

SLAVIC PARADISE RECONSIDERED

Summary

Serbian dialect word *râčes(t)* ‘paradise’ from Montenegro is best explained as a local reflex of **raščest* < **orz-čestb* ‘share’. The same idea is underlying the Common Slavic designation of the paradise, **rajb*, inseparable from Indo-Iranian **rāy-/rayi-* ‘goods, wealth, property’ (to Vedic *rāti* ‘gives, bestows’, cf. further Lat. *rēs, rei* ‘thing’) and, in view of its vocalism, most probably borrowed from Old Iranian. The word designates, in the Vedas as well as in the Avesta, goods bestowed by the gods to men, sometimes posthumously (cf. RV VIII 47, 7), often in connection to the root **bhag-* ‘to share’, and must have entered Slavic in such an eschatological context, together with the semantic shift of the latter from ‘share’ to ‘god’ (CSl **bogb*), which is explained as well by Iranian influence (cf. Av *baya-*, OPers *baga-* ‘god’). Concretely, a divine allotment of the otherworld pastures to the deceased would have been meant, which suggest Old Indian, Greek and Hittite parallels. For missionary purposes, Cyril and Method translated Gr *parádeisos* (literally ‘enclosure’, also from an Old Iranian source) as applied to the Garden of Eden in the Genesis and to the celestial abode of the righteous (Luc. 23, 43; 2 Cor. 12, 4) in the New Testament, regardless of its basic meaning, by the pagan term *rajb*.