

Love Magic: Spells Using Menstrual Blood in Lithuania

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Abstract: Among menstrual superstitions circulating in Lithuania a belief that it is possible to put a spell on a man using menstrual blood is the least examined. Our article proposes to describe and analyse this superstition.

Analysis is based on individual interview data collected in between 2000 and 2020. The number of respondents totals 323. All of them are women. Respondents were asked about the use of menstrual blood for love magic. Only 67 replied that they knew nothing about it. Respondents who learned about blood spells in their youth many decades ago stated that rumours of bewitchment are still circulating even now. The attitude to blood spells is strictly negative. Respondents who thought that the spells were absolutely ineffective regarded them as something stupid and dirty; believers in the power of menstrual blood magic thought that the spells were dangerous, immoral or even equivalent to witchcraft. Adding a few drops of blood to a drink or other liquid is a well-known practice in Lithuania. Less often blood is added to food. The consequences can be tragic: a handsome and bright youth becomes addicted to an old hag; a model husband and father leaves his family. Unfavourable physical effects are also common with spells, for example, triggering serious diseases. Relationships with the seductress are

unsuccessful. The removal of a love spell based on menstrual blood is intricate; the techniques of doing so that we recorded are scant, filthy and risky.

Keywords: Lithuania, love magic, love spells, menstruation, menstrual blood.

Introduction

Menstruation as a cultural phenomenon is surrounded by a great variety of popular beliefs and practices. One of these is the belief that menstrual blood can be helpful for people using love magic to seduce a desirable man or keep a marriage alive. Researchers into the European Middle Ages write about blood magic. Defining menstrual blood as an ingredient of love potions, they recount women who secretly add a few drops of menstrual blood to a drink or to food prepared for unsuspecting victims (Green 2005: 57; Kieckhefer 2006: 87; Miladinov 2011: 125).

This belief has not yet exhausted itself. Together with corresponding blood magic practices it transitioned successfully from the Middle Ages into modernity (Behar 1987: 39; Behar 1997: 180-181, 203; Cassar 1993: 324; Sánchez Ortega 1991: 60, 82; Matteoni 2009: 201-208). Narrations about the use of menstrual blood to cast a spell over men are still rife (Agapkina 1996: 137-138; Listova 1996: 168-169; Balatonyi 2015: 115-116; Binde 1999: 85, 251; Kalkun 2008: 31, 44; Krasheninnikova 2009: 40; Paradellis 2008: 131; Stark 2004: 84; Popper-Giveon & Ventura 2009: 34).

The first publications to discuss seduction by menstrual blood were issued in Lithuania in the early 21st century. In his short article about the use of blood to make drugs, ethnopharmacologist Tauras Antanas Mekas argued that bewitching men using menstrual blood was the most common love magic practice in Lithuania (Mekas 2002: 192). The author based his statement on materials collected in the late 20th century by local ethnographer Amelija Urbienė (LIIBR F73-616: 98-99, 101, 103). Evidently, his generalisation should have rested on a richer body of data because materials contained in this collection come only from Vieksniai (a town in Mažeikiai district, northwest Lithuania) and its environs. Jonas Basanavičius's collection was published some years later. Devoted entirely to Lithuanian magic, it contains only two statements about the use of

menstrual blood to seduce men. Both of them were recorded in the early 20th century (Basanavičius 2004: 255, 376).

The situation is similar in countries close to Lithuania geographically and culturally. We think that the perplexing scarcity of collected and published material is best interpreted by Tat'yana Agapkina. She argues that some ethnography topics are under-researched for purely subjective reasons, for example certain facts are simply unappealing to ethnography collectors and publishers. Tat'yana Agapkina supposes that this unattractiveness can be explained not so much by scientific as by “scientifically-ethic” or censorial reasons (Agapkina 1996: 103-104).

With time more data emerged. In 2005 Rita Balkutė published six exhaustive narratives about the use of menstrual blood to entrance men, and about the negative consequences of blood spells. In 2013 she included more than twenty such narratives in her collection (Balkutė 2005: 137-139; Balkutė 2013: 225, 228, 239, 246-252, 256-260, 265-266).

Researching youth initiation and calendar customs of the early 21st century in different regions of Lithuania, ethnologist Žilvytis Šaknys recorded information about young people's knowledge of love magic practices. Among his recordings there were accounts of the use of menstrual blood to entice men (Šaknys 2002: 180-181; 2007: 85, 116; 2009: 79, 109; 2012: 101, 135). Several local monographs published by the Versmė publishing house also contained articles informing about men bewitched by menstrual blood (Balikienė & Navickas 2013: 1519-1520; Navickas & Piliponytė 2009: 994-996; Navickas 2020: 866-867).

In this article our general aim is to show how widely distributed the belief in the efficacy of menstrual blood magic is in Lithuania, and how resilient it has been to time and lifestyle changes.

Participant recruitment and data collection

It was in 2000 that Monika Balikienė came across menstrual blood spell stories for the first time. This happened in Merkinė, a small town in Dzūkija (southwest Lithuania). At that time she was focussing on research into belief in the evil eye in Lithuania, so her questionnaire included the following question: “Can the eyes of a menstruating woman harm people, animals, plants or inanimate

objects?” As a rule, respondents’ answer to this question was short: “No”. Among research participants, however, there were women who expanded voluntarily on the subject of menstruation. Several of them mentioned food taboos, adding that menstrual blood was an excellent means for casting love spells on men. By the way, these respondents always warned the researcher that blood spells were very dangerous and that such magic practice was absolutely inadvisable. Thus over several subsequent years of field research into the subject of the evil eye a substantial number of narrations about the use of menstrual blood to entice men was gathered.

Some years passed, and the collection of information about seducing men with menstrual blood acquired a purposeful form based on fieldwork experience. Starting from 2006 a questionnaire titled *Menstruation in Lithuanian Culture* (Balikienė & Baranauskaitė & Navickas 2006) was used for research into the menstrual experience of Lithuanian women. The aim of the questionnaire was to embrace the whole menstrual experience, starting with the expectation of menarche (first period) and finishing with menopause. The questionnaire included 68 questions. They reflected the following basic themes: menarche, menstrual restrictions and superstitions, menstrual hygiene, menopause experience, and mother–daughter communication on the subject of menstruation. Most of all we were interested in women whose personal menstrual experience covered both menarche and menopause and who were mothers to at least one daughter. If our respondents were younger, we used a correspondingly modified version of the questionnaire. One way or another, any adult girl or any woman who agreed to speak about relevant issues was considered fit for our investigating into menstrual superstitions, menstrual taboos and, last but not least, the bewitching of men.

Research participants were given four questions. First of all, we wanted to know if our respondent had ever heard of beliefs that men can be put under a spell by means of menstrual blood. If the answer was positive, we enquired about who provided such information and when, and what the exact contents of the information was. We then asked the respondent what she thought about the chances of putting a spell on a man using menstrual blood. Our final question was about our respondent’s knowledge of techniques and remedies used to counter such spells in order to know whether our research participants had any information on how to stop a blood spell and set a bewitched man free.

Ethnographic material for this article was gathered by Monika Balikiėnė and Vytautas Navickas in many parts of Lithuania, such as Pilviškiai (2006), Obeliai and Kriaunos (2007), Panemunis (2008), Onuškis (2010), Užpaliai (2010), Vieksniai (2010), Žemaičių Kalvarija (2010) and Kaltanėnai (2011 and 2012) during ethnographic expeditions sponsored by the Versmė publishing house. The authors were also assisted by Vilnius University psychology and sociology students. For the purpose of this article, ethnographic material collected by Vytautas Magnus University ethnology students Regina Mikštaitė-Čičiurkienė and Diana Mikužienė was used. These assistants helped to widen significantly the geography of the research.

Between 2000 and 2020, using the above-described data collection strategy, relevant information was obtained from 323 women from different age groups. The most intensive period of data collection was 2006 to 2012.

Results

Having or not having knowledge about spells on menstrual blood. The majority of participants stated that they had information about love spells using menstrual blood to entrap men. Only 67 participants said that they did not know anything about such spells, i.e. 20.7%.

Women who were 60 or older dominated our sample amounting to 219, or 67.8%. We divided our interviewees into nine age groups. Group 1 (0-19) consisted of seven women who were 19 at the time of interview. (Women under 18 were not invited to the interview.) Four women from this age group said that they knew about spells using menstrual blood, three stated that they did not. Group 2 (20-29) was made up of 32 women aged 20-29. Fourteen of them said that they had information about blood spells, 18 said that they did not. Group 3 (30-39) comprised 21 women. Fourteen said that they knew about love spells using menstrual blood, seven said that they did not. Group 4 (40-49) included 19 women. The majority of them (15) were informed about the spells, only four said that they were not. Group 5 (50-59) was composed of 25 women. Twenty said that they had knowledge of the use of menstrual blood when casting spells, five said that they did not. Group 6 (60-69) consisted of 51 women. Forty-four stated that they knew about the spells, seven said that they did not. Group 7 (70-79) included 104 women. Ninety had knowledge of the spells,

14 did not. Group 8 (80-89) comprised 61 women. Fifty-two had information about the spells, nine did not. Group 9 (90+) was made up of only 3 women, all of whom stated that they were well aware of love spells using menstrual blood.

The elderly interviewees told us that they learned about love spells using menstrual blood when they were young. They stated, however, that bewitchment issues were discussed quite often in their environment even today. The women added that they heard rumours of male neighbours and distant relatives entrapped in this way. Some even told us about their family members (uncles, brothers, sons and husbands) who had fallen victim to bewitchment. The attitude of our interviewees to blood spells was strictly negative. The women who thought that the spells were absolutely ineffective regarded them as something stupid and dirty. Those who believed in the power of menstrual magic thought that the spells were very dangerous, immoral and equivalent to witchcraft.

Here are three extracts from our conversations with elderly interviewees. They illustrate at least some statements from the passage above. The interviewer was Vytautas Navickas.

VN: Perhaps you have heard that it is possible to put a spell on boys using that blood?

Respondent 1: Well, I've heard, I've really heard about it. Locals would speak a lot. People would say that once such a spell is cast, no force whatever will tear them apart. Later when they get married they do not live in harmony, they disagree, but they get married all the same. There were rumours that girls gave blood to boys secretly.

VN: How did they do it?

Respondent 1: How? They could add it to his food or cup of tea. People would speak a lot about that.... I dated a boy for six years. Over that period we separated now and then. But finally we married. I remember people saying to me: "Hey, you stupid thing, feed it to him!" But how could I? If I love a person, how can I give him such dirt?

VN: Did they say directly "feed it to him"?

Respondent 1: Yes. "Feed it to him, and he will never separate from you." My heart does not allow me to do such things. Besides, a such measure is

not really necessary, but even if it were necessary, well, how can a person feed such unspeakable abomination to anybody?

(Respondent 1: Woman, born in 1922. Interview conducted in 2005 in a village in Rokiškis District)

Excerpt from interview by Monika Balikienė and Vytautas Navickas:

Respondent 2: Well, if you ask me, I'll tell you. Local people would say that if a man is treated to a cup of tea by a woman, he becomes her property. She takes hold of him. Such stories are real. I heard them from at least several women. At that time I worked at a hospital. One medical nurse assured me: "That is a real thing".

MB, VN: Perhaps you can remember the year?

Respondent 2: Oh, that happened 20 years ago. The nurse told me that she did it herself. She said that she gave him several drops of her menstrual blood.

MB, VN: So what do people actually say? How do they perform such an action?

Respondent 2: They add a few drops. They make a cup of tea and offer it to him. I was told such stories.

MB, VN: In your opinion, do these drops really affect the man? Or is it only a superstition?

Respondent 2: Well, I don't know. Such stories were really very widespread among locals. How can I know if they are true?

(Respondent 2: Woman, born in 1919. Interview conducted in 2005 in a village in Rokiškis District)

Respondent 3: Yes, people say that women do such things. I've heard that they do. I mean women who are, so to say, older and who wish to entrap younger men... A man is simply put under a blood spell. Once he is bewitched he will never leave his seductress. I've heard about it.

MB: Perhaps your girlfriends or neighbours did it?

Respondent 3: They never told me if they did. But every woman knows about it. Women used to talk about it.

MB: What is the procedure?

Respondent 3: Maybe they add blood to a cup of tea. Or maybe to a plate of soup. I don't know. In short, it must be given to him in food.

MB: Is it really possible, in your opinion, to entice a man by means of menstrual blood?

Respondent 3: Well, I don't know. I think that there are other ways to lure him: be cheerful, be kind.

MB: Perhaps you have heard how to cancel a menstrual blood spell put on a man?

Respondent 3: Oh! People say that it is impossible to remove the spell. Once he is bewitched, he stays bewitched.

MB: For life?

Respondent 3: For life.

(Respondent 3: Woman, born in 1935. Interview conducted in 2007 in a village in Rokiškis District by Monika Balikienė).

Sometimes respondents were inclined to reflect more deeply on human relationships. On such occasions they argued that spells using menstrual blood have nothing to do with love magic because females who cast blood spells do not seek love. Their aim is to overpower, subdue and enslave a human being.

Victims. The victims of these spells are principally young, handsome, healthy and wealthy men. Women can be also counted among victims if they are girls, spouses or mothers whose boyfriends, husbands or sons were enticed away. The female victims are allegedly beautiful, industrious and honest. Respondents often mention a functioning family and children whom the man leaves under a menstrual blood spell. So, a family as an organisation and children as its members can also be considered as victims.

Respondent 4: If you want a man pay attention to you – put a spell on him using your menstruation blood. Give him any kind of beverage to drink to which you have added [a few drops of blood] squeezed out of your sanitary pad, or you may use water in which you washed that pad. Such stories make me shudder. I would listen to what women say, and think: “A decent girl cannot lure a boy in this way”.

MB, VN: But you have heard about it?

Respondent 4: I’ve heard a lot about it. A few drops into a glass of beer, whiskey. Into some kind of stronger drink so that the colour does not show. And this must be carried out with a strong desire to make him love you, pay attention to you, start liking you.... I would say that such methods are not honest. They are absolutely disgusting....

MB, VN: Perhaps they only gossip, perhaps they do not perform such actions? What’s your opinion?

Respondent 4: I heard old women talking about a husband who had a good wife. She was hard-working, clean, and so on. But the husband left her for an absolutely nasty, lazy and dirty female creature. So what did he find in her? A disgusting ruin of a woman with so many children. Those old women were asking each other: “What did he find in her?” Well, they said that she put a blood spell on him using some kind of beverage. This is a kind of bewitchment. She put a blood spell on him, and he left his wife, a tidy, industrious woman, and moved to that female. There are many instances showing how a husband leaves his wife, a seemingly hard-working woman with a smaller number of children. He chooses a life of hell. And he is delighted [laughs].

MB, VN: Have you been hearing such stories since childhood?

Respondent 4: Yes. Since childhood. When adult women discuss something among themselves, children’s ears suck in their words so well that they stick in the memory forever.

MB, VN: Where do women discuss such issues? Probably in the bath house?

Respondent 4: In the bath house and elsewhere when they meet. And children run around them. Nobody allowed us to listen, but if listening is forbidden, then children listen with increased intensity.

(Respondent 4: Woman, born in 1945. Interview conducted in 2010 in a small town in Plungė District)

Blood love magic practitioners. Judging from responses and explanations given by our research participants, menstrual blood magic operators may be malevolent or benevolent. Our interviewees very often described them as malevolent females who turned to magic in order to entrap a young, handsome and bright man. Seductresses were allegedly plain, shapeless, deformed, dirty, idle, work-shy, good-for-nothing and immoral single women (so-called old maids) or widows. By all accounts the malicious females were older than their male victims. Very seldom our research participants spoke about apprehensive wives who, fearing that their husbands will leave them for other women, add their own menstrual blood to drinks or foods intended for spouses. These poor females should be counted among benevolent blood magic practitioners.

In 2005, in a small town in south west Lithuania, we talked with a woman born in 1933. Asked about menstrual magic, she told us that several years ago her daughter was on the verge of divorce. Her mother-in-law liked her immensely and wished to save the marriage. The mother-in-law suspected that a woman who was nine years her son's senior had put a menstrual blood spell over him. She talked her daughter-in-law into bringing some of her used sanitary pads. The mother-in-law needed them to 'spice up' her son's tea. Since this measure turned out not to be very helpful, the women decided to employ black magic. Here is an extract from our conversation:

Respondent 5: So the mother-in-law said to her: "I've bought a black candle, now you go to the cemetery. As soon as you see a headstone with the christian name <...> on it [the christian name of her son's seductress was <...>], light the candle and place it on that grave. Since the christian name <...> is not very common these days, my daughter could not find a gravestone fit for the purpose in the whole cemetery.

MB, VN: To light a candle on any grave with the name <...>?

Respondent 5: Yes, on any. Place a burning black candle on it and go away.

MB, VN: So who was the initiator?

Respondent 5: My daughter's mother-in-law was.

MB, VN: The mother-in-law?

Respondent 5: Yes. She did not want them to divorce. She tried so hard. Oh yes!!! She saw that her daughter-in-law was not guilty. Her son was guilty.

(Respondent 5: Woman born in 1933. Interview conducted in 2005 in a small town in south west Lithuania)

Blood spell techniques. Secretly adding several drops of menstrual blood to a glass of alcohol (beer, whiskey, brandy) or a cup of another beverage (tea, coffee) is common practice when casting a spell on a man. Tea and coffee occupy a leading position among the most treacherous drinks. According to our interviewees, these aromatic beverages are maximally dangerous to men in Lithuania. Wine is equally suspicious. It is risky for men to drink wine in the company of charming women. Coloured spirit drinks should be avoided on principle. Special attention must be given to beer, a favourite drink of Lithuanian men. Beer is mentioned in earliest Lithuanian blood love magic narrations. Included in Jonas Basanavičius's collection, these narrations tell of how, in the early 20th century, girls allegedly used to put boys under a spell by adding several drops of menstrual blood to a glass of beer (Basanavičius 2004: 255, 376). Relatively less often blood is added to food, such as soup, scrambled eggs, omelettes and pancakes. The list of dangerous dishes is practically endless. Our interviewees noted that blood can be added to any food.

Our research participants explained that above-mentioned foods and drinks are preferable in menstrual magic because of their ability to mask the colour of blood. Men, however, should be always on guard. They should always be prepared for difficulty even if women treat them to perfectly transparent alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks. Our research materials show that tools are available to bypass the colour code. These less common blood magic techniques indicate that menstrual blood can be used not only directly but also indirectly. Indirect blood spell techniques are relatively rare. We recorded only a few. Here is one of them:

Respondent 6: Well, people would say that they really can [put a spell in a man]. Well, during their menstruation they can do it. But I personally did not have to turn to such means. I did not perform such actions.

MB, AP: Perhaps you have heard what happens when a woman performs them?

Respondent 6: Well, people say that the man is put under a spell. By burning blood-smearred rags to ashes.

MB, AP: Ah, the rags must be burnt to ashes?

Respondent 6: Smearred rags must be burnt and added to a beverage.

MB, AP: The ashes?

Respondent 6: Yes yes. Add them to a cup of tea.

(Respondent 6: Woman, born in 1926. Interview conducted in 2007 in a village in Rokiškis District. Interviewers: Monika Balikienė and Algimantė Piliponytė)

Amelija Urbienė described a technique by which menstrual blood can be used indirectly; what is more, it can serve simultaneously as a constituent of the whole bewitchment operation.

Carry a lump of sugar wrapped up in a rag under each armpit for a whole month so that your sweat is absorbed into the sugar. Also, wear your chemise without changing it for a whole month. The chemise must get smeared with menstruation blood. Any kind of washing oneself, such as swimming or taking a bath, is strictly forbidden. When a month passes, remove the lumps of sugar from under your armpits, take off the chemise and burn it. Gather the ashes and keep them. If there is a man whom you fancy but he does not find you attractive, you must dissolve the lumps of sugar in a liquid (water or tea, or something else) and make sure that he drinks it. This must be done in secret, he must not see or know anything. Scatter the ashes of the burnt chemise over a place where that man will most probably sit or lie down. Some of the ashes must stick to him. In this way a spell can be put on a man. (LIIBR F73-616: 98-99)

Amelija Urbienė learned about this technique by eavesdropping on her mother's conversation with a woman. That woman was giving an account of what she did in order to seduce a desirable man. The conversation took place in 1923 when Amelija was 14.

Another indirect technique involves rue. More precisely, the watering of rue. This bewitchment method was recorded by Rita Balkutė in 2000 in Varėna District. The procedure is complex: upon a girl's first menstruation a mother (only if she is intelligent and well-informed) instructs her daughter to wash herself and then pour the water out in the garden where rue shrubs grow. It was a custom in the past for girls to carry a bunch of rue when going to church. If a girl brushed the rue (fed with water containing her menstrual blood) against a boy whom she fancied, he fell in love with her. Acting this way any girl was able to get any boy to chase her (Balkutė 2013: 225).

Dose. Our research participants usually did not specify the dose needed to bewitch a man. They only mentioned that large quantities of blood should not be used – several drops will do.

Intake frequency. Our interviewees expressed many opinions on this issue. In general, one secret intake of menstrual blood should be enough. A male victim becomes attached to his seductress permanently. He literally becomes addicted to her. Some respondents insisted that the intake must be repeated every month. The repetition will allegedly secure the male victim's attachment to his seductress. In this way she will keep him in bondage until the resources of her seductive substance are completely exhausted. One woman told us that the seductress must add several drops of her menstrual blood on three successive new moons. This procedure allegedly guarantees permanent success for her treacherous business.

Strength and duration of spells. As can be expected, opinions on strength and duration of spells also vary considerably. Only a few respondents mentioned that the strength of the spells waste away. Amelija Urbienė recorded an interesting instruction concerning spell duration: if a woman wishes to entrance a man for a while, she must use blood taken at the beginning of her period. But if she wishes to bewitch him for life, she must use menstrual substance with only traces of blood in it. In other words, blood must be taken at the end of her period. This instruction seems to be unique, we have not come across similar.

If you wish to seduce a man, you must give him some of your menstruation blood added to his drink or food. If you give him your menstruation substance with blood (when menstruation flow is bloody), he will not love you all of his life, his love will not be long, it will last a month, a year or longer. If you want him to love you all his life, you must do the following: when your period is ending, the flow is no longer bloody, it is clear, it is clean. So you must gather that clean menstrual flow [into a piece of cotton wool or clean rag] and pour boiling water over it when making tea or coffee. Then serve it to the man, and he will love you until his death. (LIIBR F73-616: 103).

In her short comment to the above recording Amelija Urbienė writes that she got this information from a young woman travelling from Vilnius to Mažeikiai. The woman told her that she was born in a small town in Mažeikiai District, and that her first husband left her heartbroken. Seeing this an old woman taught her what to do. In a word, menstrual blood magic helped her to catch another husband who loves her very much and takes care of her. Amelija Urbienė noted that, judging from the way the young woman talked, it was clear that she was a university graduate, occupying a top position at her company.

In 2001, Monika Balikienė interviewed three women, native residents of the same village in Varėna District. One woman was elderly (born in 1940), one middle-aged (born in 1953) and one young (born in 1983). Each of them stated that menstrual blood spells last only one month. Here are their respective narrations:

If a girl wants to attract a boy, she saves that blood and then adds it to his food. As soon as he eats it, she takes possession of him. But a month passes, and he regathers his wits. But if they marry, they do not get along well.

I heard that they do all kinds of hellish tricks in order to seduce men. Grandma explained to me that if they want to seduce boys, they use menstrual blood. But as soon as one month passes, everything falls into place. And everything starts from the beginning. They say that after one month the action must be repeated all over again, every month. That is what I heard.

I've also heard that if a girl wants to entice a boy, she must add three drops of menstrual blood to his cup of tea. But after that, when a definite period of time (a month, it seems to me) passes, the boy will not tolerate that girl.

As expected, narrations by women living in close-knit village communities are very similar. Yet they are not identical because interviewees emphasize different components of a well-established standard blood spell story. The oldest participant puts stress on post-bewitchment difficulties, specifically, problems during married life. The middle-aged participant is slightly annoyed by the absurdity and stupidity of female aspirations. The youngest pays special attention to the dose – three drops of blood.

Consequences of bewitchment. Although there are a wide variety of effects, the consequences of menstrual blood spell practices are invariably dramatic. Sometimes they are tragic. For example, a young, handsome and bright boy becomes addicted to an older and totally worthless woman. Or a faithful God-fearing family man heads straight into shameful slavery, having left behind a comfortable home, devoted wife and children. Unfavourable physical effects are also common. Our interviewees warned that love spells using menstrual blood can trigger serious diseases, such as tuberculosis. They noted that male victim's relations with the seductress are always unsuccessful. On the one hand, he cannot break free from her, on the other hand, their life as a couple is not harmonious: they often abuse each other and fight.

Respondent 7: A girl can gain complete power over a boy very quickly, if only she wishes it. Her period will come, she will add [some menstrual blood] to his cup of tea, and he will stick to her. But later when they get married, he will not love her. This shows that the girl has cast a spell on him. Later it becomes clear that their married life is lost: neither do their children behave like they should, nor do they as a couple live properly. So, (a spell on menstrual blood) is a definite no-no. A girl should never entice a boy in this manner. In order to keep her peace of mind.

MB, VN: Are there any methods of undoing the spell? Is it possible to separate him from her?

Respondent 7: Oh, I even do not know if it is possible to get rid of a man under a blood spell. What I know is this: add some drops of menstrual

blood to a cup of tea. Make him drink it. This action must be repeated three times. And he will stick to his seductress. But if they marry, their life is lost. Ruined forever.

MB, VN: Women say that the husband's health also suffers from such tea.

Respondent 7: I think it is quite possible. You see, he is kind of poisoned. His heart is no longer at rest.

(Respondent 7: Woman born in 1926. Interview conducted in 2010 in a small town in Utena District)

In Vilnius in 2006 Irena Akelienė recorded two narrations about the fatal consequences of spells using menstrual blood. Both narrators were born in villages in Varėna District, where they spent their youth. The older woman (born in 1931), asked if she had heard about the use of menstrual blood to cast spells on men, told the following story:

I've heard. When I lived in a rented room in Vilnius my landlady's ex used to visit her. She used to treat him to a drink with a few drops of her menstrual blood in it. So that man became addicted to her, getting thinner and thinner with time. Then, after some years, he died.

The younger (born in 1938) woman's reaction to a similar question was unexpected. It turned out that she learned about the fatal consequences of blood spells from TV:

I have just seen on TV how a 16 year old boy fell madly in love with a 38 year old woman who allegedly used to treat him to a cup of coffee spiced with her menstrual blood. So the boy grew so desperately sad that he committed a suicide by hanging because of love.

As is known, TV shows distribute information about love magic theory and practice generously. It must be noted, however, that only a few interviewees said that they learned about blood spells for the first time from TV.

Spell cancellation chances and techniques. Opinions about spell removal differ widely in our sample. Some respondents believe that removal is possible, some think that it is impossible. Respondents who believed that a male victim can be restored to the original (pre-charm) condition warned us that restora-

tion requires much effort and skill to accomplish. In urgent cases professional consultation may be necessary. Some interviewees mentioned that they knew that their female neighbours, friends or family members consulted people with magic powers in order to undo harm inflicted on husbands, brothers, sons or grandsons. They stated that magic advice was helpful. If a professional magician is unavailable, it is possible to use do-it-yourself methods although, in the opinion of many respondents, they can hardly stop or undo spells. In sum, the chances of cancelling a blood spell are slim. No wonder we recorded an extremely small number of spell removal techniques. All of them are risky and unhygienic.

In 2003, in a village in Raseiniai District (mid-west Lithuania) Monika Balikienė heard a real-life story told by a woman born in 1921. When the narrator was young there was a poor girl in their village who wanted to marry a rich farmer very much. People said that she bewitched one boy by adding some of her menstrual blood to his food or drink. He clung to that girl. His mother did everything possible to set her son free. She even consulted a priest. The village people said that there was a chance to get rid of this unscrupulous girl. Some of them suggested doing the following: wash the inside of a shoe worn by this girl with water, add this water to a drink or food and serve this dish to the boy. The interviewee explained that the aim of this operation was to make the male victim feel disgust for his seductress. The narrator was not sure if the boy's mother performed the prescribed actions. One way or another, the persistent seductress married the man she desired. However they did not live long as a couple and in the end they divorced.

This method of freeing a victim from such a spell is obviously connected with people's expectations. According to our interviewees, the method must provoke disgust in an unsuspecting victim. In order to achieve this goal, stronger substances than the water in which the shoe was washed are recommended. Some spell removal techniques rely on the use of the seductress's faeces. Once a small piece of this substance is ingeniously obtained, it should be added secretly to the male victim's food or drink and then served to him. We heard several such narrations in east Lithuania. Four similar stories were recorded by Rita Balkutė in villages in Varėna District in 1999. All of them offer the following instruction: get a small piece of seductress's faeces, dissolve it in water, bring the water to the boil and simmer. After that, serve the remedy to the unsuspecting male victim (Balkutė 2013: 251, 262-263, 265-266).

Luckily, a more hygienic method of removing blood love spells is available: throw a piece of the seductress's faeces over her body. After this is accomplished the evil woman is regarded as "one who has been arched by shit". We learned about this method in 2010 in a small town in Trakai District. Our informant was a woman born in 1932. We recorded a less filthy technique in 2009, in a village in Rokiškis District. A respondent born in 1923 told us that it was necessary to cut surreptitiously a piece of chemise worn by the unsuspecting seductress (the garment must be drenched in her sweat), boil it for a while in water, then secretly pour the water into the victim's cup of tea.

In 2011-2012, in villages near a small town in Švenčionys District (east Lithuania), we recorded several real-life stories about the wonderful powers black boar dung. Women told us that if a small piece of this particular excrement was tossed secretly into the space between a seductress and her male victim, it could undo the spell. One woman added that this technique is very bad for the very good reason that it is fatal. The seductress will inevitably die. We asked if the action of tossing dung must be carried out by an interested party, for example, the victim's sister, mother or some other family member. The woman explained to us that kinship in such a case is not vital. The action may be performed even by a hired person. Our interviewees assured us that in former times locals feared death by black boar dung very much. Today black pigs are extremely rare in Lithuania, and so since there is an acute shortage of this specific dung, this allegedly very effective method is no longer readily available.

Our interviewees told us that they heard stories about herbs that are useful for spell removal. Unfortunately, narrations about such magical plants have become less common. One was recorded by Rita Balkutė in 1997, in a village in Zarasai District. This story, revolving around a granny who set her grandson free from menstrual blood spells, identifies a particular herb called atgiriai (*Huperza selago*). The granny gave him a cup of atgiriai tea. This remedy worked very well as the boy vomited every time he saw his seductress (Balkutė: 2013: 256-257).

In 2008, we learned the name of another good herb from a woman living in a small town in Rokiškis District. Narration by this respondent, born in 1932, is remarkable not only because it identifies the herb, but also for the information about an accidental overdose of menstrual blood.

There was a husband who used to leave his native village regularly in search of work. Seeking to secure marital fidelity his apprehensive wife secretly added a portion of her menstrual blood to his drink. The dose turned out to

be excessive. The husband suddenly felt very sick in the fields and fell to the ground rolling from side to side. Luckily, women working nearby guessed the reason for his suffering. They made him drink some clubmoss (*Lycopodium annotinum*) tea, which saved him.

The healing procedure is carried out by two people who, seated in pairs, must drink clubmoss tea. The best effects are achieved when the victim's wife or some other relation helps him drink the tea. But the helper and victim may be strangers. The pair must simply drink tea together and then vomit together. The main thing is to diagnose bewitchment correctly. Both the victim and his assistant must know that in this way they get rid of the spell. According to our informant, the procedure was over when the husband disgorged two big white beetles. The insects scurried away intact but the removal of spell was successful.

The herbal techniques described above serve as deterrents by inducing disgust. They relieve the victim of addiction to an evil woman as if she was the poison, that is through the digestive tract.

In 1999, in a village in Lazdijai District, Rita Balkutė recorded a narration about a nasty woman, a so-called old maid. This mature female cast a blood spell on a young boy. The youth suspected that he fell victim to blood love magic. He shared his suspicion with a reliable woman who suggested striking the seductress in the face with a fist – seeing fresh blood on her face was vital. Having done what he was advised, the boy got rid of the spell (Balkutė 2013: 252). This story seems to be unique and, as yet, we have not come across similar.

Spell removal techniques can be connected with important religious rites and ceremonies. In a technique described below the Christian Church and its symbols are a spell-destroying force.

In 2010, in Trakai District, Rita Balkutė recorded a narration about two sisters who saved their brother from menstrual blood spells. The brother was a married man. His seductress was a loose woman with three children born out of wedlock. Trying to save their brother, the sisters turned to a sorceress for help. The sorceress asked them to bring three things that belonged to their brother from important stages of his life. The sisters brought his christening gown, his neck tie and the shirt he wore at his marriage service. The sorceress burnt the three things to ashes. Having handed them to the sisters, she told them to sprinkle the ashes secretly and cunningly on their brother's head and shoulders crosswise. The sisters did as they were told, starting from the head. They sprinkled ashes surreptitiously from the forehead to the nape of his neck,

distracting his attention with these words: There's something stuck to your hair, let's see what it is. Next time they worked on his shoulders and back from the neck downwards, then across the shoulders, talking to him cunningly: Oh, I see a bulge. What is it? The sisters repeated the magic action twice. After that everything was fine with the brother (Balkutė 2013: 259-260).

Transmission of the knowledge of spells using menstrual blood. In 2010 Kristina Cibulskė defended a psychology master's thesis titled "Mothers and Their Adult Daughters' Attitudes towards Menstruation". She compared the attitudes of 34 mothers (mean age 52.5) and their 40 daughters (mean age 28.7) to Lithuanian tradition. Almost all research participants were native residents of Dzūkija (south west Lithuania). Cibulskė employed psychological methods in her investigation into attitudes towards menstruation. For the study of cultural context a questionnaire created by Kristina Cibulskė and Vytautas Navickas was used, the results of which showed that 93% of the respondents were very well informed about food taboos, slightly less informed about love spells used to seduce men (78%), and least informed about superstitions connected with hair care procedures (66%). Compared to daughters, mothers were better informed on all cultural beliefs, and their belief was stronger. Kristina Cibulskė noted that all research participants stated distinctly that they believed that a menstruating woman could spoil food cooked or otherwise prepared by her, or that a menstruating woman should not visit a hair salon, have her hair cut or dyed or dressed because it would be a waste of time and money. Participants gave different answers to the question of whether it was really possible to entice men using menstrual blood: "yes", "no", "I have doubts", "perhaps yes", and "perhaps no". Such a distribution of answers might indicate that women really had doubts about whether it was possible to seduce men using menstrual blood. On the other hand, it may demonstrate these women's unwillingness to tell the truth. Perhaps respondents thought it possible to cast a blood spell on men? Speaking from our research, we too cannot be sure that the participants who said that they did not know anything about blood spells (67 respondents, 20.7%) were sincere in this answer.

Kristina Cibulskė's research clearly indicates that taboos on food are handed down to the majority of daughters by their mothers. However, the situation with the seduction of men is quite different. Only one mother out of 34 participating in the research said that she learned about blood spells from her mother. Out

of 40 daughters only six said that they learned about blood spells from their mothers (Cibulskė 2010: 37-38).

The same information transmission pattern is also evident in our research. Women who were able to remember the source of the information more or less precisely said that they learned about menstrual blood spells from their girlfriends, or from rumours, or by eavesdropping on older women. Very seldom did they remember having hearing about them from their mothers.

In preparation for final conclusions. We started our research by proposing that we would describe and analyse the belief that it is possible to put a spell on a man using menstrual blood. As time went by this general goal became more precise. We wanted to get answers to the following questions: Is information about blood spells really so widespread? Do interviewees simply report what they heard other people saying or do they believe in blood spells? Do they think that evil women practising spells using menstrual blood really exist? Do people really perform blood magic rites today?

In 2008, in a village in Pasvalys District, hoping to obtain valuable information, we interviewed an aged but very agile and quick-witted woman born in 1913. To our surprise – and also regret – her attitude to magic and related issues was very sceptical. Asked about menstrual blood spells, she gave the following answer:

Respondent 8: I do not remember who told me about it, my mother or somebody else? If a girl wishes to entrap a boy, then – into a cup of tea or plate of soup. In this way she will tie him to herself and he will belong to her. I do not believe in it.

MB, VN: Do people really perform such actions?

Respondent 8: I do not believe in magic. Absolutely. But nowadays when people talk and write so much about spells and magic, even I hesitate: perhaps magic works? There are many sorcerers today, some of them could be vicious. Previously I was a strict non-believer, but now I have doubts.... Long ago, when we were young, we were clever beyond measure, we even despised stories our parents told us, but now... What concerns [blood] spells, I have doubts. I start thinking that something in them may be real. You better ask somebody else, not me.

The interview gave us a hint that the number of believers was perhaps much greater than it seems if such a rock has finally crumbled. Inspired by this revelation, we continued our work. Following this woman's advice, we interviewed as many women as we could. We recorded their allegedly genuine stories, first-hand experiences and observations. Were they really true? We do not know. Since we are not witnesses to events described by our research participants, we cannot specify the number of women who manipulate men by means of menstrual blood. It is hardly possible to give a quantitative answer to the rest of questions posed earlier in this section either. We doubt very much that every woman who denied knowing anything about these spells was absolutely unaware of this popular practice. We are not dead sure that those interviewees who waved away with a smile the very idea of love magic were absolutely sincere. Almost all women who stated that they knew about spells using menstrual blood assured us that they learned about them for the first time in their adolescence, adding that since then rumours about the entrapment of men using blood have accompanied them all their lives on an almost daily basis.

The belief is obviously resilient to time and lifestyle changes. Why is this so? As is known, love magic offers a wide range of means to affect the course of events in human lives. Some of them can be very intricate and costly. Menstrual blood, as the main ingredient of love potions and charms, is readily accessible when needed. Putting a blood spell on a man is convenient and simple. What is more, it costs absolutely nothing.

Conversations with the women who participated in this research give the impression that people stick to this belief (and practice) because it contains a huge explanatory charge. Supported by this belief, any girl who is seen (or at least sees herself) as beautiful, sexy and chic can easily explain to herself why her boyfriend has suddenly left her for a less attractive, or even a disfigured, stupid or dowdy, woman. Similarly, a frustrated mother or grandmother can explain to herself, family members and neighbours why their handsome, clever and well-educated young man became attached to an 'old whore' instead of being interested in the beautiful, respectful, well-behaved and hard-working girl next door. This way of thinking was very obvious in the narratives provided by our interviewees.

Conclusion

Field research data allow us to conclude that knowledge of spells using menstrual blood allegedly practised by dishonest and unattractive women is pretty widespread in Lithuania. Information obtained from elderly women and young girls supports our statement. Many respondents not only stated briefly whether they were aware of the existence of such magic practices, they also shared with us stories circulating non-stop in the locality quite openly. Interviewees noted very often that love magic was a popular topic in their village or town, and that blood spell stories were discussed among neighbours.

Without a doubt, there are people who believe that it is possible to bewitch a male by menstrual blood. The belief is more or less firm. Some of our interviewees think that evil women perhaps manipulate men by means of menstrual blood. Some insist that, yes, they definitely do it.

There may be many explanations as to why this belief is so resilient to time. Some of them may be practical, for example the unlimited availability of the chief magical resource and the relative simplicity of spell-casting. Other reasons may be psychological in that the belief helps to cope with the loss of dear people.

Acknowledgements

Ethnographic expeditions organised by Versmė publishing house created conditions that allowed to carry out field research in various places in Lithuania, such as Pilviškiai (2006), Obeliai and Kriaunos (2007), Panemunis (2008), Onuškis (2010), Užpaliai (2010), Vieکشniai (2010), Žemaičių Kalvarija (2010), and Kaltanėnai (2011 and 2012).

Our very special thanks go to ethnologist Žilvytis Šaknys for valuable suggestions, helpful advice, and inspiring discussions on the subject presented in this article.

Archives

LIIBR F73-616 = Lithuanian Institute of History Library Manuscript Collection. Viekišniai environs (Akmenė District, north west Lithuania) folk medicine and veterinary collection, collected by Amelija Urbienė, Vilnius, 1974.

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