



HOP – History of People

Project Reference: CREA-CULT-2022-COOP 101098484

On the trail of the wolf pack

A story about Vulchan voivode



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Early June was ideal for nature walks - the plants had woken up but not too much to create difficulties on the road, the May rains had passed and the snakes had not yet come out of their holes. Although working in the busy city, a group of friends still kept the knowledge of contact with nature and decided to organize a long weekend. So, Danny, Theo, Steffy and Maria set out on the long awaited adventure. They had researched all the routes and eco-trails in the area in advance, because they assumed that they would not have coverage on their phones, and they wanted to enjoy the fresh air and the beautiful views without being dependent on their devices.

They left early in the morning, with not much luggage, but full of an adventurous spirit. They left their gear at the hut and got some water and something to eat along the way. As they walked each told a legend they had read or heard about the area, and what to do if they encountered a wild animal, however unlikely. They quickly forgot the noise of the city and the tension of work... they left themselves to nature, they felt flies and bees buzzing past them, the light and playful pricking of the grasses on their ankles, the sound of a walking stick, the aroma of blooming wild flowers and plants, of course and the magical song of the forest birds. Sometimes there was also the quick rustling of grasses, from the scurrying of some lizard. Steffi and Maria even managed to pick some flowers and pinned them in their hair on the way. The friends walked and breathed with blissful smiles.



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A strange noise was heard in the distance. As they approached, the group somehow entered an enchanted forest, and the sound of the caval played the role of a fairy veil that marked the boundary between reality and mysticism. Gradually the forest thinned out and they came out into a sunny clearing, and an old man was sitting on it, playing a caval and singing a strange song. The young people listened, but the text was unfamiliar to them:

**Vulko ljo, Vulchan voivode!
Vulchan voivode gathered
Seventy boys,
Boys like wolves.
He took them, took them away
In a forest green,
To a water cold.**



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The old man noticed them, but did not seem to be disturbed, as if he were performing a ritual song, and he could not interrupt this ritual for nothing in this world. Danny, Theo, Steffy and Maria sat at a distance and listened to the song, while Grandpa with the caval was like an apparition. When he sang the whole song, the tourists just looked at him with sunglasses, thought about whether to applaud the performance, but didn't even bother, because this was not an ordinary performance, but somehow quite magical. The caval even gave it a mystical sound. They got up and approached the man uncertainly. He smiled kindly and greeted them. They greeted each other and introduced themselves. The young people were fascinated by grandfather Iliya. He was a soft-spoken man and gladly told passers-by about the hero of his song. In Strandzha mountain there are still legends about Vulchan voivode (In Bulgarian, the name Vulchan (Вълчан) comes from the animal wolf - ВЪЛК (vulk)). According to the old man, he was a fearless protector of his enslaved people and had an iron will. Grandfather Iliya added that the people of Strandzha mountain near Gradishte loved him because of his kindness and sense of justice. The old man continued the story of the legendary voivode, explaining that the beech forests in the area still remembered his footsteps and those of his companions. Grandfather Iliya added that the forest birds still sing songs about the heroic battles of Vulchan Voivode and his band against the Ottomans.



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The youths were impressed, not only by the story of the Vulchan voivode, but also by the admiration and awe with which grandfather Ilya spoke of him. The boys were surprised why they had not heard of him, and the girls added that it is a great loss for Bulgarian education and national memory that it is not studied in history classes. Grandfather Ilya had no explanation for the reason why the exploits of Vulchan Voivode were not popularized, but he was convinced that his deed will forever remain in the memory of his native land, because it is forever imbued with heroism, sacrifices and self-sacrifices by the rogue gangs. The youths were like little children who heard of the exploits of the Vulchan voivode as well as of his untold riches and hidden treasures. Their imaginations ran wild and, like little readers, they were enchanted by the legend of the Vulchan voivode.

It was getting past noon and the hikers knew they had to head back to the lodge to get there before the sun went down. They did not want to leave grandfather Ilya, but they had to go. They said their goodbyes, and the old man played his caval as accompaniment for their journey back. The youths felt strange walking through the forest. They began to "see" strange signs and imagined that these were secret markings by the Vulchan voivode's gang to know where they had hidden some of their treasure. The tourists walked somehow more uplifted, knowing that brave Bulgarians once walked on these paths. The song of the forest birds sounded different, and Theo even heard a wolf's howl, as if the spirit of the glorious voivode was welcoming them and confirming his existence.



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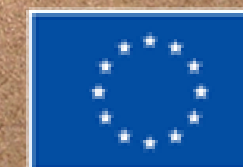


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When they reached the hut, the young people first looked for the hut owner – Asen. They couldn't wait to ask him for more information about the Vulchan voivode. Asen smiled contentedly and as soon as he saw the tourists he realized that they had heard about the famous Bulgarian. Danny, Theo, Steffy and Maria were puzzled as to why Asen had started being reserved with them. They asked him many questions, and he answered evasively. Maria insisted on explaining his behavior. The lodger was open with them and told them that many treasure hunters were coming to look for the Vulchan voivode's treasures and he thought they were just another people who came looking for a quick rich. Steffy and Danny were very convincing that they had pure intentions and just wanted to know more about Vulchan. Theo and Maria confirmed. Asen told and supplemented grandfather Iliya's stories. The lodger told them that Vulchan Voivode was born in 1775 and died in 1863. He is one of the most legendary figures in Bulgarian folklore and there are many myths, legends and folk songs about him.

Vulchan led one of the largest rogue gangs in the Bulgarian lands, with a number of nearly 300 people. He operated mainly in Eastern and Southeastern Bulgaria. His detachment constantly attacked the caravans sent from Constantinople, which collected the local taxes. They not only robbed caravans passing through the passes, but also found Roman, Thracian and Old Bulgarian treasures. In addition to his faithful gang, Vulchan had another strategic advantage – he had a spy implanted in the closest entourage of the Sultan himself.



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The great outlaw who owned heaps of gold. He buried his treasures in a secret place in the mountains and left for his descendants a map on which the vault is indicated. For more than two centuries, the legend of an incalculable treasure, buried somewhere there by Vulchan Voivode, has been floating around Strandzha Mountain. No one knows where it is buried, but many believe it exists. The mystery does not give peace to either historians or treasure hunters from all corners of Bulgaria.

Vulchan amassed wealth from attacks on Ottoman and Bulgarian peasants. He himself was an avid hoarder. Asen added that, according to legend, he discovered in one of the caves of Strandzha a huge ancient treasure left by the Thracians. With him, his wealth became so great that the voivode asked to pay the Russians to send their troops to Bulgaria to fight against Turkey.

Almost 100 years before the Liberation, the voivode led his people to the Russian emperor. The messengers told the ruler that Vulchan had prepared tons of gold with which to pay for Bulgaria's freedom. He ordered the people to convey that the property would reach Russia immediately after the war, loaded onto train sets. But the Russian emperor did not believe in the existence of the riches and refused to cooperate with Vulchan and the Bulgarian people.



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According to Asen, Vulchan sent many bright Bulgarian youths to study abroad. He endured them there completely. He did all this so that Bulgaria would have educated people after its Liberation. The hut explained that, according to some unconfirmed sources, among these awake young men were Evlogi and Hristo Georgievi. Vulchan took care not only of their education, but also gave them money to build the first Bulgarian university, which still exists today in the city of Sofia.

The voivode also gave money for the construction of monasteries or the restoration of those destroyed by Turkish raids. Together with his team, they built 2 monasteries – monastery "St. Trinity" in Sakar Planina and "Seven Thrones" Monastery in Stara Planina.

Asen explained that there are different legends about where and how he died – whether on the territory of today's Bulgarian lands or in the region of the city of Brajla, Romania. Finally, he summarized that Vulchan is a worthy patriot, a Bulgarian who fought for freedom, but it is a pity that his portrait does not sit next to the faces of the other fighters against foreign rule.



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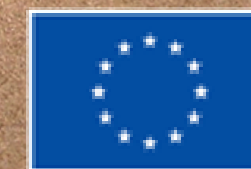


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The youths listened and were amazed by Asen's stories. They were sure that a man much more glorious and noble than Robin Hood lived on the Bulgarian lands. The tourists quickly ate their dinner. They lay down on the beds and began to tell each other their imaginary versions of Vulchan's treasures. Tomorrow's tour would be even more exciting, treading on land with hidden riches. Danny, Theo, Steffy and Maria made a promise to tell their acquaintances about the deeds of Vulchan Voivode to spread the word about his story, but they did not know exactly how to present the information about his countless riches so as not to provoke interest in unscrupulous listeners, who are looking to get rich easy. But they still had 2 days to figure out how to preserve the legend and personality of Vulchan Voivode in all his majesty.

Vulchan voivode (1775– 1863)



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