk culture shows that of all the folk instruments, the bell was endowed with the greatest symbolic meaning. It was present in the people's spirits from cradle to grave, and it was the acoustic accompaniment to the most important events in their lives. It warned of calamities, drove away evil forces, delineated auditory borders and provided protection for the community. It was a medium for wishes and requests, accompanied the souls of the dead, and thus "embodied" divine power on earth. Its power to fulfill the assigned function was corroborated with the blessing in the baptizing ritual and with the written and drawn signs in the form of inscriptions and iconography. Its silence during Easter time symbolized the greatest sorrow in the Christian year and its sounding anew, the greatest joy. The people treated it as their protector, intercessor, acoustic determiner of their day and life rhythm, as well as a symbolic medium through which they communicated their vision of the world and their understanding of the universe.

NOTES

¹ In certain cases the bell fulfills an independent function but the functions are often interwoven; for example, in the announcement of Mass, where the bell has a ritual and signaling function, or in Slovenian-style bell chiming, in which both are united in a musical function.

² Because the casting of bells sometimes took place in front of the church itself, this collective ritual roused people's imaginations. The casters exploited this and encouraged people's belief that the silver sound of a bell would offer better protection against evil forces, and so they encouraged them to bring as much silver as possible – which they then secretly set aside and kept for themselves because they were aware that adding silver would only harm the acoustic properties of the bell.

³ At the meteorological institute in Ljubljana it is reported that they have frequently discussed this and concluded that it has no real physical basis. Sound energy diminishes greatly per cubic meter of distance, whereas the formation of hail in storm clouds takes place at altitudes of 5 to 10 km.

⁴ One of the reasons why European medieval houses were built close together around the church was to place its people under the protective range of the sound of its bells (Price 1983: 124).

⁵ Karel Štrekelj. *Slovenske narodne pesmi, III*. Ljubljana, 1907, No 5179, p. 212.

⁶ Some examples are recorded in the postwar period. In 2005 I met a parish priest that had lived and said Mass at an isolated church exposed to lightning (at Zasavska Sveta Gora in the Zasavje region), and he mentioned that he always rang the bell when a storm was approaching and that lightning had never struck there since.

⁷ Rhythmic bell chiming is a form of ceremonial bell ringing and therefore only takes place on major Church holidays. Exceptionally, it may also be done to mark the death of the bell chimer, priest, or sponsor of the bells.

⁸ GNI R 24.736 (Archive of manuscript songbooks and other manuscript transcriptions at the Institute of Ethnomusicology SRC SASA).

⁹ GNI M 46.260 (Archive of sound recordings at the Institute of Ethnomusicology SRC SASA).

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VARPAS IR JO SIMBOLINIS VAIDMUO SLOVĖNIJOJE

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Santrauka

Slovėnų liaudies muzikoje varpas užima ypatingą vietą, savo funkcijomis visuomenėje išsiskirdamas iš kitų liaudies instrumentų. Dar XVII amžiuje tapęs svarbia Slovėnijos socialinio gyvenimo dalimi, jis iki šiol atlieka daugelį įvairių funkcijų: apotropinių, ritualinių, signalinių ir muzikinių.

Varpai priskiriama maginė ar sakralinė galia yra vienas universaliausių religinių bruožų, besiremiančių ikirikščionišku tikėjimu, esą metalo skambesys gali įveikti kerus, o keliamas triukšmas – išvaikyti demonus. Nors šiandieninis racionalus mąstymas yra jau gerokai išklabinęs šias nuostatas, tačiau akivaizdūs jų gyvavimo praeityje pėdsakai matyti daugybėje prietarų, iš kurių populiariausieji yra susiję su Velykų laikotarpiu, kai nutilę bažnyčių varpai žadindavo žmonių vaizduotę. Sakmėse ir pasakose dažniausiai minimi stebuklingi, sidabriniai arba nuskendę atgamtinių galių turintys varpai. Įvairios demoniškos būtybės, kaip antai raganos, žaltykslės, piktosios laumės ir kt., itin nemėgsta varpų skambesio. Anksčiau gyvavusiai prietaisais remiasi ir dar iš viduramžių žinomas paprotys varpų skambinimu gintis nuo audrų bei krušos. Jo atspindžių galima rasti patarlėse ir užkalbėjimuose nuo blogo oro. Toks skambinimas reikalauja labai didelio įgudimo: skambintojas smarkiai suduoda tik į vieną varpo šoną. Varpo vardynų apeiga kasdienį daiktą (paprastą varpą) paverčia sakraliniu objektu (bažnyčios varpu).

Dar iki Antrojo Vatikano susirinkimo bažnyčiose varpai būdavo šventinami ypač pabrėžiant jų apotropinių vaidmenį. Šiandien akcentuojama tikrai ritualinė ir funkcinė varpų svarba. Milžiniška simbolinė reikšmė varpai teikiama ir ant jo daromuose įrašuose bei ikonografijoje. Žmonės laikydavo varpus pusiau dieviškais, savitomis, individualiomis būtybėmis, tad ir daugumoje ant varpų esančių įrašų kalbama pirmuoju asmeniu. Šventųjų atvaizdai, įrašai apie varpų paskirtį, jų liejikus, fundatorius, herbai ir papuošimai – viskas liudijo estetinės, o ne akustinės jų vertės svarbą, savo ruožtu menkinant akustinio varpų skambesio kokybę. Greta minėtųjų varpų personifikavimo būdų (savotiško krikštynų ritualo, kurio metu varpai būdavo suteikiamas vardas, ir įrašų pirmuoju asmeniu), slovėnų folklore – liaudies dainose, patarlėse ir priežodžiuose – varpas irgi dažnai pasirodo kaip individualizuota būtybė. Slovėnų kalboje įprasta sakyti, esą varpas *dainuoja, šaukia, rauda, turi liežuvį, jaučia skausmą, pabunda, šlovina* ir pan., šitaip sužmoginant instrumentą ir sukuriant intymumo, artumo tarp žmogaus ir negyvosios gamtos įspūdį. Žmonės neretai bandydavo savo kalba perteikti varpų skambėjimą. Ritmingos liaudiškos dainos būdavo kuriamos mėgdžiodant savų ar kaimyninės parapijos varpų balsus. Liaudies dainose ir patarlėse varpas taip pat figūruoja kaip aukšto statuso simbolis ir kaimo bendruomenės pasididžiavimo objektas.

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