

Estonian Plague Lore between the Eastern and Western European Traditions: A Combination of Period-Specific Disease Theories, Medicinal Observations and Legend Motifs

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Abstract: This article takes a look at the development of Estonian plague lore based on Estonia's unique position on the border between the Eastern and Western European traditions. The author looks at ways plague-related folklore (legends and beliefs) and the plague-related knowledge in European educational centres (for example, chronicles on the causes and preventive and treatment measures given in treatises on medicine) combine and lead to specific nuances. The author primarily refers to motifs present in plague lore that have crossed genres and found places in different discourses and eras, based on the miasma theory that was once widely popular.

Keywords: religious lore, mythological plague lore, plague-era medicine

Historians have studied how the plague epidemics that ravaged Europe affected politics and the economy, while archaeological excavations of plague burials have provided valuable information about life during plague epidemics. Less attention has been given to what went on in the psyches of the people who tried to find an explanation for the devastating disease and the changes it caused to people's worldviews and religious and medical beliefs. At the same time, comparative study of plague lore leads to salient results, especially if it is done with consideration to Estonia's geographical position.

Altogether twelve plague epidemics have ravaged Estonia. Repeated outbreaks took place in Estonia (as elsewhere in Europe) in the fourteenth century; it was also widespread in the second half of the sixteenth century during the Livonian War. The last plague epidemic, which coincided with the Great Famine, took place in Estonia during the Great Northern War and was at its peak in 1710 (Hiimäe 1997: 37). Estonian folklore is dominated by beliefs that developed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, during the time of significant waves of plague, and is mainly influenced by Western European traditions. However, it cannot be said that foreign elements were absorbed without change or that these elements were the only influence on the development of lore. Estonia should rather be regarded as a wide border area between two more extensive traditions, which has caused this area to become a mixture of elements of both of these traditions – parallels can be drawn with lore from both Eastern and Western European countries, although there are also elements that are unique to Estonia (cf. Hiimäe 1999). I have previously written elsewhere about several other aspects related to Estonian plague lore, such as the development of mental danger maps and other traditional coping mechanisms (e.g. Hiimäe 2004, Hiimäe 2016).

A shared motif in Slavic and Estonian plague legends is the ritual ploughing of furrows around the village for protection

against the plague spirit, motif that is common in Russian folklore but rather rare in texts of Estonian legends. If we follow the establishment of plague lore more narrowly in the Finno-Ugric cultural area, north-eastern (Baltic-Finnic and Sami) folklore becomes distinct from the rest. Finnish and Estonian, and to a lesser extent Sami and Livonian, lore see plague as inflicted by a mythological plague spirit that usually takes the form of a human, an animal or a particular object, as is generally traditional in Western European legends and partly also in Slavic legend tradition. When examining the religious beliefs of eastern Finno-Ugric areas, we have to keep in mind that plague epidemics had much less of an effect on them than on Western European countries. Animal plague (anthrax), which mainly poses a threat to animals, is much more common in these areas than human plague. The spirit or god ruling over this disease should be placed into a wider context: there is no concrete mythological entity like the Estonian plague boy or plague goat in these traditions, but the Udmurt and Komi people, for example, have records of spirits in animal forms (for example as dogs or cats) that bring severe infectious diseases in general. Karelian tradition also seems to lack folklore related to plague as a mythological entity; yet it contains the notion of the plague coming from the wind. Some Estonian texts also point to the plague being carried around by means of noxious air or wind. The references to noxious plague air in mythological plague lore and the miasma theory that was widespread in plague-era medicine motivated me to try and find what factors have contributed to the development of plague lore in Estonia and to what extent the official medicinal knowledge of European centres mixed with regional belief folklore motifs. The conclusions made about belief traditions in this study are based on 1,300 older Estonian folklore texts (see Hiiemäe 1997), and on parallels drawn with other countries. Historical medical approaches (e.g. Landbeck 1685, Eggerdes 1715) and contemporary

in-depth scientific research (e.g. Ziegler 1969, Zimmermann 1988, Bergdolt 1994) provide insights on medical viewpoints.

Relationships between medical positions and mythological plague lore

The development of Estonian and Western European plague lore more generally has been affected by several competing beliefs and positions. Although at first glance it may seem that plague-related folklore (legends, beliefs) and the plague-related knowledge of educated circles (for example chronicle records about the causes of the disease, prevention and treatment recommendations in treatises on medicine) gained ground among different target groups and through different channels, it is still possible to establish points of contact between them.

Even if there are no assertions in folk legends about the prominent medical beliefs of the scholarly circles of the time, it does not necessarily mean that the common people had no knowledge of such beliefs; rather, such information did not meet the necessary genre prerequisites to be recorded in the mythological tradition. Medical texts and legends can be treated as channels for dispersing different types of information. The problems referred to in legends are often mythological (for example the appearance of a disease spirit), and the means required to eliminate such problems based on the logic of the story world, a usage of language and symbols characteristic of the discourse of legends. Obviously, the aim of plague legends was more than just to provide instructions to eliminate the danger described in the text. By telling these legends people also tried to reduce the fear of that danger: plague legends indicate that despite the severity of the threat, certain proper behaviour would still grant survival. Therefore, the fictional management strategies provided in legends cannot be viewed on the

same basis as practical medical recommendations. Even if legends contain practical advice applicable in the context of infectious diseases (for example recommendation to move away from those who might carry the disease) they often develop a mythological dimension (for example such recommendations can be spoken by a plague goat). Among other things, Estonian traditional texts include several dozen variants in which the family gives witty replies to the plague spirit, who has assumed the form of a goat, thereby ensuring the survival of the family. At the same time, there are no traditional texts based on which it could be said that such witty dialogue had any practical value, or that it really happened.

In her analysis of nightmare-related lore, Catharina Raudvere describes similar fictive coping mechanisms (such as physical resistance to the menacing being), i.e. activities that are described in detail in the legends, but for which no proof can be provided regarding the actual implementation of these activities. Raudvere calls these fictitious rituals that express the ideal of escaping the dangerous situation because they always lead to the desired outcome (cf. Raudvere 1995: 56–57). Medicinal prescriptions, on the other hand, were mainly meant to be followed directly, although measures such as letting blood, using smoke from fragrant herbs, etc., promoted by medics who were unaware of the actual ways infection spread could not have reduced the threat much in the epistemological sense. However, they still caused people to believe that particular steps could be taken against the disease. Legends, therefore, primarily provide mental coping strategies, and medicinal texts physical ones. Chronicle notes, which at times contain intentional overstatements, serve a different function to legends, although chronicles also feature plots taken from legends.

In this case, why is it that some motifs can be found to be treated similarly in legends, treatises on medicine and religion, as well as in chronicles? Can we assume that some ideas and motifs cross genre borders more easily? Or should we suspect that there

are certain universals in place regardless of genre borders? More importantly – and inclusive of both of the above options – it seems that the wider cultural and mythological background rather than one-to-one connections condition the development of thinking models.

Plague-era scholars belonged to the same cultural context as common people, which often leaned on magic. Thus, early modern thinking often didn't clearly separate natural and supernatural causes, for instance, rats and witches could be understood as analogous agents of plague as both were associated with foul air, environmental disorder and even moral pollution (cf. Cole 2010: 72). The fact that many doctors considered plague to be caused by God's wrath or sowers of plague was enough to make even doctors use magical and religious measures to combat the disease. Plague-era doctors considered noxious smoke or vapour to be a cause of plague; wine and letting blood were scientifically reasoned treatments, to be promoted as such. The propaganda of the Church against so-called sowers of plague also had an effect on people. The beliefs of doctors, scholars and other people did not necessarily have to be directly taken over by one or the other, but they largely developed within the same frame of reference.

The influence of written sources on plague lore

The contents of Estonian plague folklore (at least in the part that is available to us in the form of archive texts that were mainly collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) is largely mythological, with the most important relevant storyline being a meeting with the plague spirit. Yet in Germany and other Western European countries – roughly covering the area from Denmark to the north, and Austria and Italy to the south – the relationship between scholarly-organised and spontaneous-folk traditions

seems more complex. However, the unequal representation of verbal and written traditions in different countries prevents us from getting an objective overview. For example, the oral tradition from some of those areas can be studied only through legend collections published mainly at the end of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, and the texts in those collections tend to be adapted to the ideals of Romanticism and don't fully reflect the tendencies that have set the tone in living folklore tradition.

When looking on the written medical and religious tradition, extensive publication of literature on plague in larger cities must have promoted the development of uniform ideas in Europe – starting from the fourteenth century, all kinds of letters on the plague, treatises on medicine and other similar publications spread explosively (cf. Keil 1995: 95). In medical circles plague treatment started to become standardised to a certain extent, originating from the former residence of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV in Prague (Keil 1986: 116). Initially, the main media for knowledge on the plague were wood carvings depicting plague-related saints at the beginning of the fifteenth century (Mary, Sebastian, Rochus). After the invention of the printing press, prayer texts and medical recommendations were added to this list (compare to LMA 1991: 1921). Naturally, the standardisation process was slower and less extensive in more peripheral regions (including Estonia) compared to large centres.

Until the eighteenth century, the principal reference material for literature on the plague was the position of the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris *Compendium de epidemia*, written in 1348. The publication contains two treatises, one on the prevention and the other on the treatment of plague, the latter including diets of sour foods and a recommendation to use strong-smelling fragrant substances against noxious plague odour, etc. (cf. Zimmermann 1988: 9). The publication does not really contain any ground-breaking positions, and is, in turn, based on older

Greek and Arabic authorities. The fact that it could be related to existing tradition probably only added to its popularity. Several repetitive techniques and measures such as diets, letting blood, urine therapy and purgation were now declared specifically effective against the plague. Certain techniques repeat in almost all historical publications on the plague.

Even the fact that the plague is actually an infectious disease quickly became evident to some people despite numerous mythological explanations, and its infectious nature was also emphasised in plague-related literature. Places of quarantine were established where people suspected of being infected had to spend forty days in isolation (Hofius 1971: 214). Upon entering cities people were often required to submit a certificate of their state of health, although it was not necessarily taken into account that a certificate that was valid on the previous day might be outdated by the following day. There is information about a village in Austria being surrounded with a circle that no one was allowed to cross in order to prevent any contact between people and thus the chance of infection (cf. Jungbauer 1934: 45). In the legend discourse, however, actions such as these may have given rise to the formation of ideas about a magical protection ritual to keep supernatural plague spirits at bay. The following legend could also originate from a real occurrence if someone who was infected with plague was allowed to stay the night at a village that had previously not been affected:

People were said to have seen a mendicant monk, dressed in black, walking towards them. Monks weren't something to be frightened of. People thought of them as having God's blessing and being beyond the grasp of the plague. They welcomed the monk and put him up for the night. The next morning the plague had taken hold of the people on the farm. From there on the plague was said to have spread

across the whole village. The monk then moved on again to spread the plague. (Hiimäe 1997: 118)

In the legend text, the monk goes through an unexpected change in status. The monk who could be considered to be immune to the threat of disease due to the divine protection he was granted because of his piousness, really does turn out to be immune because he himself is the disease. If we further look at the intersections of mythological thinking and real-life contexts, then it is possible that some strangers and people who displayed symptoms of illness were classified as disease spirits or sowers of the poisonous plague after subsequent infections in the village. For instance, Brivio's study (2017) of 17th-century Milan also considers cases when accusations of plague-spreading were linked to demon-assisted agents, showing a fusion of mythological thinking and observed contagion patterns. Therefore, quarantine arrangements could not have provided the desired results or caused the outbreak of plague to stop completely, because while people may have been suspicious of strangers they often did not imagine that infected neighbours could pose a threat. Several other protection methods that were medically unsound became widely popular, although they did not necessarily improve the situation. One such concept that evolved to become an entire system for warding off diseases was the miasma theory.

Miasma theory – a scholarly obsession of the time

The theory of air pollution or 'miasma' that cause diseases started to appear in documented form in the fifth century with the Hippocratic School of Medicine (LMA 1991: 593). According to Avicenna (c. 1000 AD), plague-inflicting air was released during earthquakes. In the Late Middle Ages, an anonymous clergyman

from Flandria refers to a letter from a friend to describe the unprecedented incidents that took place in eastern India over the course of three days causing widespread pollution and resulting in an outbreak of plague. According to the description, on the first day it rained toads, scorpions and other vile creatures; on the second day people heard terrible thunder and streams of fire fell from the sky along with big rocks; on the third day the sky was covered with fire that spread an insufferable foul stench. The fire consumed a number of cities, burning them to the ground, after which the wind dispersed the smoke and contaminated all places with plague (Ziegler 1969: 14). Chroniclers' descriptions even seem to compete with one another to create the most impressive mental imagery, although noxious smoke or vapour is a recurrent motif. One chronicle from Bologna states that plague was preceded by balls of fire the size of human heads falling from the sky: "They fell from the sky and burned land and property as if they were made of wood. It was said that it caused terrible smoke and who ever saw it dropped dead on the spot" (Bergdolt 1994: 34). Another chronicle from Ferrara 'confirms' the message from Bologna: there was a "severe downpour of fire between China and Persia. It fell like snowflakes onto the ground and burned down mountains, flat terrain and all other areas, including men and women. It caused a gigantic smoke pillar. Whoever saw it died in half a day. All the men and women who saw anyone who witnessed the event died as well" (Bergdolt 1994: 35). Therefore, the above reports contain the belief that noxious smoke or vapour spread the plague, a belief that became widespread among educated circles starting from the great plague epidemics of the fourteenth century.

The joint work of the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris *Compendium de epidemia* played an important part in the popularisation of the notion of plague air (Bergdolt 1994: 24). It mediates a theory according to which harmful vapours were sucked up from the ground due to a particular constellation of

planets, transformed into contaminative plague-air and flung down towards the ground again (Keil 1995: 99). On the other hand, it was assumed that fish and sea creatures that had died after an extensive drought would be washed back into the sea afterwards, where they would rot. Contaminated water allegedly gathered into clouds and reached the ground as plague-bearing rain or wind (Ziegler 1969: 15). This explanation is found repeatedly in treatises on the plague over the course of several centuries, occasionally mixing with theological explanations. For example, the seventeenth century minister Ignatius Ertl declares the creation of odorous plague air resulting from an unfavourable constellation of planets and the subsequent outbreak of an epidemic to be a secondary reason since the primary reason must be considered to be God's righteous wrath (cf. Moser-Rath 1991: 321–322). A similar connection is made in a work by his contemporary, German doctor Johan Georg Landbeck, published in 1685. The book sums up the principal contemporary beliefs of the medical and theological tradition 'in a simple way that anyone could understand', making it clear how far off they still were from medical facts at the end of the seventeenth century. Landbeck believed he knew that 'the primary cause of the plague is the evil and wicked life of men that has drawn onto itself the wrath of God in the form of the plague and other punishments. The comets, burning bullets and other flaming objects in the sky that have been observed in many places over the past three years are often considered to be among the natural causes of disease; the constellations of planets also have an effect' (Landbeck 1685: 14). From there on, the doctor gets to the theory of noxious vapours and sums up with realistic practical observations: "As a result of such abominable weather turns as long-lasting southern or midday gusts that have also been common in this time, the air inevitably becomes rotten to a degree, seeing as it is polluted by foul-smelling and deadly vapours." Additionally, he cautions people not to keep piles of filth

close to their houses since it fosters the spread of noxious vapours. In the plague-related writings of Spanish chronicler Alfonso de Cordoba from the fifteenth century, the miasma theory is mixed with the activity of a criminal sower of the plague: “The air can be poisoned artificially. The poison is prepared in a glass bottle. An evil person who wants to bring destruction to their city will wait until a strong wind is blowing in the direction of the city. Then they position themselves downwind and break the bottle on some rocks. The poisoned air then reaches the city, destroying everyone who comes into contact with it” (Ziegler 1969: 16).

Naturally, a number of techniques were set up to avoid the harmful plague-bringing air. In his 1679 book, the royal court physician Thiermayer gives the following recommendation to prevent the plague: “Keep rooms closed at sunset and sunrise, as well as when it is overcast and foggy outside” (Melter 1905: 59). Instructions included placing fresh milk in rooms so it would absorb the noxious air. Oxen and cows were herded through cities so that they would purify the air with their panting (Nohl 1924: 116). In Austria and Germany, it was recommended to keep billy goats in buildings with bedrooms or nearby because it was believed that their smell would neutralise the deadly plague odour (Nohl 1924: 116; cf. Depiny 1932: 408). To keep dangerous plague odour from gathering in one place as it descended down to the ground, it was deemed necessary to ring bells and fire cannons on windless days in order to stir the air (Nohl 1924: 115). On the other hand, this also references the magical belief that it is possible to deter harmful supernatural beings by making noise. There are a few Estonian folklore records stating that gunpowder and smoke from gunpowder help against the plague (Hiimäe 1997: 46), but it is unlikely that this recommendation is motivated by the desire to disturb plague air. It is more plausible that this belief motif is linked to sympathetic magic or, in this case, to the attempt to banish the abrupt appearance of disease using means that are equally abrupt.

There were recommendations in several places in Europe to burn pleasant-smelling substances to neutralise the harmful and infectious air when plague posed a threat. It was advisable to light fires of juniper, rose and vine branches near houses, spray rose oil onto walls indoors and spread pepper and other spices around (Ziegler 1969: 73; Bergdolt 1994: 27). Such recommendations were based on the opinion that people could only get infected if they smelled the plague odour, meaning that they did not have to worry about getting infected if the fragrant substances overcame the plague odour. However, such measures probably did not yield much more result than creating a pleasant smell.

Historical sources indicate that the theory made intuitive sense within pre-modern worldviews, aligned with visible environmental conditions and prevailing moral ideas, and filled an explanatory gap before the role of microbes in illness transmission was properly understood. It was not until the eighteenth century that the dogma related to the miasma theory began to lose relevance. Pioneering German doctor Alardi Mauriti Eggerdes (1715: 33) declared that “the plague is not caused by a bad season or the bad alignment of the stars, by noxious air or ill-natured earthly vapours, but is the result of nothing else but the poison that is carried to us from inflicted places”.

Reflections on the miasma theory in vernacular legend discourse

To some extent, the described medical views were linked with traditional mythological belief motifs. For instance, Lucinda Cole (2010) demonstrates how in the 16th–17th centuries, explanations of plague contained ideas embedded in existing belief folklore such as witches corrupting the air magically and thus causing the illness. In Estonian folk narratives or texts on folk medicine, little

attention is given to the burning of fragrant substances; probably the corresponding techniques failed to catch on even just due to their high cost. However, the idea of neutralising plague odour is not entirely unheard of in folklore and is linked to the general use of smoke in prophylactic magic as reflected in an Estonian text that states “if the horn of a black billy goat was smoking in a fireplace then it [the plague] stayed away” (Hiimäe 1997: 283–284). The smoking of juniper branches as an act of prophylactic magic is also widely known in folklore and some records mention that it also had an effect against the plague. A more indirect link with the topic of smells can be seen in a few Estonian legends, according to which it was necessary to dig oneself into manure to get away from the plague. The same remedy was known in Germany, where some texts advised people to climb so deeply into manure piles that only their head could be seen (HDA VI: 1514). It is still unlikely that this method would have been related to the neutralisation of plague odour in Estonian folklore. It is more likely to be based on a more specific idea that such behaviour would prevent the disease spirit from smelling people and finding victims. In a general sense, this method of hiding is also part of Estonian ague legends.

In German folk narratives there is an image of the plague appearing as a cloud or column of fog; there is also a motif of the ground being covered with a thick noxious fog that the sun could not penetrate for a year before the Black Death (HDA VI: 988–989). A Danish legend describes a “vapour” rising out of the ground the year before the plague (Ashliman 2020–2023). The warning against dangerous plague air all around must have seemed too abstract for the minds of people. Therefore, there were attempts to give the enemy a more tangible form: in a couple of widespread German legend types the plague fog has been transformed into a plague spirit that is dressed in white and can be locked up in a wood block or defeated in some other manner. According to a legend, plague in the form of a bluish cloud crawled up into a hole

in a wood block on a farm. After witnessing that, the owner of the house quickly plugged the hole and the plague could not escape (Busch 1877: 190; Strackerjan 1909: 186, 280). Other legends describe how people also tried to stop the spirit of death and other supernatural beings in the same way. There are also descriptions of plague escaping its confinement again due to carelessness or ignorance (Seyfarth 1913: 201–202). There is a Swiss legend about a girl in white who appeared at a farm with a white broom. When she swept the broom against the front door it created a whitish smoke, unleashing the plague (HDA VI: 1511; see a similar Polish legend about a spectral plague maiden spreading plague with her scarves, breath, or garments in Ashliman 2020–2023). Such narrative motifs may have been supported by the miasma theory, which was extremely popular in many European countries, but the described protective activity is already a further development resonating with mythological ideas about malicious supernatural beings. Thus, the theory of noxious plague smoke appears in plague legends in a modified form that has been adapted to pre-existing folk belief.

Hot bread in the magical and medical context

As mentioned, Estonian folklore was not directly influenced by the concept of noxious plague fog or air. The appearance of just a few assertions, such as the ‘Bad Winds Brought the Plague’ story type (Hiimäe 1997: 95) or the depiction of the plague as a grey stream may be incidental. However, questions arise with the ‘Giving Appropriate Replies to the Plague Goat’ story type, which is localised mainly in Viljandi County (see Hiimäe 1997: 317, type 118). This type of legend is centred around witty replies given to the utterances of the plague spirit. Appropriate stereotypical formulaic replies have developed, which generally concern the eating of

particular foods (according to some legends it is sufficient to just select the correct dishes). For example, the plague spirit refers to hot gruel and freshly baked bread as ‘brother and sister’ and says that it cannot kill people who eat these foods. Sometimes it is said that there was supposed to be pea soup or porridge on the table, but all such legends say that people could hope to be spared by eating hot food. It is likely that we should also consider the medical aspect here because the high temperatures involved in cooking foodstuffs really does destroy at least some harmful bacteria, thus reducing the risk of infection. A more important association here seems to have been imported from elsewhere, with the possibility of it being related to the study of miasma. Specifically, in Western European treatises on the plague, repeated mention is made of placing a slice of hot bread onto the lips of the dying person so that it would absorb the noxious air or vapours that cause illness. The belief that bread absorbs the plague can be found, for example, in the folklore of most German regions. The following German legend talks about a nurse who is possibly following this advice to stop the disease from spreading, although it has been interpreted in the opposite way.

In Möhra, a sick nurse was said to aid the plague further. She placed warm bread into the mouths of the deceased and used it to make soup for those who were sick. She did this until almost everyone in the village had died. Finally, one of the sick persons noticed her actions and switched the soup bowls – now, the nurse had the poisonous soup and was the last to die of plague. (Quensel 1926: 138)

If we put the interpretative element of the legend aside, which is most likely inspired from the motif of sowers of plague and treats the nurse as the spreader of the plague, then on both occasions above, bread is used as a preventive measure against the plague; in

Estonian legends, however, the primary element of the narrative is the dialogue with the talking plague goat – people must eat hot bread to escape the plague here, but they also have to know the appropriate reply to give about their activity in prophylactic magic dialogue. Therefore, bread becomes important in narratives only after being placed into magical context. Estonian legends that are structured around witty replies tend to describe how the plague goat enters the room without notice and the conversation that follows whereby those eating the food give appropriate replies to the goat:

It was the plague and cholera. The plague was the one that took the form of a goat when quite a large number of people ended up dead.

Once, diners were having hot bread with salt when a goat suddenly popped its head through the doorway and said:

“Fire and sparks are eaten!”

The people then replied:

“Well, well a goat that speaks with a human tongue!”

If you could reply to it straight away, then it didn't take anyone. Anyone could reply when they saw it. If no reply could be provided, then a person would die in that place. (Hiimäe 1997: 324.)

As said above, multiple diets were promoted as treatment for the plague in Europe, for example drinking vinegar or sour milk or eating sour plants was considered helpful because acidic substances were said to prevent bodily fluids from going bad and leading to the plague (Creutz 1948: 186). And yet, no item of food or drink that has been mentioned in medical literature has gained such magical connotation as hot bread in Estonian legends.

Summary

Concludingly, we can return to the claim at the beginning of the article, that ideas from medical discourse are reflected in legends only to a limited extent. Since they are ill-suited to be presented as structured or symbolic stories, they serve no function in narratives, although this does not rule out the possibility that people were aware of them as such. They were complete logical pieces of thought and practice primarily spread in writing and fit for the so-called educated tradition. In legends, on the other hand, the story elements perform the essential function of warning and mental encouragement which may be augmented by description of fictional coping strategies. Plague legends are generally confined within a folk religious worldview, primarily highlighting mythological dangers and ways of surviving these, while providing instructions for proper behaviour that is often similarly related to mythological reasoning. There are still motifs that cross genre borders and resonate in different discourses and at different times. Hopefully the above-described factors contributing to the development of folklore help make better sense of the complexity of the relationships between oral-spontaneous legends and scholarly-organised medical traditions.

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