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CURRENT RESEACH IN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

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CURRENT RESEARCH IN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

Nikolay Antropov
Timofey Avilin
Elena Boganeva
Anastasiya Gulak
Reet Hiiemäe
Katre Kikas
Mare Kõiva
Pavel Limerov
Tatsiana Valodzina

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Authors: Nikolay Antropov, Timofey Avilin, Elena Boganeva, Anastasiya Gulak, Reet Hiiemäe, Katre Kikas, Mare Kõiva, Pavel Limerov, Tatsiana Valodzina
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Address:
ELM Scholarly Press, Vanemuise 42, Tartu 51003, Estonia
Phone: +372 737 7740; e-mail: kirjastus@folklore.ee

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Introduction

The present volume is the result of long-term collaboration, which has included joint research on folklore, vernacular religion, and school lore, along with mutual fieldwork and participation in IT- related projects, made the compilation of this collection possible. Until 2023, this work was carried out within the framework of the Folklore, Religiosity, Language: Transcultural and Vernacular Aspects project, which analysed religious belief and traditional ideas and their relationship with contemporary global challenges, their mutual influence and the consequences of this symbiosis. The project explored the most popular religious and traditional beliefs and ideas, those who promote them (actors), their place and influence on vital aspects of individual and social life.

We chose the format of a collective monograph to present our results. The main research questions investigate the identification of key themes within the selected topic and, depending on the material, give a comparison of our findings with parallels from neighbouring or culturally related regions. Documenting this highly variability material was essential, as was identifying common motifs that appear across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The methodological framework includes source criticism, comparative folklore studies, ethnolinguistics, and cartographic approaches. Additional methods comprise ecosemiotic readings (examining the human–environment–other-than-human relational landscape), quantitative trend analysis of digital corpora (frequency, co-occurrence, and temporal patterns), and, to a

lesser extent, network-analytical approaches to the movement and transformation of motifs. The studies are based on maximally comprehensive text corpora.

The world's languages carry with them the mythologies that grow out of them; each contains both universal themes and widely shared conceptions, as well as unique and locally specific knowledge that invites further exploration. Mythology and cosmovision explore cultural generalisations about the structure, origin, and development of the world, as well as explanations of the emergence and evolution of humans, other beings, and various other phenomena. They also encompass certain norms and obligations embedded within a given social and spiritual system. It has been assumed that members of specific social groups share mythological knowledge and perspectives (Haverkort & Hiemstra 1999). In the 20th century and thereafter, it has often been argued that a once-coherent mythological system has survived only in a fragmentary form in folklore, customs and language (cf. Tolstoy 1995–2012). Rather than accepting this widespread assumption at face value, we propose a more precise formulation: every language and every culture possesses mythologies that change over time and vary from person to person.

Contemporary mythologies are reflected in books and media productions, as well as in fairy tales, legends, songs, and other folklore genres that have entered these media environments. Certain elements also continue to circulate in short-form expressions such as anecdotes, proverbs, curses, blessings, charms, prohibitions, and prescriptions. Mythological conceptions shape large parts of lifecycle customs, calendrical rituals, magical practices, healing magic and the techniques associated with them. Archaic worldviews and corresponding practices remain a vital foundation not only for contemporary media creativity and professional cultural production but also for the continued resonance of older beliefs within today's societies and belief systems.

In recent decades, numerous national mythologies have been published, along with influential reconstructions of the mythological systems of major cultural regions (for example, Greek, Roman or Germanic) and language-family-based syntheses (Slavic mythologies, Finno-Ugric mythologies, Germanic mythologies). There are also large-scale attempts to map mythological motifs globally and to reconstruct their historical movement and diffusion (Berezkin 2025; Tolstaya 2002; Tokarev 1980–1982).

Scholarship on both Estonian and Belarusian mythologies has a long history. Nineteenthcentury Baltic German authors produced early interpretations, which were later followed by the innovative synthesis created by Matthias Johann Eisen in the early twentieth century. His multi-volume *Eesti mütoloogia* (Estonian Mythology) combined extensive material sent in by a nationwide network of correspondents with the most current mythological research of his time, especially contemporary German scholarship.

Oskar Loorits, whose monumental work began with the three-volume study of the Livonian vernacular religion in 1926–1928, developed his views on mythology from 1932 onward through a series of individual studies, culminating in his large-scale synthesis published between 1949 and 1957. His work drew on a far more diverse body of material and incorporated newer theoretical perspectives. Intermediate contributions by Ivar Paulson (cf 1971) offered literature-based, phenomenologically oriented overviews, while Uku Masing (1995) produced a printbased synthetic account.

In contrast, the complex process of shaping Belarusian mythology, discussed in Anastassiia Gulak's article in this volume, culminated in the publication of a mythology encyclopaedia (San'ko & Valodzina *et al.* 2004).

One of the chapters in this volume examines the aetiologies of the first humans. Aetiological narratives are closely linked to religious folklore and weave together several important features.

They represent both written and oral traditions, including stories inspired by passages of sacred texts. Like mythological narratives, they address the dualistic or singular creation of the world, various beings, and humankind. Aetiological motifs occur in local and regional cultures in the form of narratives as well as in verse and song. The formal characteristics of tales and songs indicate different periods of creation, yet they consistently reflect the particularities of the local natural environment, featuring local animals characteristic of specific regions.

From a folkloristic perspective, these narratives belong to several genres: primarily fairy tales and legends, dispersed across various story types throughout the international index. Creation stories recount the origins of beings, or phenomena and frequently incorporate humour or coarse comedy.

The international project on the aetiological motifs and themes of European folklore, initiated by G. Kabakova at the Sorbonne in Paris, brought together researchers from nine countries (France, Spain, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria) (see Belova & Kabakova 2014). The project resulted in a collective publication as well as independent volumes and indices of ethnic motifs authored by participating scholars. Among these, we can mention the collection edited by Belova and Kabakova (Belova & Kabakova 2014, Belova 2004), and the contributions of Albena Georgieva, Florentina Badalanova Keller, Ilona Nagy, Elena Boganeva and Magdalena Zovchak, among others.

Work on national mythologies has inevitably led to the study of aetiologies as one of the expressions of cosmovision. For example, the cosmovisions and aetiologies of the small Livonian community were analysed by Oskar Loorits in 1926–1927. A significant contribution was made by the Lithuanian scholar Norbertas Vėlius, whose collections (1974) appeared both in Lithuanian and in English translation. Komi aetiological narratives have been published partly in Russian, but also in an excellent Komi-language edition

(Limerov 2005, 2012). In many traditions, aetiological materials have been copied into card catalogues and preliminarily organised.

The articles in this volume examine mythical characters, aetiologies, mythological perceptions of illness and healing, and the formation of mythological systems in great detail.

Katre Kikas examines an unusual media debate that unfolded in Estonia in 1890 around a folktale titled *Majaussi kasvandikud* (The Boys Brought up by the House Snake). The discussion began when schoolteacher Mihkel Kampmann published the tale in the newspaper *Sakala* and suggested that the names of its three protagonists – Rahurikkuja, Siniuss and Truuvaar – resembled those of the legendary founders of the Russian state (Rurik, Sineus, Truvor) mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*. This resemblance triggered a lively exchange in several Estonian and Russianlanguage newspapers about whether the folktale might preserve historical information relevant to imperial origins. The debate illustrates how folklore, identity politics, and imperial ideology intersected.

Anastassia Gulak provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Belarusian mythology studies from the mid 19th to early 20th century, tracing the methodological shifts, key personalities and academic contexts that shaped the field. Hulak identifies three major phases – romantic mythologisation, empirical documentation, and positivist systematisation – and emphasises how Belarusian scholarship evolved in dialogue with broader European intellectual trends.

Elena Boganeva and Mare Kõiva examine Estonian and Belarusian aetiological narratives about the first people (Adam and Eve) and demonstrate that the two traditions share a striking number of common motifs. The article outlines the perception of aetiological stories among tradition bearers, the most prominent shared motifs and three major structural parts commonly merged into a single folk macronarrative: 1) the creation of the first people; 2) the fall and transformation of the world; and 3) life after expulsion from

paradise. Although these narratives paraphrase Genesis, they expand biblical episodes with local detail, humour, concrete explanations, and naturalistic imagery not found in the canonical text.

Nikolay Antropov, Timofey Avilin and Alena Boganeva examine the multi-layered and highly polymorphic portrayal of mermaids (*rusalka*) in Belarusian folklore, focusing primarily on their appearance and the strategies used to conceptualise them. Mermaids are depicted in highly diverse ways: as anthropomorphic beings, often longhaired, naked, and with disproportionately large breasts; b) as zoomorphic creatures, including beings with fish tails, wings, bird heads, as well as monkey, cat, rat or snakelike forms; and c) infernal figures with iron breasts, hands, claws, or even an entirely iron body, emphasising their connection to the otherworld or to folk notions of the undead.

Mare Kõiva provides a comprehensive overview of Moonrelated mythology and folklore among BalticFinnic, Baltic and Slavic peoples. Drawing primarily on linguistic, folkloric, and mythological corpora, her article examines conceptions of the Moon's origin, its role as a living or inhabited entity, and interpretations of Moon spots. The article compares numerous cosmogonic myths, including creation from a cosmic egg, astral marriage songs, and mythic genealogies linking the Sun, Moon and stars. It highlights both IndoEuropean and FinnoUgric parallels, showing how communities integrated Christian figures, local deities, and natural phenomena into their cosmologies.

Reet Hiiemäe explores Estonian plague lore as a cultural formation shaped by Estonia's position between Western and Eastern European traditions. The study shows how mythological concepts, religious interpretations, and early medical theories – especially the influential miasma theory – interacted to shape local understandings of plague. In Estonian and broader BalticFinnic folklore, plague commonly appears as a mythical disease spirit,

a humanlike figure, animal (notably the plague goat), or moving object reflecting Western European patterns.

Tatjana Valodzina examines Belarusian ethnomedical rituals through the theoretical lens of rites of passage, emphasising illness as a liminal state in which a person's biological condition no longer aligns with their social status. Ritual healing therefore aims to restore harmony between the human body, community and cosmos. Many treatments imitate ritual death, using symbolic burial, isolation, silence or contact with items linked to the underworld (fur coats, straw, thresholds, grave sand). These acts temporarily strip the sufferer of their social markers and situate them at the border between worlds, enabling symbolic regeneration. The postliminal stage focuses on rebirth and spatial movement crossing thresholds, bridges, crossroads, or being carried along roads, encoding the journey between worlds.

Pavel Limerov examines the religious manuscript tradition of the Upper Vychegda region and the mystical Komi sect known as the Burs'ylys'ians or Singers of the Good News, active from the late 19th century into the Soviet period. Founded by Stefan Ermolin, a charismatic peasant preacher, the movement combined elements of Orthodox piety with Russian mystical sectarian practices such as ecstatic prayer, visions, and prophetic trance. Ermolin's success stemmed partly from his preaching in the Komi language at a time when many Orthodox priests no longer spoke it. Central to the sect were *burkyvzöm* (good listening) gatherings, daylong spiritual meetings that included prayer, biblical interpretation and singing. Ecstatic states, visions, and later the ritual of 'dying and resurrection' became important features. Women played a prominent role, especially as prophetesses after Ermolin's death. The article presents and analyses the *Söbiraitchöm rad* (Soborny Chin) manuscript, a liturgical text probably authored or shaped by Ermolin. Written in the Upper Vychegda Komi dialect, it outlines core theological principles: receiving direct knowledge from

God, inner mystical sight, spiritual hearing, and the centrality of the cross. Its 37 songs describe the believer's path from earthly conversation to direct communion with God.

We hope that the studies of Estonian and Belarusian vernacular religion presented here will be both engaging to read and a source of new knowledge, and that our respective approaches will offer fresh perspectives.

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We express our warmest thanks to our readers.

On behalf of the authors, Mare Kõiva

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The First People in Belarusian and Estonian (Baltic-Finnic) Tradition

Elena Boganeva, Mare Kõiva

Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of Estonian and Belarusian aetiological narratives concerning the creation, fall, and early life of the first humans. Both traditions frame Adam and Eve narratives as folk reinterpretations of Genesis, enriched with humorous, explanatory, and moralising elements. Central shared motifs include dualistic creation, in which the Devil defiles the newly formed human; the widespread tale of the woman created from a dog's tail; explanations of bodily traits such as the "fingernail body" before the fall; and the division of the serpent into the snake and eel (or loach in Belarus). These narratives function simultaneously as playful tales and as accounts of ancient truth for tradition bearers.

The article demonstrates how biblical material, apocrypha, and local worldview merge into cohesive macro narratives. Comparative study of these motifs highlights both universal narrative patterns and region specific innovations, and invites further research into deeper historical and cultural connections between Baltic Finnic and East Slavic traditions.

Keywords: aetiology, legend, creation of humans

Information about aetiological collections in Estonia and Belarus

In comparison to fairy tales, aetiological legends are a poorly studied corpora of texts. Oral aetiologies in Estonia and Belarus began to be recorded at the end of the 19th century, which is quite late. The aetiology is usually embodied in the form of legend or fairy tale, as well as in the form of local legends, with texts reflecting the local landscape, natural and cultural objects. The register of ethology narratives covers a wide stylistic range, from serious narratives to humorous origin stories (UIM 2014: 9–10; Loorits 1928; Etioloogiad 2026). The retelling of Bible stories or similar texts were not favoured by collectors: one hundred years ago scholars emphasised that oral stories held far greater value, and it was supposed that biblical stories were written down from the Bible or other books. The best period for collecting stories was certainly 1905–1939, as many people lived in rural areas and the network of local correspondents was dense.

The topic of the first people was discussed by Oskar Loorits during the 1926–1928 period, and also in 1999, following the author's death, when a book about the religion of the Livonian people was published. Loorits had a monumental approach to Estonian folk belief, including some of the motifs relating to the first people (published during the 1949–1952 period).

In Estonia, the topic of the first people was considered by Oskar Loorits in volumes I–III (1926–1928) and IV–V (1999) of *Folk Belief of the Livs* (Loorits 1926: 126; 1928: 181; 1999: 144, 146, 151–152), he examined Estonian motifs in his *Grundzüge des estnischen Volkglaube* (*The Main Features of Estonian Folk Religion*) (1949– 1951). The main motifs are listed in the *Catalogue of Fairy Tales and Legends of Estonia*, by Antti Aarne (Aarne 1918: 139–153, AaS 10–26[2]).

In the Estonian Literary Museum's Estonian Folklore Archives, in the handwritten card files on aetiology, there are more than 2,400 texts – just a fraction of the materials collected from the manuscripts of different years. The overwhelming majority of these texts have not been published. A total of 227 Estonian texts, used in the current article, were found in the Skriptoorium[3]. The majority of the texts are about the creation of humans, and the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and after the fall. In addition to the main story points, the data is also extremely interesting in terms of explanations, arguments and conclusions about male and female life. There are interesting comments in the narratives, although these will have to remain a separate topic of study.

At the turn of the 20th century, a number of regional studies were conducted within the territory of Belarus, as a result of which a fundamental corpora of folklore texts was published, including folk prose containing a substantial proportion of aetiological legends, including Biblical topics (Dobrovol'skiy 1891, Romanov 1891, Romanov 1912, Shein 1874, 1893, Federowski 1897, Serzhputovski 1911, 1930, Pietkiewicz 1938). During the Soviet era – starting in the 1930s in the Eastern Slavic countries and later in the countries of the 'socialist camp' – religious legends (as well as memorates and any kind of genre variety that mentioned religious forces such as mythological fairy tales, miracle stories, mythological stories about God's help or punishment) were on the fringes of research, exactly because of their religious nature.

However, from the end of 20th century and to the present day purposeful field research is being conducted in Belarus, as a result of which a rather extensive corpus of legendary and mythological narratives has been collected.

Modern Belarusian folklore materials, including the legends about the first people, are reflected in such publications as *Legends and Traditions* (Grynblat and Gurski 1983; 2005), *Belarusian Folk Bible in Modern Records* (Boganeva 2010), corresponding articles

dedicated to the oral Bible and aetiological legends in the 10-volume series *Traditional Belarusian Art Culture*[4] (Tradytsyynaya 2004: 719–724, 752–761; 2006 (2): 348–399; 2009 (2): 373–439; 2011 (2): 384–454; 2013 (2): 526–611), *Ethnography from Polotsk* (PEZ 2011 (1): 25–26), Boganeva 2020, etc. The database of the Belarusian ethnolinguistic atlas[5] contains 3,580 legends and mythological narratives, 163 of which are legends about the first people.

The perception of aetiologies by the bearers of tradition: truth and fiction

Rural sources define oral texts on biblical themes and plots descriptively, referring at the same time to the oral tradition and the written source – the Bible and the Law of God. For example, a Belarusian source answers a collector's question about who Adam and Eve were: "According to the Bible, Adam is the priest. And Eve is the mother of Nikolai Wonderworker." (BNB 2010: 32). As modern studies from 1995 to 2019 show, Belarusian bearers of tradition can refer to aetiologies as 'tales', 'parables', 'fairy tales', 'sayings', without giving any precise genre designation to these names. However, even when referring to aetiological legends as 'fairy tales' or 'tales', sources most often believe that they are describing true events that took place an indeterminately long time ago. For example, at the beginning of the story of a rare aetiological story describing the causes of gender differences, the source immediately states: "That, baby, is true. It's true. That's how the light started, kid, it's true. It's not a fairy tale, no. It's true, honey, that's the way it is."[6] (TMKB 2011: 389–390). And this despite the aetiology of the difference between the genders almost always having a humorous tone. In other words, aetiological legends in the modern perception have a dual status: on the one hand, they

are not quite serious, i.e. they are axiologically 'lower' compared, for example, to the Scriptures (although in their verbal existence they are often mixed with one another); on the other hand, these texts, sanctified by tradition, explain the phenomena of the world in an edifying way, and are thereby essential for storytellers.

Estonian aetiologies were recorded en masse from the end of the 19th century to the 1940s, existing today mainly in archival folklore collections. As a rule, archival records do not reflect the narrator's attitude towards the truth of the story. If the aetiology sounds humorous, it is still primarily characterised as explanatory, as seen in recordings of the same stories from different narrators in different regions in Estonia[7].

Some of the most common motifs in the Estonian and Belarusian traditions

The first people plot, including their fall and the consequences of the fall, is one of the most popular, and, probably, most diverse plots aetiologically in the Estonian and Belarusian oral Bibles. In plots associated with the names Adam and Eve, many European (and Jewish) traditions have three chronological parts following one after the other, differing significantly from the biblical original:

1) stories about the creation of the first people;

2) stories about the fall and change of both the nature of the first people and the world;

3) stories about the subsequent life of Adam and Eve after their exile from paradise (Kaspina 2001). In each text, these sections can follow each other, forming a single narrative, meaning that they can exist either in parallel with or independently of each other.

Due to the limited scope of this report, we will consider only some characteristic Estonian and Belarusian texts that belong to these three sections and focus on parallels from our traditions.[8]

In Estonian and Belarusian traditions, texts associated with the names of the first people – Adam and Eve – are often retellings of biblical stories (Gen 1–3) and combine all three first people plot sections. However, these retellings are embedded in purely folk settings. There are also dualistic motifs in Estonian and Belarusian legends about the creation of people in which the Devil takes part in creation. The content of these texts is far from the Bible, although they are relevant because texts with dualistic motifs of this type are widely spread around the world (cf. StTh-MIFL A2; Berezkin B 01; ATU 773)[9]

Dualistic creation

Let us consider the following Estonian text from the Pechora area as an example.

Ku' Jummal inemise tekk valmist ar', syss tä pand tuu sauõtsõ kujo kuioma. Esi läts hinge perrä. Pand huss mano vahi pääle. Halv tiiäi midä hussilõ lubasi, nigu huss lask ar mano. Sülel' inemise ar' nigu ei teeägi. Tull Jummal mano, pühk, pühk, õks jõua-as kyikõ ar' pühki. Kandlitsoppõ jäi veel tuud sülge. Muido mi olnu ka' nii puhta nigu elläi. Olnu-us kuurõivit es midägi. ERA II 194, 475 (11) < Setumaa, Petseri v., Risjova k. – Ello Kirss < Tat'o Kallaste, b. 1875 (1938)

When God created man, He set his clay figure to dry, and started creating his soul, placing the snake to guard him. And the Devil – who knows what he promised the snake? (And the snake] let the Devil get close to man. Then the Devil spat on man. God came and began to wipe the man. He wiped, wiped, but at the corner of the buttocks there was still saliva. If it weren't for Satan, we'd be as pure as the beasts. There wouldn't be a period of menstruation or something like that.

Alternatively, it is the dog that allows the Devil to enter paradise and Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

Belarusians have similar legends in the records of the late 19th century. God creates man, goes away and places the dog as a guard. The dog, in its original form, was without fur and very afraid of the cold. The Devil blows cold air onto the dog, promising to give her a fur coat in exchange for free passage to the man. The dog lets the Devil in, and he spits on the man. When God return, the Devil advises Him to turn the man inside out, so that all of the impurities, and with them the diseases, remain inside. God does so (Dobrovol'ski 1891: 230–231)[10].

In today's world, this legend does not exist among Belarusians, as in general, legends with dualistic motifs are extremely rare today.

Similar motifs (the Devil spits on man, with the spitting the Devil creates diseases, God turns man inside out) in the aetiology of the creation of man are also found among Russians (UIM 2014: 228; VESiL 2019: 15–16), Ukrainians (Bulashev 1992: 91–92, 104; Dragomanov 1876: 1), and Bulgarians (Badalanova 2017: 338– 341).

Such motifs are found in the *Slavic Apocrypha* 'How God created Adam' (Pypin 1862: 12–13)[11]. Only in the specified apocrypha does the Devil not spit on man, instead poking at him with a stick from afar, because the dog does not let the Devil near the man.

Texts about the names of the first people and the re-creation of people

Livonians have an original dualistic legend about the creation of man, collected by Oskar Loorits and published in Estonian in 1926.

> Once, God decided to create a man and a woman. 'Let there be Adam and let there be Eve!' – and He went away, leaving them alone.

> The Devil was standing in the bushes, watching and listening to what God said. He heard the word 'Darme', instead of 'Adam'. And as God left, the Devil immediately came out and said to the pieces of clay, of which the people were made, 'Let there be a gendarme and let there be Eve!'
>
> As soon as he said it, God came out of the bushes and ran to the Devil. The Devil, having noticed Him, grabbed the people and started running as fast as only he could. He managed to hide underground with both, the gendarme and Eve. He was about to hide, but God managed to grab Eve's head. The pile of clay that was Eve's head remained in His hands.
>
> And then God quickly made a new man and a new woman out of this piece of clay. Since there was a paucity of material, He was unable to make the people as tall as He wanted.
>
> God did not have enough clay, so He created people as tall as possible with the clay He had. This is the reason why we are shorter than the very first people. If only the Devil had not stolen them! There was a lack of material, thus God created hair on the head and between the legs on both man and woman. And so we are. (--] (Loorits 1926: 147; Loorits 1926a: US 16 + 25)

The text features a humorous and even somewhat satirical character, relating in particular to naming: the Devil did not hear what God had called people and, running away with His creations, called them gendarme and Eve. Moreover, he manages to hide the gendarme under the ground, and from part of Eve's head God makes another pair of people. In other words, in the text there is also a comic description of the origin of the (police rank) gendarme, who is not a descendant of the first human pair[12].

The folk etymology of the names Adam and Eve is also humorously used in a Russian legend: the newly created man points to Eve and exclaims "Eve!" in surprise. And Eve winks at him and promises: 'Oh, I'll give it to you!' (*А, дам!»*] God punishes them by calling them these names (UIM 2014: 242–243)[13].

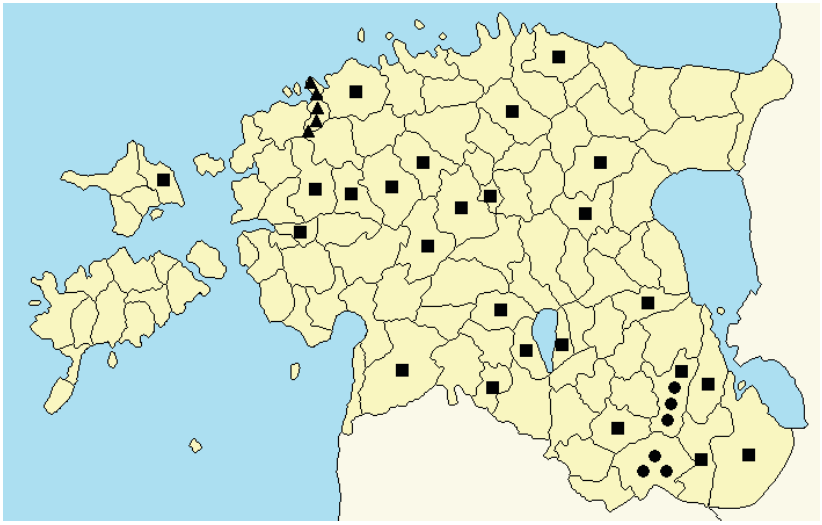
These motifs have parallels not in Slavic, but in Jewish traditions. In Jewish rabbinical sources one can find the fact that Eve was created several times. Midrash Bereshith Rabba points out Adam's strange biblical comment, as he sees his wife: "And Adam said, this now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). This verse is commented on as follows: "For the first time, Adam saw all the details of creation: blood and discharge – and then God removed everything and created it again" (Bereshith Rabba 18: 4).

The woman from the tail

In Estonian and Belarusian folklore there are versions of the creation of a woman from a dog's tail (the same applies to Adam, to the monkey and to the Devil) (ATU 798).

> When God wanted to create a woman, He took Adam's bone. Cut out a piece with a large knife. Went a little further away. The dog came and stole the bone. God started chasing the dog, but the dog ran away. God had no way to catch the dog. Finally, He caught the dog's tail and cut it off with a knife. And so, the woman is made from that. The dog continued on with the bone. (ERA II 1, 382 (75) < Tartu l. – Paul Ariste < Oskar Gnaderteich. (1927)

This version of the creation of woman is very popular in Estonia (see Map 1)



Map 1. Eve created from a dog's tail motif.

In Estonian, different variants of these events are followed by all kinds of aetiology. The woman, with her qualities, is a different type of creature; women listen to men only partly and often argue; women are show-offs and coquettes (they play with men like a dog chasing its tail); women, like dogs, have a lot of fleas; women, like dogs, move quickly and strive to bite, etc.

In a Belarusian legend recorded in Daugavpils County in Latvia (this version is closest to the Estonian version), God removes a rib from Adam, sets it to dry, and the dog grabs it and runs away.

> *Хоць і не такая выйдзе як трэба, усё ж на бабу будзе пахожа, бо тут ёсьць і костка, і мяса, і шэрсьць». Завершает рассказчик историю следующей сентенцией: «Ну ўгледзісь, з чаго баба, калі ні з хваста!*

> The angels chase the dog, until finally a younger angel grabbed the dog by the tip of the tail, tore it off, brought it to God and said: 'Although it will not turn out as it should,

after all, it will look like a woman, because there are bones, meat, and fur.' The narrator ends the story with the following sentence: 'See what the woman is made of – a dog's tail!' (Latvia, archives of S. Sakharov. Latviešu folkloras krātuve (LFK).

Ill. 1. Adam and Eve. Found in the ruins of Maasi stronghold (Maasilinn). Currently in the Museum of Saaremaa, Kuressaare Castle. Photo by Mare Kõiva 2018.

In Western Belarus, at the end of the 19th century, the following version of the legend was recorded:

Бог як створыў Адама, то створыў его з хвастом; посля Бог апамятаўся, што кепско гэтак, каб усе — і жывіна, і людзі — былі з хвастамі, так навярнуў на Адама сон і адрэзаў ему хвост, і палажыў кала его, і зрабіласе з таго

хваста жонка Ева. То кабеты паходзяць з мужчынскага хваста.

God, when He created Adam, created him with a tail. After God came to His senses, it was not good that everyone – animals and people – would have tails, so He gave Adam a dream and cut off his tail, and put a woman, Eve, near him, to make a woman from that tail. Women come from the male tail (Federowski 1897: 201).

There is also a Belarusian version that says when Eve grew out of Adam's tail, they were joined by the tail for a while, until the Devil seduced Eve[14]. There are also parallels with Jewish tradition here. In the Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, the creation of woman is described as separating her from Adam's back (i.e., originally man was an androgynous being). "While Adam was sleeping, Ashem detached the female body attached to Adam from the rear, and replaced the part thus taken with flesh." This interpretation is derived from the verse (Tehilim 139:4) *Ahor wakedem tsartani*, 'Front and rear' (i.e., a double being) 'You created me' (*Rashi, Ketubot*) (Bereshit Rabbah). It should be noted that in the Talmud, the word meaning 'rib' is also used for 'tail', from which such a variant could occur (Kaspina 2001).

This plot was repeatedly recorded by all Eastern Slavs (see VESiL 2019: 415–418). Publications of this story are available in Finland, France, Portugal, Germany, as well as in Latin America (ATU 798).

Retellings of the Bible in macro stories

Often in Estonian and Belarusian traditions, texts associated with the names of the first people, Adam and Eve, paraphrase biblical texts (Gen. 1–3). In some cases, this is a retelling, a copy that

conveys the main content of the biblical fragment. However, the biblical original is generally too concise and needs detail, clarification, explanation, etc.[15]

Let's have a look at the following Estonian text as an example, which combines all 3 parts of the macro story about the first people: their creation, the fall, and life after the fall.

> God has created Adam first (and let him go to heaven]. Adam was walking alone in the garden and was lonely. Then God put him to sleep, and from the left side took a rib, cut out a small piece of it and created Eve. And God allowed them to eat of every tree in the garden except for one. Adam and Eve did not need clothes, because their bodies were like fingernails.
>
> Our fingernails are the memory of those first people. Nobody could enter Heaven. Adam and Eve lived there, but no one from the outside could enter. Then the Devil persuaded the serpent to carry him in its mouth into the garden. The Devil began to speak (with Adam and Eve] from the serpent's mouth: 'What are you all afraid of? God was jealous of you and he did not allow you to eat. If you eat the fruits of this tree, you will be the same as God'. Eve hurried to try the fruit and gave some to Adam.
>
> From that moment on, they became naked, they were ashamed, and they began to hide in the bushes. And they began to make themselves an apron of leaves to cover their shame.
>
> When God came, He said, 'Adam, Adam, where are you?' But Adam did not dare to respond. God called him one more time and Adam replied, 'I can't come out!' God asked 'Why did you break the rule?' Adam replied: 'Why did you give me such companions?'

God asked Eve: 'Why did you take it?' Eve replied: 'The serpent gave it to me, and I took it!'

Then God took the serpent and divided it into 2 parts. One part was thrown into the sea, and the other, with the head, left on the ground. And He said to the people, 'Get out of the garden!'

And He told Adam that he would have free time, but not the woman. And He said to the woman: 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe and when you see a snake, you must smash its head!'

After that, God led the people out of paradise and set an angel with a burning sword at the gates of paradise. And there it still stands. ERA II 163, 82/4 (19) < Setumaa, Järvesuu – Nikolai Ress < Aleksei Mägioja, 62 yrs, 1937)

In this text, we can distinguish the following plot complex, which organically combines both biblical (referred to here by book, chapter and verse of the Bible) and non-biblical motifs. The latter are considered in relation to the Belarusian (and more broadly Slavic) folklore Bibles.

1. God creates Eve from Adam's rib (Gen 1:15–25);

2. The first people had a nail-like body before the fall (folk motif);

3. Satan asks the serpent to take him in its mouth, to carry him to the garden of Eden (folk motif);

4. Satan tempts Eve, Eve tempts Adam (Gen. 3:1–6);

5. People become ashamed of their nakedness and cover their bodies with leaves (Gen. 3:7);

6. God divides the serpent into 2 parts, one remains on the ground (the snake), the other is thrown into the sea (the eel) (folk motif);

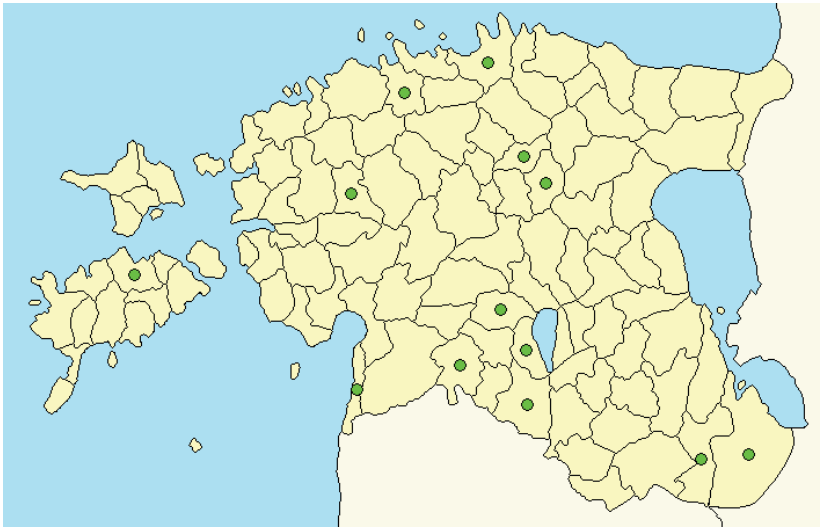
This motif is also traditional to the Belarusian folk Bible, as in the 19th century it was recorded in the eastern (Dobrovol'ski 1891: 236) and western parts of Belarus (Federowski 1897: 201). The motif of fingernail-like bodies also occurs in Ukrainian, northern Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, aetiologies (Bulashev 1992: 103; Belova 2004: 239–241; Zowczak 2013: 97; Badalanova 2017: 369– 371), as well as in Jewish sources (Kaspina 2000: 125–126). The Polish legends state that the fingernail-like body is even and firm (similar to the way people were moulded from clay at the beginning of creation) and had hidden inside the sexual differences of men and women (Zowczak 2013: 97). After the fall, the fingernail body fell off, and underneath there was a 'sinful body', i.e. the gender differences were apparent. Many Belarusian texts emphasise the existence and presence of a 'sinful body' – 'saromastsy' – just after the fall. A parallel view is found in Jewish Talmudic tradition, where, on the one hand, there was an idea that the original man, Adam, was an androgyne (Piotrovskiy 1991: 41–43), while on the other hand the first people were asexual (Tokarev 1991: 359).

The motif of the fingernail body of the first people is connected to the belief that you cannot throw nail clippings around: after death, with their help, you will need to climb a high mountain to God in Paradise or you will need them at the Last Judgment. This belief is found both in Belarus and Estonia, but is also widespread among different nations such as Jews, Slavs, Balts, and Scandinavians (Bulashev 1992: 103; Levkiyevskaya 2004: 427; Volodina 2018: 181–206).

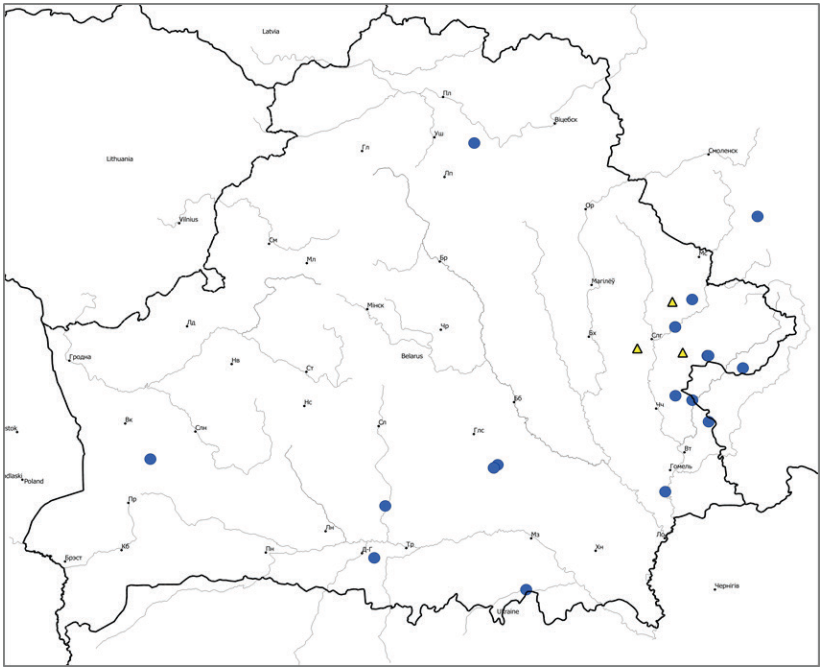
The motif of the fingernail body in Belarus is popular in the upper and lower Dnieper and eastern Polesye areas, as well as separately in Ponemanye and Dvina. In the 19th century there was a belief in western Belarus that when a man scattered his nails during his lifetime, his soul would not enter heaven or hell after death, but would remain on earth in the form of a stork as pun-

ishment, until he had collects the discarded nails, and only when everything is together will he become human and go to heaven.

Who throws off the cut-off nails, its soul does not go to heaven or hell after death, but walks, God willingly, like a stork until it has gathered all the cut nails. (Federowski 1897: 221). Once the stork has gathered all the nails, it will be converted back into a human being, and will be taken to heaven because his punishment is over. (Federowski 1897: 185).



Map 2. The fingernail body of the first people (Estonia).



Map 3. The fingernail body of the first people (Belorus).
- the fingernail body of the first people
- belief, that you cannot throw cut nails around, as they are needed to climb the mountain after death

Motifs of the snake, eel and weather loach

The Estonian motif where 'Satan asks the serpent to take it in his mouth, so that he would carry it to the Garden of Eden' is original and has no analogues in Slavic traditions. This motif is a detailed figurative illustration of the universal idea in which the serpent-tempter is identified with Satan.

The motif of dividing the serpent into two parts, one of which remains on the ground (the snake), the other left to float away

into the sea and become an eel, is found in Estonian aetiologies in a variety of ways, when God / Jesus / Moses dissect the serpent for various reasons.

In some Estonian aetiologies the snake and eel appear from two pieces of rope: one piece is animated by the Devil, it becomes a snake and bites it, the other part is revived by God, it becomes an eel and does no harm to the Creator, even when He takes the creature in hand (ERA II 162, 9/11 (1) < Latvia, Ludza – P. Voolaine, 1935).

In the Lithuanian legend the eel uses its own body to plug a hole in a boat on which Christ sailed, since that time people can eat eel, although it looks like a snake (UIM 2014: 148–149).

The eel is a rare fish for Belarus, so Belarusians have no legends about the eel, but there are legends about the loach – a freshwater fish that looks like a snake (and an eel in miniature). Belarusians have two versions of the origin of the loach: 1) the nail that the Gypsy stole at the crucifixion of Christ and threw into the river becomes a loach (BNB: 119–120); 2) when Christ was crucified, they gave him grass snakes to eat. Christ made these snakes into fish loaches, and said that now they can be eaten by people:

> *'I am the only one who heard* (the stories] *from the loach. I heard what our people were saying. Even my mother, when they brought our fish, and the loach was in the catch: 'It's a snake!' The loach is a snake. When He* (Christ] *was crucified and tortured in every way, Christ was given a snake, given snakes as food. There were people near Him – His people. And He said, said unto them: 'Go, eat; fear not'. And He gave the snake two ends, one and the other, and it was all. It doesn't have such a fish tail, but it's a real snake.*
>
> *'Eat, fear not. He who eats believes in me.'*

> *That's what I heard. And He said: 'Just cut the head off because the head bites. Cut off the head and eat the rest, don't be afraid.' That's what I heard about a loach or a snake.*[16]

The second version of the origin legend of the loach is similar to the Estonian aetiology of the eel: the loach, just like the eel, appears from the (grass) snake and remains similar to its ancestor.

A woman has no free time

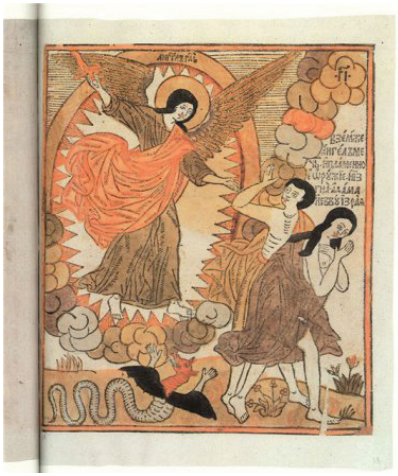
A woman has no free time, because she sinned first. The motif is equally common in the Estonian and Belarusian traditions. However, Belarusians are more likely to have an aetiology associated not with the first people, but with a wandering God. When God walked the earth, he asked a woman to show him the way, but the woman was working and did not even straighten up, she showed which way to go with her foot. The man left his job and led God in the right direction, since then women always have work. Numerous versions of this story are published in the Belarusian book series *Traditional Artistic Culture of Belarusians* (Tradytsyynaya 2006 (2): 370–372; 2009 (2): 434–435; 2011 (2): 445–447; 2013 (2): 605–607).

In Estonia, this motif is not popular. Instead, there are various other motifs. For example, the woman shows Jesus/God the way with her foot, and He says: "Men should always have time to lead me across the river. But women should not have time to show me the way with a foot. In the second version Jesus and Peter have asked the man to show the way. Man shows them the way with a foot. A woman, working busily, is ready to teach them, showing how Jesus assigns a good woman to a lazy man.

A woman answered God's greetings arrogantly, so God assigns her everlasting work. A woman does not deny her useful inventions but says that she did it all by herself. A man denies his work

and says that God has taught him. The moral is that the woman's work is not profitable because she said that she had done everything herself while the man's work is profitable because he said that God has taught him. A woman does not open a gate for Jesus in Jerusalem and so has everlasting work. (Cf. with the motif of the woman asking for work on Sundays and receiving it in full).

Ill. 2. Adam gives the apple to Eve. Altar from Kaarma church (13th century. Currently in the Museum of Saaremaa, Kuressaare Castle. Photo by Mare Kõiva 2018).



Ill. 3. In the 17th century Vasily Koren, a native of the Belarusian town of Dubrovno, carved the Book of Genesis and the Apocalypse on lime boards. Vasil's Bible was important for the common people, who could not read or write.

The death of the first people

The Seto people have a text about Adam's death that has been influenced by a book source.

> When Adam lived with Eve, and they were already old, then the Father (God) told the family that if your old man (Adam] dies, tell me about it. He died and they went to God and told him – somehow they could do it. He gave them 3 heavenly grains, and said that when they bury Adam, they need to sow the grains at the grave. A beautiful tree with three branches grew on the grave. And from this tree a cross was made for Jesus.
>
> Since the tree was very beautiful, one king ordered that a bench be made out of this tree for the church, and left it

ready to sanctify it in the morning. An old woman had a dream in which she saw that she needed to go and sit on this bench, 'And you will be more blessed than the king', the old woman heard in her dream. And she did it.

The king saw from the window that the old woman was sitting on the bench in the morning. Then he (got angry] and rejected the bench and threw it out of the church. But the people began to come to the bench to recover from diseases. Then the king threw the bench into the forest. But the people went there. Later they made a cross from it for Jesus. If the king had not thrown the bench, Jesus would not have had a cross. ERA II 194, 479/80 (16) < Setu, Petseri v., Risjova k. - Ello Kirss < Tat'o Kallaste, s. 1875 (1938).

This text is obviously influenced by the 'Tale of the Tree of the Cross' in the Apocrypha, which was attributed to St. Gregory the Theologian and is known in the Serbian, Bulgarian and Russian lists (cf. Federova 2012: 89–107).

Belarusians and Poles, in their collections of legends about King Solomon, have narratives about Sibyl (Sébilia), the prophetess who refused to walk on the wooden bridge across a river or stream, saying that the cross of Christ would be made out of this wood (Boganeva 2015: 57–64). In Belarus, this plot is rare, whereas in Poland it is widespread (Zowczak 2013: 201).

In the Estonian text there is an original image of the bench, which corresponds to the image of the wooden bridge across the river, and a nameless king who is the equivalent of King Solomon, who usually appears in the legends of Sybil the Prophetess (Sébilia).

Conclusion

We have reviewed only some of the Estonian and Belarussian texts about the first people, revealing a number of common motifs and identifying some local features. This can be partly explained by the universal, transcultural influence of biblical literature. Based on the examples of common aetiological motifs of Estonians and Belarusians, such as 'why women always work' and 'why children do not walk from birth', the mechanism of adaptation of folklore-based aetiological subjects to biblical themes is clearly visible.

We demonstrated the verbal side of the legends outlining basic types and principles such as variation, intertextuality and the influence of apocrypha. We excluded non-verbal legends, i.e. the influence of art and architecture, the role of the imagination, and the pragmatics of legends (cf. humour and entertainment). Certain aetiologies can move relatively freely in the space of the biblical storyline and form new compounds without violating the internal logic of one or other aetiology that did not result from a new folk biblical history.

Links between Belarusian and Estonian folklore have so far received very little study. Further research will not only establish common and special motifs in the mythology and folklore of Estonia and Belarusia, but also perhaps consider in greater detail the non-verbal side of legends, or even the hypothesis that there are Baltic and Finno-Ugric substrates in the ethnogenesis of the Belarusians.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] An exception is O Belova's article, in which she compares Slavic and Finno-Ugric legends, generally using material from the Komi people as examples of Finno-Ugric legend (Belova 2007: 229–241). In addition, there are a number of books and articles on the myths and legends of the Komi people in Russian (Limerov 2005; 2012; Sharapov 1996: 310–320; Smirnova and Chuv'jurov 2002: 14–16; Kuznetsov 2018: 169–180, etc.).

[2] AaS marks the legend type in the register of Estonian legends in Antti Aarne's register.

[3] Part of the digital archives and a working tool of the Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum.

[4] The author of these sections of the series is E. Boganeva.

[5] The database belongs to the Center for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature of the National Assembly of Belarus, the J. Kolas and J. Kupala Institute of Linguistics, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Department of Ethnolinguistics and Folklore.

[6] Written by E. Boganeva and T. Varfolomejeva in 2007 from Larisa Guleitsik, b. 1939, Kamenka village, Uzdenski region, Minsk territory, Belarus.

[7] For instance, in the Estonian archive there are numerous records of legends telling how a woman got a job on Sunday. A woman/spinster asked God for work on a Sunday afternoon. God asked her to pray, and she said that even then there was too much time left. Then God threw a handful of ashes on her head, which became lice — and now women have work on Sundays (H I 4,724 (6) Otepää, 1879; ERA II 54, 224/5 (247) Tartu–Maarja.)

[8] Since almost no Estonian aetiologies about the first people have been published, we will cite some texts translated from Estonian to English, some of the texts will be given in retellings.

[9] Slavic peoples have extensive literature on dualistic legends. For a review of the research on this subject see Kuznetsova 1998; NB 2004: 44–57; Belov and Petrukhin 2009: 312–323; Badalanova 2008: 235–242; Badalanova 2011: 134–136; Badalanova 2017: 23, *et al.*

[10] The version of the legend was recorded by Michal Federowski at the end of the 19th century in Western Belarus (Federowski 1887: 200, No 780).

[11] From Rumyantsev's collection of the 17th century.

[12] Given the intense activity of gendarmes in Russia and other European countries in the 19th century, we can conclude that the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century were still a time of active formation or reformation of folklore biblical aetiologies.

[13] Word play with sexual connotation. This record of the Russian legend was made at the end of the 19th century, in the Cherepovets district of the Novgorod province (now the Vologda region) (UIM 2014: 427). Estonian legends and mythological texts often demonstrate parallels with the legends of the Russian North.

[14] See Serzhputouski 2009: 62.

[15] About biblical retellings see (Boganeva 2010: 4–13; Boganeva 2014: 116–125).

[16] Transcribed by E. Boganeva, N. Petrov and N. Savina in 2014, from Maria Romanenko, b. 1922 in Zhuravel village, (evicted) Tserikov region, Tserikov, Mogilevsk oblast, Belarus.

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Belarusian Mermaids: Appearance and the Pragmatics of the Image

Nikolay Antropov, Timofey Avilin, Elena Boganeva

Abstract: The mermaid is one of the most famous and popular mythological figures in the Belarusian folk tradition. The analysis conducted of Belarusian mythological texts about mermaids and descriptions of their appearance demonstrates the extreme diversity and polymorphism of this image, including the characteristics (from beautiful to scary) and axiological (from evil spirits to saints). Many texts about mermaids describe only their appearance, while saying nothing about their actions. Researches have mapped individual motifs in mythological texts and typical characteristics of habitat, microareals and isodoxes. The maps for the article were prepared using the QGIS geographic information system, which is distributed under the GNU GPLv2 license.

Keywords: mermaid, water spirits, appearance, mythology, Belarus

The mermaid is one of the most famous and popular mythological figures in the Belarusian folk tradition, and, at the same time,

perhaps the most vague and multivalued. Even though the mermaids in Belarusian folklore and mythos are described vividly, the descriptions are so different that they can often be identified only by the mythonomic, mermaid.

In contradistinction to other Alfar, mermaids are undomesticated: they can be found in ponds, forests, fields, meadows, gardens, cemeteries, and in certain circumstances in gardens, baths, and village houses. They can be anthropomorphic (like children, young girls, women with small children, old women), zoomorphic (like creatures in the guise of birds, monkeys, snakes, cats, rats, an indefinite 'animal', etc.), and have a number infernal features, such as iron or other artificial body parts.

In the way of axiological characteristics, the whole range of evaluations is present from evil spirits through to a neutral status to saints. In equal measure they harm and foster the growth of field and garden crops, bring about disease and cure them, tickle to a frazzle, crush, drown, take people with them; but also reward them for their goodness towards their children, warn them of danger, and do housework.

A complete description scheme for mermaids includes: appearance; attributes, clothing, loci of habitat; actuality (actions); origin; temporality (characteristic time of the year/day); acoustic characteristics (what sounds the mermaids make, what they say, sing); the functionality of figure (for whom/for what people talk about mermaids/threaten with mermaids); and other characteristics, in particular what mermaids are afraid of, what they feed on, etc.

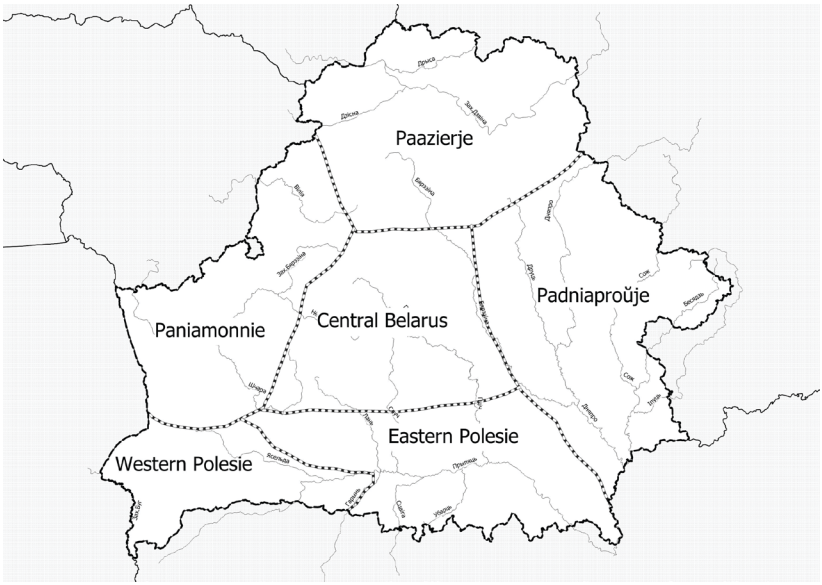
The present article is concerned only with conceptualisations of the appearance of mermaids, their attributes and clothing. Currently, Belarusian folklore studies already contain research on some characteristics of this character, namely, external qualities (Avilin, Antropov & Boganeva 2016: 232–273); acoustic appearance (Boganeva & Avilin 2024: 33–49); origin (Buiko 2025: 248–278). The article analyses the pragmat-

ics of the image. On the working versions of the maps we indicate the distribution of those or other components of the appearance of the demon/demons, which are united by mermaid mythology, in the territory of Belarus. The authors did not set themselves the aim of reconstructing the genesis of the mermaid as a character in order to draw typological and comparative parallels, to show the connection of Russian ritualism and prohibitions against the mythologema of the mermaid, etc., which by all means are significant, but come within the framework of a different study. In the article there is also no special review of literature devoted to mermaids, because this would cause an increase in the page count.

The appearance of mermaids is distinguished by exceptional polymorphism. They can be anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and have infernal features, but in any case they are written out as extremely "material", have visual, acoustic and even in some cases tactile (for example cold) characteristics, which correspond to the general mental strategy of constructing a mythological image. What is more, in the absence of appropriate naming, the appearance of a 'female' character is one of the indications that a character is possibly a mermaid or a character similar to mermaids (in the Belarusian tradition, there are a number of local spirits with other names, but the feature of a mermaid: Galyshka (from *golaya*, meaning naked), Zhalyaznyachka (*zhaleznaya*, meaning iron), Kazytuha ('one who tickles'), Tsytsokha ('one with a large bust'), Nimka (from *nyamaya* meaning dumb), Lesavitsa ('one who lives in the forest'), Vadzyanitsa ('one who lives in water'), Smalyanka ('as black as tar'), Nachnitsa ('one who comes at night'), etc.).

In specific texts about mermaids, the entire complex of visual artefacts, together with the functionality of images, their pragmatics, ambivalent characteristics, and ratings, is intended to emphasise the otherworldly belonging of the images.

The article will repeatedly mention the historical and ethnographic regions of Belarus, which do not coincide with the administrative divisions of the modern country (see map 1).



Map 1. Historical and Ethnographic Regions of Belarus

Data and sources

According to the electronic database of the Belarusian folklore-ethnolinguistic atlas (hereinafter the BFELA), there are 1870 units relating to mermaids and the Sunday before Whitsuntide[1] (each unit includes the following meaningful fields: the text of the record, the motifs in the text, the place of recording (community, district, region), the informant's data (last name, first name, middle name, year and place of birth, education, religion) as well as the collector's data, published sources (texts, studies). The BFELA electronic

database currently contains the largest volume of mythological texts (legends and beliefs) about mermaids from the ethno-cultural space of Belarus; therefore, the authors' priority task was to systematise Belarusian material as a separate case.

Maps for our analysis were prepared in the QGIS geographic information system, which is distributed under the GNU GPLv2 license. Data for the maps is stored in an Access database, where the following can be listed as main tables: the text of the recording, the community in which the recording was made and its geographical coordinates, the conventional classification of the recording (for example, folkloric motif). Most records are in the BFELA database from Belarussian Polesye[2] (Western and Eastern), which is explained by the introduction to the database of the entire body of texts about mermaids from the Polesye archive of the Institute of Slavic Studies (Moscow), for which a survey of settlements on the subject of "demonology" was carried out according to the full ethno-linguistic program Atlas (PELS 1983: 21–49).

Among the sources, archives and publications used for this article are the BFELA handwritten archive; the archive of the department of folklore and culture of the Slavic peoples at the Centre for Studies of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus; the archive at the Vetka Museum of Old Belief and Belarusian Traditions, Polesye Archive of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the RAS (hereinafter referred to as the PA), publications by Pavel Shein (Shein 1887: 185–191), Evdokim Romanov (Romanov 1912: 204), Dmitry Bulgakovskiy (Bulgakovskiy 1890: 189–190), Fedor Klimchuk (Klimčuk 2003: 217–225), Vladimir Sivicki (Sivicki 2006), Alexander Strakhov (Strakhov 2014: 164–188), Lyudmila Vinogradova and Elena Levkiyevskaya (Vinogradova 2000, 141–229; Vinogradova & Levkiyevskaya 2012: 476–698), dictionaries of Belarusian dialects, personal archives of Timofei Avilin, Nikolai Antropov, Elena Boganevay, Tatyana Volodina, Tamara Varfo-

lomeeva, Tatyana Kukharonok, Gennady Lopatin, which are partially published in 2–10 volumes of the series "Traditional Art Culture of Belarusians" (Varfolomeeva 2004: 755; 2006: 364–366; 2009: 428–429; 2011: 438–440; 2013: 601– 603), "Belarusian Folk Bible in Modern Records" (Boganeva 2010: 48–49), "Polotsk ethnographic collection" (Lobach 2011: 59–62), publications with lyrics by Gennady Lopatin in the PALAEOSLAVICA almanac (Lopatin 2007: 275–292). A number of texts are included in the database from publications on Ukrainian Polesye and Bryansk.

For the preparation of the article we used text publications and studies from different periods from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 21st century. However, the set of fundamental study texts falls at the turn of 21st century, specifically the expeditionary materials of Nikolai Antropov and his students, Elena Boganeva, Tatyana Volodina, Tamara Varfolomeeva, Tatyana Kukharonok, Timofey Avilin.

Appearance

Anthropomorphic mermaids

1.1. Gender and age

Most of the records studied testify to the anthropomorphic image of the mermaid, and, in terms of gender, her female appearance. At the same time, there is rare (although not unique) information about male mermaids: "A person who was born on the Sunday before Whitsuntide – either a man or a woman can become a mermaid"[3] (Zamoshye village, Lelchitsky district, Gomel region). In the village of Dyakovichi, Zhitkovichi district of the Gomel region (Central Polesye), a name for male mermaids is even noted, Rusalim: "Like girls – stone breasts, she can crush

a person with them; Rusalim is like an ordinary man." When it comes to mermaid children, then, as a rule, both girls and boys appear. "There are a lot of girls and boys. So, hand in hand, they danced. In the cemeteries they were dancing" (Dubitsa, Brest district, Brest region.).

However, the most common image is the mermaid who has the appearance of a woman. According to the age characteristics, mermaids can look like little girls, young ladies, brides, women and old women.

1.2. Peculiar features

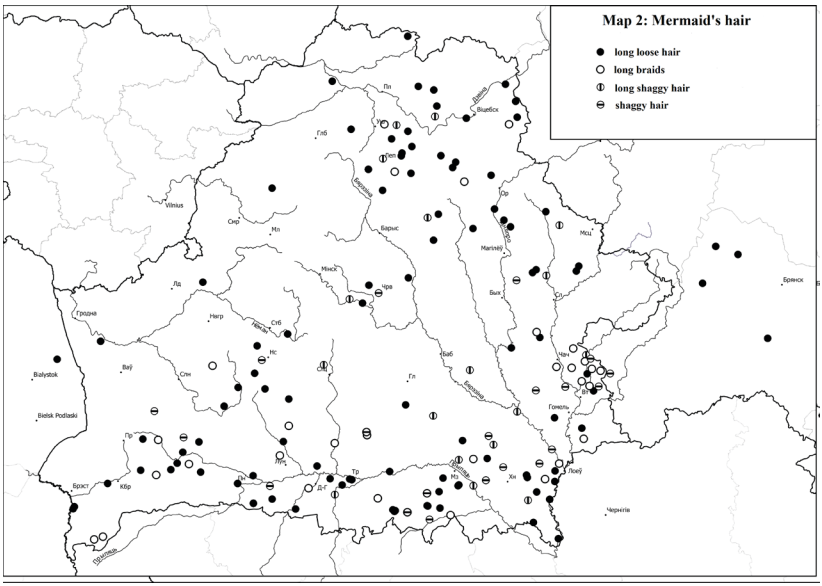
The dominant external features of images of adult mermaids, both young and old, are, firstly, their long hair, secondly, large breasts, and thirdly, nudity, that is, features that emphasise the femininity of the character: "A long time ago, old people said, two mermaids were brought to our village. They had everything feminine, only their busts are very big, it's even frightful, and they have long hair" (urban-type settlement Belynichi, Mogilev region).

1.2.1. Hair

Mermaid hair can be unfastened, tressed, shaggy, etc.: "Mermaid hair is unfastened, it rides on a trolley, on a pushchair…, and the ribbons are behind" (Krivitsa village, Ivanovo district, Brest region); "With a long plaits and naked" (Khotislav village, Maloritsky district, Brest region). For the distribution of texts that refer to mermaids' hair, see map 2.

The mermaids' untressed hair, together with nudity, meant that they belonged to a non-human, demonic world. Mermaids were compared to girls (women) who let their hair down ("she had braids loose like a mermaid"). At the same time, in some

tales about bird mermaids, a motif stands out according to which it is the mermaids who perform the regulatory function when women wear nothing on their heads. “The mermaid is like a big bird, they even cling to the hair of girls who go to pick rye flowers… She flies, sits on you and clings to your hair… That’s why girls should wear a kerchief on (the Sunday before Whitsuntide) as she can cling to their hair… Once she was caught, her claws are large, bent… People say that all the hair will come out if she sits on your head, the hair will not grow on that head.” (Prudniki village, Gorodec district, Vitebsk region). In total, the BFELA database contains 2 texts in which a mermaid-bird sit on women’s bare heads.

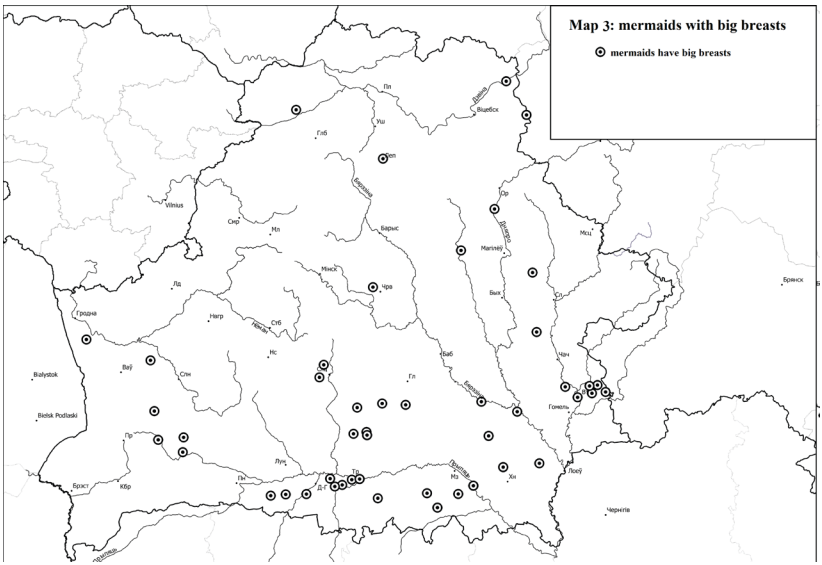


Map 2. Mermaid’s hair

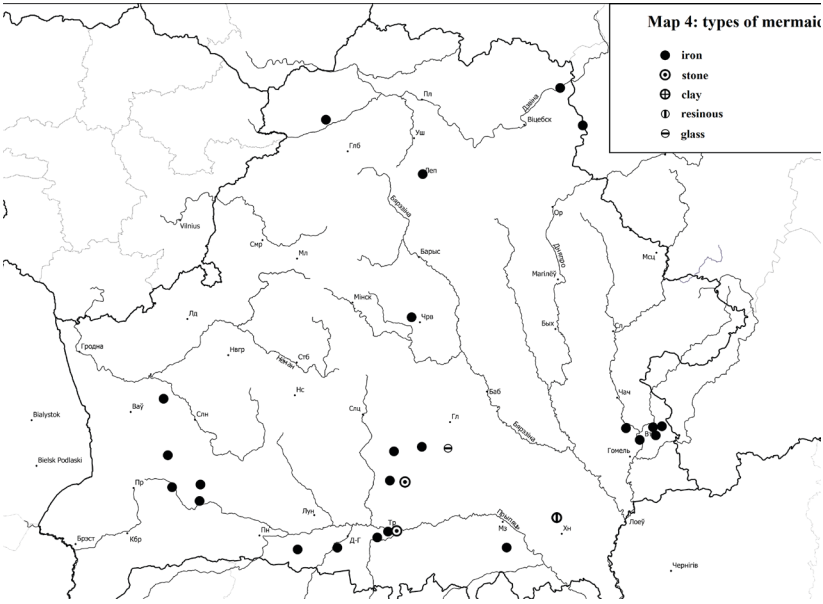
1.2.2. Bust

The mermaid's bust is said to be hypertrophically huge (map 3), in addition to which it can be made of iron, stone, glass, clay or resin, giving a certain infernality to images of mermaids (map 4). "My deceased father saw a mermaid. He saw her himself. My father raised the landowner's horses… And there was a rye field, and the sun at lunch. He went to turn these horses, and she came out. Such a bust, he said, and it seems to him that they were shiny like iron, and the hair was *loose*" (Boyanichi village, Luban district, Minsk region) *"The people frightened the children with the mermaid <...> Don't go there, otherwise the mermaid will jump out, put a glass bust into your mouth*" (Khoromtsy village, Oktyabrsky district, Gomel region). "*When children go to the cemetery, so I say: "Go, go, there the mermaid will strike you with stone bust!"* (Pogost village, Zhitkovichi district, Gomel region)

If the mention of the long hair of the mermaids is a characteristic of the entire territory of Belarus, then informants of mainly East Polesye and the lower Belarusian Podneprovye focus on the big bust of the mermaids[4].



Map 3. Mermaids with big breasts



Map 4. Types of Mermaid breasts

1.2.3. The skin

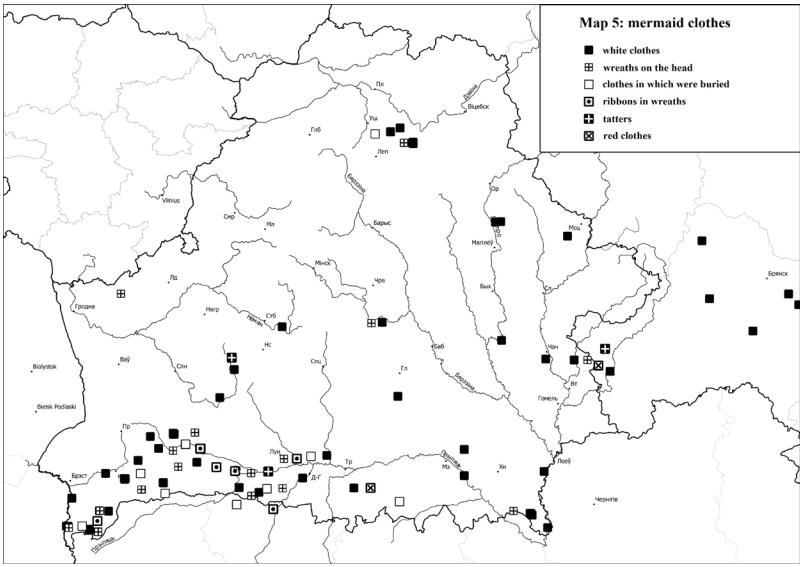
There are instances where the features of mermaids' skin are emphasized. "*Mermaids– the common run of men, only just they have a long hair and their skin is different*" (Kopani village, Chausy district, Mogilev region). Exactly what kind of the mermaids had was specified in the records of the famous Belarusian collector and publisher of early 20th century folklore Evdokim Romanov "*Belarusians conceive mermaids as girls, it is certain that they are naked, with long untressed hair and a body of earth color, covered not with skin, but with something hard like nails*" (Romanov 1912: 204). Here the motives exchange of the nail skin of the mermaids and the nail (horn, shell) body of the first people before the Fall are evident. The motives of the shell (nail) skin are traditional for the Belarusian Folk Bible (Dobrovolskiy 1891: 236; Federowsky 1897: 201; Boganeva 2010: 34), as well as for many European Folk Bibles – Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian and other. (Belova 2004: 239–241; Zowczak 2013: 97; Kerbelite 2001: 107; folklore archive of Estonian Literature Museum). Corresponding parallels are also found among the Jewish people (Kaspina 2000: 125–126). The conceptual difference between the motives of the horn-type body of mermaids and the first people is that the skin of the first people was a sign of holiness and sinlessness, it protecting them from heat and cold and hiding gender differences. For mermaids, the nail skin along with its earth colour emphasise their belonging to the demonic world, the world of the dead, or the undead[5].

1.2.4. Clothing

Most texts say that mermaids were dressed in white clothes, or in clothes in which they were covered with sod when they were

girls: “People were afraid of mermaids. There were young girls who died, with their hair loose, in a white dress, in a bridal veil” (Druzhilovichi village, Ivanovo district, Brest region).

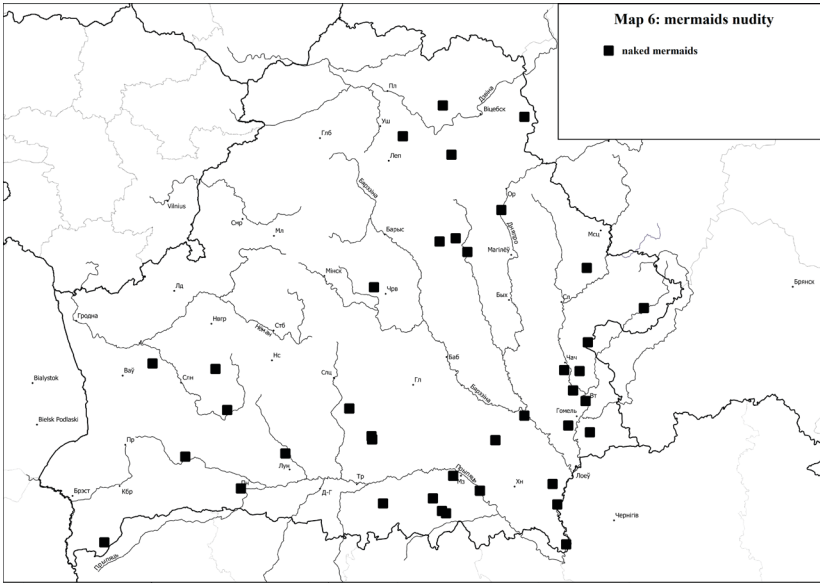
The motif of mermaids’ funeral clothing is common mainly in Western Polesye. It is no coincidence that motifs of mermaids originating from deceased girls or brides are also concentrated in this are. In Belarus, the practice of burying dead girls in wedding dresses of pre-eminently white, including a chaplet, is universal, and is a trait frequently attributed to mermaids. On rare occasions, mermaids can be dressed in tatters or red clothes. Among the Slavs, red clothes on mythological figures is a marker of evil spirits (Belova 1999: 649–650), which is also evidenced by Belarusian records (Varfolomeeva 2013: 652).



Map 5. Mermaid Clothes

In the images of Belarusian mermaids, both the presence of clothes (white, burial, tattered, red) and their absence are noted.

Many records document the nudity of mermaids, while naked mermaids can appear anywhere they live – in rye, in the forest, in water (see map 6).



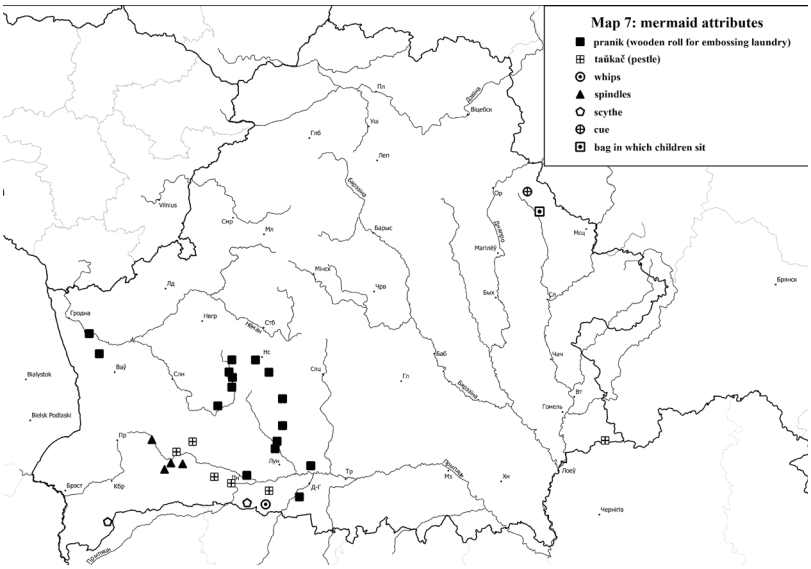
Map 6. Mermaid Nudity

1.2.5. The attributes

In some vernacular Belarusian traditions, an integral part of the image of mermaids is their paraphernalia, i.e. objects they have with them (a *pryanik,* a pestle, a mortar, spindle, cane, whip, bag) (Map 7). With these items, the mermaid acts as a frightening character, for example punishing obstinate children with these tools. The most common such mermaid item is the *pryanik*, a flat wooden bar with a handle used to pound linen during the washing and bleaching process. "A mermaid is in the rye field, with long hair and a *pryanik* in her hands. She will kill. The people are scared

in this way when they go to pick blue cornflowers" (Podborechye village, Lyakhovichi district, Brest region). The second most common tool is the pestle, which she needs for a similar reason to the *pryanik*: "It occurred when the rye was ripe… the mermaid was already coming with a big pestle! And killed the children! Oh, that was the fear!" (v. Vyzhlovichi, Pinsk district, Brest region). Together with the pestle, a mortar is often mentioned: "Don't go to the rye fields, otherwise the mermaid will beat you with an iron mallet and pound you in a mortar" (Obrovo village, Ivatsevichi district, Brest region). Mermaids' large busts are sometimes substitutes for the pestle, with which they crush children or make them suck to death: "Look! She'll put you into a mortar and pound you with a pestle... Instead of a pestle, she has her bust, with this bust she will pound you in a mortar" (Sporovo village, Berezovsky district, Brest region).

In addition to the *pryanik* and pestle, mermaids could also use a scythe, whip or cane. In order to snatch the children, mermaids could have a bag with them. In some districts of Western Polesye, texts about mermaids indicate that they carry spindles (Klimčuk 2003: 220).

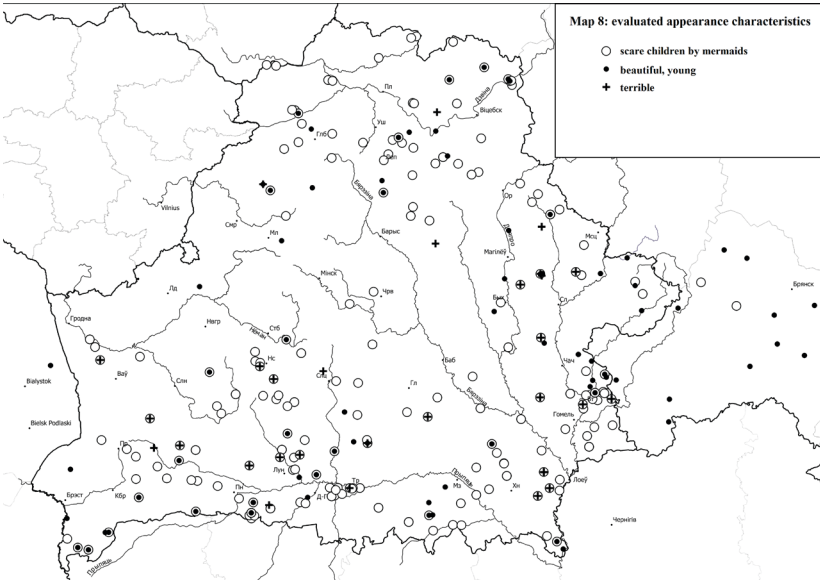


Map 7. Mermaid Attributes

1.3. Evaluation

The evaluative (in general terms) aspect of appearance is often updated in responses from rural respondents, i.e. mermaids can be beautiful or look ghastly. Mermaids who are evaluated as beautiful, look like children or young girls. The ugly mermaids were most often presented as old women with wild hair, overgrown with hair, or with a big bust, which they threw over their shoulders.

However, beautiful mermaids as well as ugly ones were scary. The very fact that they belong to the world of the dead was perceived as something terrible. Moreover, in relation to people, mermaids seemed dangerous and foreign. This is why children were scared not only by ugly mermaids, but equally by beautiful ones (map 8).



Map 8. Evaluated Appearance Characteristics

2. Zoomorphic characteristics of mermaids

In addition to the anthropomorphic type of mermaid, there are a certain number of other images 1) that have combinations of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characteristics; and 2) that have only zoomorphic characteristics. Mermaids of the first type acquire a grotesque, often extremely bizarre and ugly appearance, and look like mixanthropic creatures. Each of these types is discussed below.

2.1. Mermaids with the appearance of people with zoomorphic characteristics

Among the zoomorphic characteristics found in anthropomorphic mermaids are a hairy (shaggy) body, an animal face, hooves, sharp claws and sharp teeth.

The shaggy-looking body is usually marked not as a separate characteristic, but in a complex of comparisons of mermaids with monkeys, cats, non-specific animals; or this characteristic is given to emphasise their ugliness. In some descriptions, the mermaid looks like a shapeshifter who stopped at some stage of transformation from a person to an animal, or vice versa: "Mermaids are walking naked... Their eyes are big... Only long hair around their head... Hands and legs are similar to a man's, and the neb is like a beast's, slightly oblong. She holds her child as a person, and understands the conversation" (Simonichi village, Lelchicy district, Gomel region).

Images of mermaids with horse's legs (and hooves) have demonic features.

> "One woman said: once I weeded the millet. And there, near the cemetery, exactly at noon, I raised my head and saw a young woman standing and asking which way to go… and suddenly she disappeared. She said that she went over, looked, and where she had stood, only hoofmarks remained. Well, not leg, but hoofprints such as that of a foal. When I looked, I was stupefied, I had the feeling I would die…"
>
> "Who did she actually meet?"
>
> "That was a mermaid."
>
> "With hooves?"

> "Yes, she walked, well, like a woman, so young, so good, but they don't walk with feet like us… With hooves they walk, old people said"
>
> (Sinkevichi village, Luninets district, Brest region).

This text and stories similar to it remind us of plots of common Belarusian mythical narratives about evil spirits that appear at parties looking like handsome guys, but with horses legs or tails (Varfolomeeva 2006: 440–446; 2009: 479–482; 2011: 470–471; 2013: 655–658).

Anthropomorphic mermaids with sharp teeth and claws also look demonic: "And the parents were at work, and did not want us to go far away, and frightened us with mermaids. They said they were such tall girls, their arms were thin, their hair was long, their eyes were blue, and their teeth and claws were sharp. And if they catch you, they will tickle you until you die" (Sho village, Glubokoye district, Vitebsk region).

2.2. Mermaid-fishes

Mermaids that have the body and face of a young girl, but and instead of legs have the tail of a fish, are the most famous combinations of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characters. As a rule, such mermaids inhabit the water. Characters similar to mermaids were also popular in classical and European mythology (nymphs, naiads, sirens, undins, melusins, etc.), the romance. Odds are good that in modern Belarusian vernacular folklore, the source of the image of a mermaid with a fish tail was the literary works of Adam Mitskevich, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Gogol or similar. Moreover, the consolidation of this stereotypical image in the peasant environment had already begun in the 19th century through popular prints. At the same time, the image of mermaids

with fish tails in certain cultural micro-dialects was inherent in the Belarusian folk tradition without regard to literary influence, as evidenced by records from the late 20th and early 21st centuries from informants who did not attend school.

As a matter of interest, mermaids with fish tails do not always live in water, in some cases such mermaids are said to run around fields (and the lack of legs necessary for running confuses the storytellers a little). "My uncle said that he was walking early in the morning, the sun had just risen. At sunrise he saw women. He looked out and realised that they had no legs. They were naked, laughing, running around the rye field. Scales and tails, well, that means mermaids. He was frightened and ran away, so he said" (Staro-Vysokaya village, Yelsky district, Gomel region). Similar records of mermaids with fish tails observed in fields were also documented in north-east part of Ukraine, in the Chernigov region) (Vinogradova & Levkiyevskaya 2012: 515).

Quite often in the image of mermaids along with a fish tail, wings also appear which motivates the ability of mermaids to sit in trees. "*Long hair, and with a fishtail. And with wings. Believe me, both wings and fishtail she had. The people frightened that way. And she flie*, and was in the water as well" (Zaronovo village, Vitebsk district, Vitebsk region).

2.3. Mermaids-birds

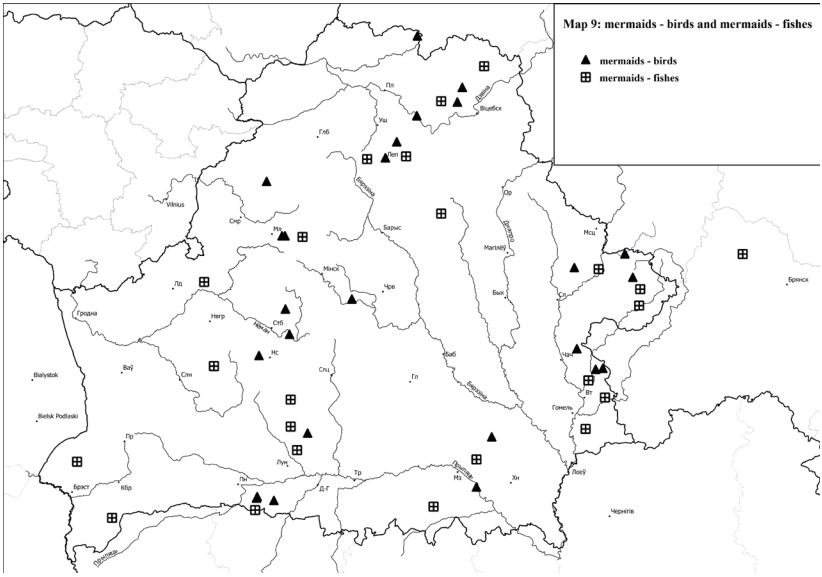
Winged mermaids are quite well known in Belarus, and they can have both the appearance of a bird and a combination of anthropomorphic ornithological features.

This type of mermaid, similar to the mythical birds of Alkanost (Tolstoy 1995: 100), or the Siren (Ivanov, Toporov 1992: 438), or Gamayun (SRYA XI–XVII 4: 10), with the body of a bird and head of a woman, is unique according to our material. Francisco

Molina-Moreno in his article "Mermaids in Polesye and Sirens in Antiquity" (Molina-Moreno 2015: 197–220) wrote that in the Polesye archive of the Institute of Slavonic Science (Moscow) the image of a bird-like mermaid with a female head does not occur. There is such an image in the Belarusian BFELA base, although it is unique. "The mermaid then is without legs, without arms, she is only with wing… She has a woman's head, but only a body with wings. 'And can they fly?' Sure, if they have wings, they can fly. 'And when do they fly?' At night. Like a bat flying in the dark, so a mermaid flying in the dark… 'Where were these mermaids coming from?' Well, God punished the woman. Recompense for her sins. She had sinned a lot, put the cat among the pigeons, and God punished her and made her like this: without hands, without legs so that she couldn't take anything or walk, just fly. 'And does she fall upon people in the night?' No, she doesn't" (Dukora village, Pukhovichi district, Minsk region).

Another type of flying mermaid, this time anthropomorphic, is much more common: "Well, the mermaids were these… 'And what were they?' Well, they were shown with long plaits that were beautiful... They have wings, and those two wings are on the back" (Volosovichi village, Chechersk district, Gomel region).

Some species of large bird, for example, owls, hawks, storks, are also often associated with mermaids. Occasionally descriptions of mermaids conjure up a picture of a bird, but they are not compared with specific species: "The mermaid is a big bird, or looks like a bird… She lived in a rye or barley field. And kept watch over it" (Myasota village, Molodechno district, Minsk region). On map 10, expressive 'isodoxes' are shown[6] from north-east Belarus through the western part of Central Belarus to Western Polesye and from the eastern part of the Podneprovye to East Polesye.



Map 9. Mermaid-Birds and Mermaid-Fishes

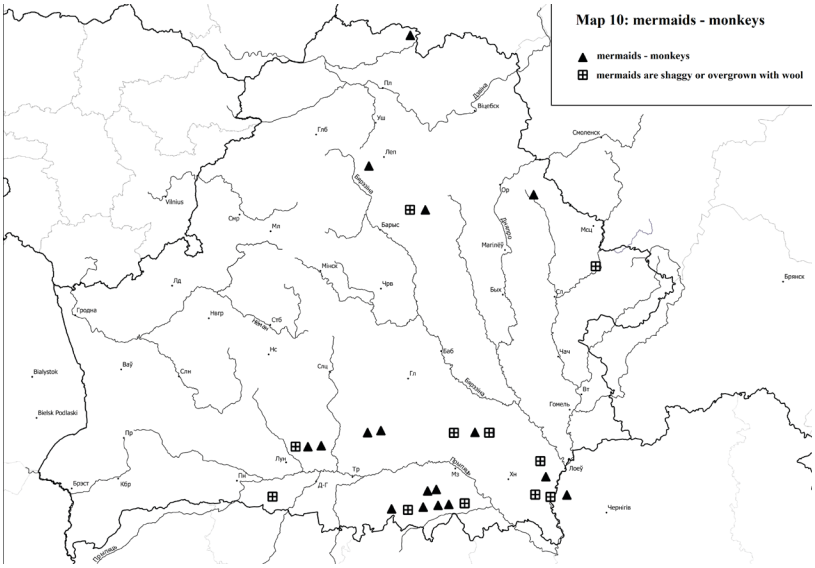
2.4. Mermaids-monkeys

The appearance of monkey mermaids is quite common among the zoomorphic images of mermaids (see map 10). In these situations mermaids are either compared to monkeys or identified with them: "Once upon a time there were monkeys – these were the mermaids, mermaids that once had been. They had shaggy-looking hair, they were primitive ones. Both women and men are shaggy, naked in the forest. They sway, climb, peep. Once upon a time…" (Zolotukha village, Kalinkovichi district, Gomel region)

In this case, as with the nail skin, a parallel can be seen with Belarusian narratives about the first people, who descend from monkeys and were covered with hair (Boganeva 2010: 32–33). The motif of the hairy bodies of the first people is also found

in the Polish and Bulgarian folk Bibles (Zowczak 2013: 97; Badalanova 2017: 52–53) and among the Ukrainian Guzuls and Old Ritualists of the Kirov Region (Belova 2004: 241). The first people, according to some local versions of folklore Bibles, gradually went through the evolutionary stages of the acquisition of human attributes, getting rid of the signs of chthonic beings. Chthonic features and demonic nature are particularly distinguished among mermaid-monkeys. "What do mermaids look like?" "People say that they look like monkeys. I'm not sure… The story runs that they will troop around a man and tickle him until he runs out of force, and then they will drink his blood" (Volova Gora village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region)

Map 10 shows a large area in East Polesye of the occurance of mermaid-monkeys and hairy/shaggy mermaids. Documentation of this mermaid type in the north is scarce, but they also form an isodox from the eastern part of Poozerye to the eastern part of the Podneprovye.



Map 10. Mermaid-Monkeys

2.5. Mermaid-snakes

Mermaid-snakes are a rather rare species of zoomorphic mermaid. In certain instances, mermaids are called snakes, referencing witches who take away milk from cows: "On the Sunday before Whitsuntide, mermaid-snakes came to suck out the milk" (Zamoshye village, Lelchicy district, Gomel region). There is probably also an association with snakes (grass-snakes) sucking milk from cows (see Varfolomeeva 2009: 583; 2013: 706), as well as with witches who turn into snakes and suck cow's milk from the udder (Varfolomeeva 2009: 564–565).

Mermaid movement is often characterised as having an upright posture: they walk, run, dance, sit on tree branches, etc. At the same time, there are texts about mermaids that talk of them having a horizontal position and crawling, and so they are compared with snakes: "The mermaids in the garden crawl on the earth the same way as grass-snakes do. Who wants to scare, lie in the furrows in the garden and already scares – crawls like a mermaid" Dublin village, Bragin district, Gomel region).

2.6. Mermaids that look like cats, rats or squirrels

In rare cases, mermaids become similar to cats (4 records), rats (2 records), and squirrels (1 record). "The mermaid is small, black, shaggy, like a cat" (Stodolichi village, Lelchytsy district, Gomel region.). Rats and squirrels do not have a direct comparison, but rather are hinted at in vague associations that can be explained by gradual attenuation (but not yet complete obliteration) of this aspect of local tradition. "Hasn't your mum scared you with mermaids?" These are… rats, perhaps. Or mermaids. "Rats?" Once we started fooling around, and she says... She said it was not mermaids, but rats: "I will kick you to the rats right now!" "And

what kind of rats were they?" And now you can see them. Well, these are mermaids, perhaps. But in my mother's mind, rats, in your language now, probably, mermaids" (Sava village, Goretsk district, Mogilev region).

As for the squirrel, it was not the mermaid that was compared with the squirrel, but rather the squirrel was called the mermaid, see: "I caught a little squirrel, and he bit my hands all over. Little squirrels are also called mermaids" (Solonaya village, Volozhin district, Minsk region). There is every likelihood here that the attenuation of the existing beliefs about mermaids occurred and left only an indefinite trace of those ideas that used to belong to mermaids, i.e. how quickly they travelled, perching in trees.

3. Infernal characteristics of mermaids

Many texts about mermaids demonstrate their infernality, which is emphasised by anomalies in their appearance, in particular their artificial body parts (most often these are texts that horrify children).

So mermaids can have an iron bust[7] (31 texts), iron hands, an iron tail, iron fingers, iron claws, iron wings (6 texts). Not only can parts of the body be iron, but the entire mermaid can look like an iron woman (7 records). "They only used mermaids to scare the children so that they would not go to the garden. Do not go to the garden, the mermaid is sitting there!" "We had a barn made of withe. Once I went there, peered through a gap. And saw a woman. She was iron but normal, with a naked bust. I was thinking: "Where did she go?" I went outside, but she was not there." (Khalch village, Vetka district, Gomel region). One record was documented that mentioned mermaid looking like an iron black bird: "We walked, and there in the field the rye was sown, and the cornflowers could be seen. We wanted to pick them, but

one female said: No, it's impossible, the mermaid sits in the rye and will take away anyone who will pick cornflowers or trample on them. The mermaid is like an iron bird. The mermaid is fully black, wings are black, iron, she's very scary" (Demyanovka village, Pukhovichi district, Minsk region).

Several texts stand out from the Belarusian texts about mermaids, in which mermaids are described not as a visible creature with a body – anthropomorphic or zoomorphic – but as something indefinite, like a ghost. These mermaids can seem like shadows (3 texts), like a moving pillar in the air (2 texts), or like a light in a cemetery (1 text).

4. Perception and axiological characteristics of mermaids

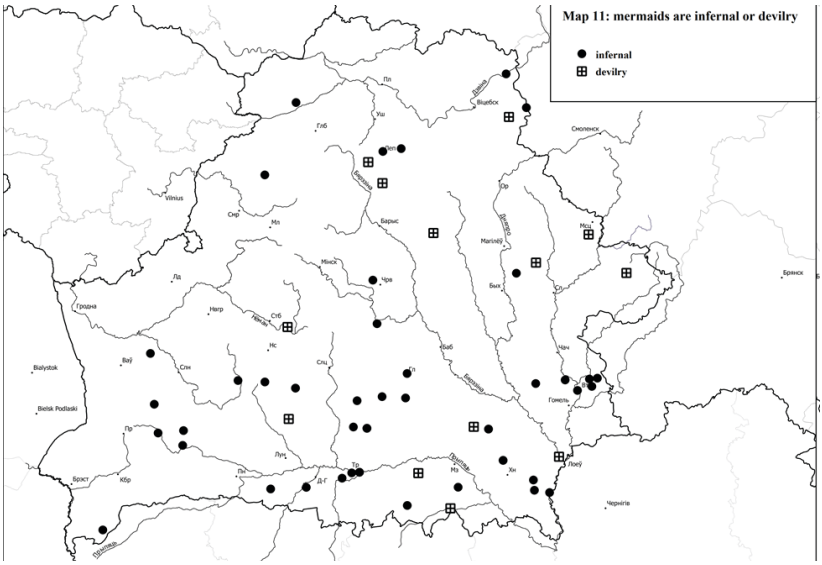
Mermaids can come across as evil spirits more rarely as the saints, and, quite often, as something intermediate and neutral. As a rule, if the collector does not ask about the mermaid being an evil spirit, informants rarely reflect on this topic. But if the question is asked, most answers are affirmative. Anecdotal evidence suggests that mermaids comes directly from hell: "The mermaids came out of the abyss, out of hell… Mermaids, these are the devils walking evil spirits. They did a lot of harm to people. They could scare someone or do a harm, make something..." (Mikhalinovo, Liozno district, Vitebsk region).

Common signs of evil spirits in Slavic mythological texts are fear of the cross or of prayer, blessed things or holy places. Mermaids are also afraid of the cross (both the baptismal cross and the sign of the cross) and of prayer. Apart from the cross itself, mermaids are afraid of everything that looks like the cross. So there was a belief about how a person could be saved if mermaids were chasing him or her in a field. In this case, the person needs to

run not along the furrows, but across, forming a cross with their movement. This cross is visible enough and palpable for mermaids, and in this case they cannot pursue the person.

Traditionally, evil spirits are afraid of bread, and mermaids too are afraid of it. "Mermaids caught a man and pinched him, that man had bread under his armpit, so that way he was kept alive" (Verkhnie Zhary village, Bragin district, Gomel region).

See map 11 for the geographical spread of texts that have mermaids as evil spirits.

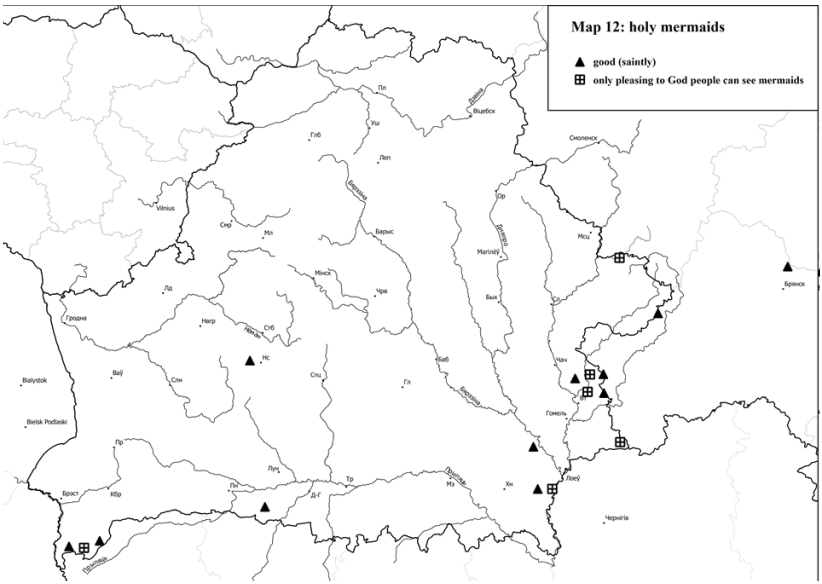


Map 11. Mermaids are Infernal or are some kind of Devilry

When asked by the collector whether mermaids were evil spirits, informants do not always respond positively. For instance, in East Polesye, where it is explained that mermaids descend from people who died on the Trinity or the Sunday before Whitsuntide, as a rule, mermaids do not come off as evil spirit (however, neither are they saints).

In West Polesye, where mermaids appear as children, and, according to superstition, descend from dead children, including baptized ones, they are perceived as akin to saints and are sinless: "Mermaids are small children, good children. They are from paradise, heaven born. Wreaths of cornflowers are collected in the rye fields and woven for them" (Oltush village, Malorita district, Brest region). However, the perception of mermaids as saints is not without ambivalence, and 'holy' mermaids can pose the same danger to humans as evil spirit mermaids. "Well, the mermaid is one of those who die young, unmarried... Whoever dies young becomes a little mermaid then. "Baptized or not baptized?" No! Baptized. Still so young that they did not know sin, men… "And are the little mermaids kind-hearted or evil?" Kind-hearted. They used to scare us when we went to pick cornflowers in the rye: Go, go! There the little mermaid lulls her child on the spikelet, she will strangle you there!" (Balandichi village, Ivanovo district, Brest region).

Map 12 shows the distribution of texts that have the mermaid-saints, i.e. mainly the south-west and south-east of Belarus.



Map 12. Holy Mermaids

The analysis of the descriptions of mermaid appearances in Belarusian mythological texts demonstrates the extreme diversity and polymorphism of this image, including the estimated characteristics (from beautiful to scary) and the axiological description (from evil spirits to saints). Moreover, unlike Estonian mermaids, Belarusian mermaids are not characterized by proteism. Belarusian mermaid tales do not include stories of mermaids transforming into inanimate objects or zoomorphic creatures, which are extremely dangerous for humans if they interact with them in any way (for more information on these beliefs in Estonia, see (Kõiva 2024, 141–166)). Mermaids in Belarusian beliefs can appear anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or mixed-race (with a combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features). Anthropomorphic mermaids can appear as children, young girls, middle-aged women, or terrifying old women with enormous

breasts (the latter beliefs are common in the Belarusian Eastern Polesie region). Some tales of mermaids emphasize their infernal nature by using artificial body parts (iron/glass/clay breasts, iron fingers, hands, claws, etc.). Mermaids can appear as fish, birds, monkeys, snakes, and other animals. Mermaids can possess a combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features (a girl with a fish tail, a woman with wings, etc.). Mermaids may carry objects that are used to intimidate: children were frightened to keep them from going into the rye because a mermaid was there with a sack (for carrying and lifting children), a spindle (for stabbing), or stick (for beating). In the system of Belarusian mythological characters there is not one with whom mermaids could be compared, according to appearance, from which the functionality of the image does not always follow. In other words, many texts about mermaids describe only their appearance, but say nothing said about their actions. Mapping the individual motifs found in mythological texts as well as the ascribed characteristics, opens up other areas within the framework of this research.

Notes

[1] The Sunday before Whitsuntide, the week after Trinity, the 8th week after Easter. It was believed that in this week mermaids showed their faces to people and were most active. In the south-eastern part of Belarus a mermaid's farewell rite is of a mermaid has been performed. A young girl put on "clothes" from green branches and leaves, then she is taken over village with songs, then the girl is led outside the village into the field. There the mermaid's dressy clothes from green branches and leaves are taken into pieces (later on, this greens are used as a talisman), and she is pushed into the rye (into the river), thus removing her from rural society, from the world of people.

[2] Polesye (Polesie) is a historical, cultural and geographical area, located on the territory of four countries: Belarus, Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

In Belarus, Polesye is located in the south part of Belarus, and according to historical and ethnographic characteristics it is divided into Western and Eastern Polesye.

[3] Hereinafter, all citation records of texts are given in translation from Belarusian. After the citation, the place of recording is indicated. The informant (respondent) and the collector are not indicated in the article, all information about them is available in the BFELA database

[4] Podneprovye is a historical and ethnographic region of Belarus. It is situated in the east of the country occupying the Mogilev, part of the Vitebsk and Gomel regions.

[5] The undead, according to Slavic convictions, are people who pass away unnaturally and can then return to the world of the living in the form of mythical creatures (mermaids, ghouls, etc.).

[6] The motifs of mythological texts, as a rule, are geographically tied, and on this basis, isodoxes – the conditional boundaries of certain phenomena, zones, or microzones – are distinguished in ethno-linguistic mapping systems.

[7] On the artificial busts of mermaids (stone, glass, etc.), see above 1.2.2

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Sky Observation and Moon in Mythology: The Moon in Baltic-Finnic, Baltic, and Slavic Tradition

Mare Kõiva

Abstract: The article gives an overview of folklore and myths about the Moon (for example the origin of the Moon, the Moon as a living creature, the Moon as place of habitation) and the nature of Moon spots in Baltic-Finnic, Baltic and Slavic traditions. Moon creation myths have reached us mostly thanks to oral tradition and publications. The best-known myths about the origin of Moon spots people who have ended up there either as a result of their own actions or at the discretion of the Moon, or describe how human activity has caused the spots. In Baltic-Finnic tradition the main plots are connected with water carrier, Moon taring and Ursa Major; the Christian characters on the Moon is rare exception.

Keywords: Baltic-Finnic Moon lore, Baltic astral lore, Slavic Moon lore, astral names, Moon myths, Moon spots, Moon as a living creature

Based, first and foremost, on written texts about religion and myth, researchers have reconstructed a three-level model of the

world that is accompanied by a three-seven-nine-twelve-part heaven with inhabitants and constellations. The underworld and its structure have been reconstructed in the same manner. The living and communication quarters of the supernatural inhabitants of the middle world, as well as the overall topology of the worlds, are organised by means of complicated and partly polar relationships (see also Lefebvre, 1991). In reconstructions of the view of the world the methods of comparative mythology and archaeomythology have been productive, while data and methods from phraseology and folklore have been used to a lesser extent. This study examines data on the concept of the heavenly world, and specifically the Moon, in the corpora of linguistics, folklore and mythology. The study is limited to the Baltic-Finnic peoples and the relevant data about the Slavic and Baltic contact area.

The subject matter concerning the worldview of native Baltic-Finnic peoples who live around the Baltic Sea and northwestern Russia, i.e. the Estonians, Finns, Karelians, Votes, Vepsians and Livonians, has been recorded over the course of two centuries. From a linguistic perspective the Baltic-Finnic people belong to Finno-Ugric and Uralic language groups, while neighbouring and contact people belong to various Indo-European language groups. Folklore and language corpora are the only valid way of observing the mentality of these people. Such observations are complemented by theoretical discussion and monographic studies (K. Vilkuna, U. Harva, K. Krohn, J. Hurt, P.-E. Prüller, A. Kuperjanov, M. J. Eisen, O. Loorits, I. Paulson, P. Ariste, E. Ernits, I. Vinokurova) that date back to roughly the same time as the start of sound recording. From one perspective two centuries is a short period, although from socio-economic, historical and ethnic vitality perspectives it can also be quite a long time.

This paper presents results of research into Moon spots, the Moon as a living creature and the Moon as a place of residence. For most of the traditions under discussion the Moon is a living

creature, a god or an old man. Other layers of myth relate to the life cycle and fate of the Moon.

The name of the Moon

It is a linguistic characteristic that the same word – *päva* (Livonian, cf. Loorits 1926), Votic *päivä* (Ernits & Ernits 2011: 89) and Estonian *päev* (EKSS 2009) – means both the sun and day. There is a saying in an Estonian dialect that "the day sets", "the day turns to God". Here day signifies the Sun and the setting of the Sun is its departure homeward or to God. A day is the period between sunrise and sunset and night is the period between sunset and sunrise (Õim 2012: 96). The word *ilm* in Estonian means world, but also means weather. Semiotically, *ilm* can also be used to define different worlds and realms (*inimeste ilm* (the realm of humans), *tontide ilm* (the realm of ghosts)). Today, we have come to use the compound word *maailm* = *maa* + *ilm* (the earth, day, sky), a word that shows the semiotic coexistence or integration of the earth and the sky. Other special names for the Sun include the suffix-induced *päval'ik(k)i* (Livonian), *päevlik* (Estonian) and *päivikko* (Votic, the latter also having been interpreted as light by Ernits & Ernits 2011, citing Öpik 1970). The common term used for the Moon in all Baltic-Finnic languages is *kuu.* The word *kuu* means, simultaneously, the celestial body, the closest planet, the Moon, the month (28–31 days), an astronomical companion, a satellite to a planet, as well as being used for the synodic month, i.e. the time it takes for the Moon to orbit the Earth (EKSS 2009). The words used for Moon and the unit of time differ only in Finnish and Vepsian: in Finnish *kuu* is the celestial body, rarely a unit of time, while *kuukausi* is month; in Vepsian *ku* is month while *kudmaine* is Moon, although both language use the same word stem. *Kuu* is a shared word in all Finno-Ugric languages and also

appears in the same form in Uralic languages. In other Baltic languages, the corresponding words in Lithuanian are *Mėnulis* and *mėnuo*, and in Latvian *mēness* (celestial body), *mēnesis* (time period) (LVET 2015). The word *mėnuo* means both the celestial body and the time period. These words directly derive from the Indo-European root **menes-*, **men(n)s-*, 'Moon' and 'month', and have a more general meaning of **me-* 'measure' (Vaiškunas 2006). In Russian these words are different: луна (*luna*) is Moon the celestial body, and the time period is месяц (*mesiats*). Linguistically speaking, the Moon is created or born again (VKS II: 325; III: 189, EKSS 2009). In the Baltic-Finnic area the phases of the Moon are called old and new moon, crescent moon, full moon, half-moon; in south Estonia there are also the hard and soft phases of the Moon (Sarv 2017; Kuperjanov 2003).

The Moon was used as a natural cosmic instrument for measuring time, something that became natural to people living in direct contact with nature who needed to know how to determine moonrise, the Moon's movement across the sky and its brightness, size and colour. The Moon rises before the Sun sets and remains long after the Sun has risen, something that is important when calculating time. But working at night, i.e. in moonlight, was thought to be inauspicious: all work done after sunset was said to go to waste or to the devil. The lunar calendar and moonlight play important practical roles in folk belief (for example in folk medicine, cf. Kõiva 2011; Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2015; Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2016; Sõukand & Kalle 2011, and in plantation, veterinary medicine, forestry, house building, etc. For Votic and Vepsian parallels see Ernits & Ernits 2011; Vinokurova 2015). Moonlight was an important source of light before electricity. Phraseology includes the humorous expression The Moon is the Bachelor's Sun (JUSTKUI 1998–2005), which refers to twilight meetings and village bachelors visiting girls. Lithuanians conclude that the Moon is "the Sun's assistant", shining instead of the Sun at

night, or that the Moon is a big fire burning in God's palace, and moonlight is the light shining through the windows of the palace (the stars, Vaiškunas 2006).

The origins of the Moon

Diverse worldviews and the polarity of such views are also characteristic of data related to objects in the sky. Such objects form a topographical part of the sky while also representing the mythical and the sacred. These objects have been used in different practices and feature as components in explanatory models, necessitating the use of broader subject matter. The Moon is an important axis of temporal relations, bears significance as a temporal reference point and is an element in the sky that affects the day-to-day life of people both as a source of light and because of the powers ascribed to it.

There are records about the creation of the Moon in the older epic songs of certain Baltic-Finnic peoples. For example, in the mythical Estonian song "Loomine" ("Creation") the sky and earth are created from an laid by the world bird, with the yolk forming the Sun and the Moon and stars as well as animals and birds below. The same song is known among Votes and also in the Finnic-Karelian tradition, although with small variations (SKVR tiedekanta 2004–2007; Rüütel 1969). The myth of origination from an egg belongs among the creation myths, where it is the most common form (Eliade 1963) alongside the various versions of the earth-diver myth (see more in Napolskikh 2012). Older Estonian songs also include other fascinating motifs. In the epic song of the Star Bride (Est. *Tähemõrsja*), a girl chooses a star from various celestial suitors (the Sun, the Moon and the stars) as the most constant of companions. The Moon in his role of luckless suitor is faulted for his inconsistency, i.e. waning, waxing,

occasionally being totally out of sight. In other mythical songs the Moon is the son of a god (the Sun) and is usually depicted as an old man; in other myths it is the Sun's sister. Some songs too have been interpreted from a mythological point of view (Loorits 1949), although they are thought of as simple courting fantasies in which suitors are symbolically given the names of celestial bodies (Roos 1969). Astral myths in songs found among the Balts, neighbours to the Baltic Finns, have provided material for interpretation (e.g. Ivanov & Toporov 1974), revealing for example that they seem to be reflections of older Indo-European myths. At the same time other researchers have indicated that the texts used to create such theories have been personal creations and fantasies that attempt to create myths in the age of romantic recorded history, challenging their overall role in the mythological worldview (cf. Putelis 2017).

The lore of a number of nations includes a division of celestial bodies into specific genders (bearing in mind that Finno-Ugric languages lack gender). The Mordvins depict the Moon as a young man and the Sun as a young woman who live by the Volga River. The Mordvins start their prayers by turning to the god of thunder and then to the god of the Moon. The Moon mother (*Kovava-kov* 'mordvin, half-moon', *ava* 'woman, mother') is usually present in Mordvin folklore together with the Sun, with one of its functions being to observe time (Devjatkina 2008). A Komi myth tells the tale of how the god Jen first created the Sun and then its opposite, Oməl', the Moon, from an egg. Another version of this myth states that the Moon was created first and this caused everything to freeze. Nothing could be grown and this led to famine. Then, Jen created the Sun, which started to warm the world up and made plants grow, advancing life (Konakov 2003).

Among our neighbours, Lithuanians residing in Belarus associate the Moon with the deity *Dievaitis* (in dialect *Dievaicis*), 'young god, the son of God'. (Often the word is spoken in the diminutive form.) After Vaiškunas, the Moon is referred to as *jaunikaitis*,

'young man', *karalaitis*, 'young king', as well as *Dangaus Dievaitis*, 'Heavenly God', *Sūnus Dievo*, 'God's Son' and *Dievas Sūnus*, 'God Son' (Vaiškūnas 2006: 373–374).

The appearance and disappearance of the Sun and the Moon have given rise to discussions and driven fantasies of their young age: according to Estonian folk belief, a Moon's life is short, only four weeks, old Moons have gone beyond the edge of the world. Interim lunar phases during which the Moon is not visible in the sky have provided subject matter for vernacular narratives.

According to the beliefs of some Estonians, the Moon and the Sun move across the sky along an invisible rope. Once the Sun reaches the other side of the sky the Moon, in turn, starts its journey. When the Moon and the Sun are worn out from all this movement and grow old, they are piled up around the corner of the world where they grow mouldy. But a new Sun and Moon are then created to replace the old ones, as was recorded in Püha parish in 1893: "The Moon is also a moving thing and it is set thus that the Moon must illuminate the world during the night and sometimes it comes to an end and a new Moon is created." (H, Mapp 135 (2) Püha)

Among narrative forms of expression, the most common explanation that Estonians have for the creation of the celestial bodies is that during prehistoric times the sky was so low that children could reach up and make holes in the sky, which they did out of boredom. Celestial light and life then shone down on the earth through those holes, creating the celestial bodies that we see. After this the sky was raised so that people could no longer reach it. This story spread through school textbooks from 1867 (see Jakobson 1867). For a long time it was the subject of popular discussions because not everyone understood or accepted this belief as taught. At the same time, the story inspired humour as well as being mixed with more factual content, especially during the modernisation period at the start of the 20th century.

> Thirty-five years ago a herdsmen in Epliku village said the following about the world, specifically about lost animals: "They won't leave the world – the sky is above like an upside-down cauldron!" There was a humorous tale about a tailor and his family who poked holes in the sky in the old days when it was lower, cutting our Sun, the Moon and the stars. There was talk of going to the end of the world where the sky was said to touch the earth. (ERA II 261,186 (4) Ambla, 1939)

The image of an upside-down cauldron or arch over the earth was common (the same category, including the sky made of stone, was popular in Japan and Europe, see Metevelis 2000).

> About 60 years ago the men from Anseküla believed that the Earth was a wide tin plate and that the sky was a cauldron that had been turned upside down and had holes in it and the Sun was a big ball of fire that could be seen through such a hole. God lives on top of the bottom of the cauldron and pulls down a screen either fully or half-way as he sees fit, resulting in a full moon or a half-moon. When God gets angry he bangs against the bottom of the cauldron with his fist, creating thunder. (ERA II 158,104 (40) Anseküla)

The following excerpt on the formation of Lithuania was recorded from the period before World War II: "The Devil borrowed a sieve from Mary. He didn't want to carry it to Heaven, so he threw the sieve up and the Moon appeared." (Vaiškunas 2006, citing SBK). This is one of the narratives in which the characters are clearly Christian.

Christian beliefs from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period have trouble assigning hell and paradise to specific points in space, often associating the gates of hell to the Sun, the Moon or

another star. The same applies to the gates of paradise. In Estonian belief accounts, the Moon is also mentioned as a window to hell (H II 9,107 (2) Viru-Nigula). One Estonian belief speaks of the afterlife of the soul in heaven, while the Votes mix the heavenly and Christian Heaven – a person's soul goes to Heaven after death: *Po1 ku iɲehmiin kuolõb, siz enči lentääb taivasõõ*, 'when a person dies then their soul flies to Heaven' (Ernits & Ernits 2011, reference to VKS I: 206). According to Vaiškunas (2006) there is also a record in Lithuania saying that the Moon is the 'house of the Devil', because it is the place where the Devil resides.

The mythical motifs of songs and narratives represent a cosmological view of the world, as well as mythological events with their own spatial and temporal dimensions. At the same time, micro-records, behavioural norms and various narrative realisations provide an abundance of information that helps us decipher the meaning of celestial phenomena.

The Moon as an object in the sky: Adaptions of scientific explanations

Let us take a brief look at the scientific discourse and the expression of data in folklore-based knowledge. Although basic information on solar and lunar eclipses, the planets and stars are available in a calendar from 1739, including information on observation options and other information that was novel at the time, stories mixing different viewpoints continued to spread in folklore up to the mid-20th century alongside discussions of the nature and origin of cosmic phenomena. The size of celestial bodies is one of the more interesting issues. The complexity of assessing the size of celestial phenomena can be seen in a written record from the 19th century that expresses the belief that a single star is probably the size of an ox.

Varying sizes are proposed in the early 20th century, but these assessments are based on the size of the celestial bodies as seen by the human eye: *Päiv om just nii suur kui tuubri põhi, kuu nii suur kui pangi põhi.* ('The Sun is as big as the bottom of a tub; the Moon is as big as the bottom of a bucket') (H II 29, 822/3 (82) Kambja, 1880).

It would appear that, despite using the units of measurement employed on earth, these were serious attempts to give an accurate account of celestial sizes, although this shows that people did not know how to determine the size ratios of phenomena in the sky. The common measurements used simply express what would be a large territory to a peasant: "The stars are the size of a bushel of land and the Moon the size of a barrel of land, but only God's might knows the size of the Sun." (E 33896 (71) Narva)

A bushel of land is an archaic unit of surface area in the Baltics. According to Tallinn measurements, a bushel of land was approximately 0.18 ha (EKSS 2009), while a barrel of land was 0.55-0.63 ha. These units of measurement led to the following discussion, which brings together descriptions of the objects in the sky (as well as the holes in the sky) with their own limited fuel supply, which, when it runs out, will cause this cycle of the world to come to an end and the creation of a new Heaven and Earth.

> Young cowherds believe the Sun to be the size of a couple of barrels of land. It is a hole in the sky the size of eight bushels of land where the fire is always blazing. The earth stands still and the Sun goes around the Earth. The Moon is said to be a hole in the sky that is as if filled with fire, but only the size of a bushel of land and full of coal. This hole is covered with a lid that moves back and forth on its own and where the Moon sometimes waxes and then wanes. And the Moon can sometimes be cut in half, so that it may look like a carriage wheel or the bottom of a tub or like a poker or a sickle. Just

like the day, the Moon is also a hole in the sky. The Moon used to be the only thing to cast light on the world, but then its fuel started to run out and the day was created, which was much bigger than the Moon. And when the day goes out then that is the end of days and a new Heaven and Earth will be created. (RKM II 34, 465/6 (1) Keila)

Writings from the Setu region in south-eastern Estonia also imply that certain scholarly explanations have been integrated into the folk explanatory model and changed, for example the Sun as a mountain of fire that has been adapted in the agrarian environment. Here we again encounter attempts to determine the size of both celestial bodies with objective units of measurement by imagining that the Moon is bigger (which it can optically seem to be) and the Sun is smaller. This micro-narrative also includes a description of the journey of the Sun behind the (world)mountain and back again and observations about different geographical areas and the visibility of the celestial bodies.

Päiv om määne tulõmägi. Tä om vakamaa suuru'. Kuu saistus om suurõmb. Kuu om kolmõ vakamaa. Päiv tsõõr' pääle ümbre. Vaos õdagult mäe taadõ, hommogult jal' tõõsõst veerest vällä. Üts miis siist Labõritsa külast ol'l Russaliinah. Tuu om rohkõmp päävä ala, mi' olõ kavvõmbah. Sääl paistus päiv maa pääle õkva nigu saiba mulku.

The day/Sun is a kind of mountain of fire. It is the size of one bushel of land. The Moon is bigger – the size of three bushels of land. The day/Sun moves in circles. It went down behind the hill in the evening and came back up from the other side. One man from Labõritsa village here was in the town of Russa. Russa is more under the Sun; we are further away from it. The day shone down on the land there like a pole into a hole. (ERA II 252, 202 (4) Setu)

Lithuanians have similar explanations, with generalisations such as the Moon being 'a frozen ball', 'the frozen Sun', 'the night Sun' and 'the light of the night', all the way to claiming that the Moon is 'the night lamp of God'. The essence of most folk reports seems to indicate the re-textualisation of scientific information.

The Moon as a living being

The Moon and other celestial bodies are depicted as living creatures – heavenly beings (Est. *taevalised*) – as seen in several older beliefs. Beliefs that there are Moon people living on the Moon belong to the same category ("Moon people live on the Moon. When they start flailing about a lot then it is said to be a sign of war." (ERA II 254,144 (45) Pühalepa).

This excerpt probably likens the Moon people to the Northern Lights, which can often be seen in the sky around the Moon. This theory is supported by other beliefs that relate the Northern Lights to the Sami people and a mythical underground folk, with conflicts between heavenly beings seen by people on earth as celestial phenomena: "The flailing about and lunar eclipses are wars in the sky. Lunar eclipses are when Heaven must make half of the Moon white and the other half black. The Northern Lights are supposed to be the Sami people or the underground folk and they are said to cause the eclipses (ERA II 37, 339/40 (28) Jõhvi).

There is a difference between how older tradition and scholarly lore categorise animate and inanimate objects, with lore becoming fixed in the 19th century and reshaped in beliefs. Folklore knew animate beings such as plants, trees and rocks according to beliefs. The animate category also included the supernatural and the divine (living faith, living God).

However, since this constitutes a separate field, it can simply be said that heavenly beings included God (and divine beings

and gods), the angels and the saints and that demonic creatures also roamed Heaven. The Baltic-Finnic peoples have always given special attention, and shown respect, to celestial bodies and heavenly phenomena. All Baltic-Finnic, Baltic and Slavic people were forbidden from pointing at the Sun, the Moon, rainbows or stars. According to didactic belief, this would cause the finger to shrivel and die. The Sun and the Moon were not only sacred, Livonians also believed that they had their own "god" or fairy (Loorits 1926). Lithuanians believed that when the Moon and the Sun were both in the sky it was forbidden to make a child laugh because his or her navel would hurt (e.g. Vaiškunas 2006). Mocking or criticising the Moon would always be followed by an accident or punishment, and doing so was forbidden, just like being disrespectful to one's elders. One was also not to perform impermissible acts in the sight of the Moon, i.e. in the moonlight, including stealing, having sex or hitting somebody.

The Moon as a place to live

Reports have been recorded from several ethnic groups of the Sun and the Moon being habitats similar to Earth, even with somewhat similar topology, enabling similar traditional daily tasks to be performed. For example, there are reports in the Estonian corpus of astral lore that, *Pääv olema mua, elanikud siden. Kuu piama üks mua olema, aga kessi juuren käenud on tal* - 'The Sun is a kind of Earth with beings living inside. The Moon must be a kind of Earth, but who has been there?' ERA II 266, 378 (7) Kodavere, 1937); *Kuu om ka maakerä. Kuu siheh om kah mõtsa' ja oru' ja kuu om tuulinõ.* – 'The Moon is also a kind of Earth. There are also forests and valleys on the Moon and it is windy there.' (ERA II 301, 222 (75) Setumaa)

The first text concludes with something that makes no assertions about plausibility, 'but who has been there'. The storyteller is merely passing on what he or she has heard, allowing doubt to remain. In the next example, however, a man from a local village responds to a story told by a man from Hiiumaa by asking a devious question, which makes the text sound like a borderline joke targeting the neighbours. "There must be people on the Moon. The man from Hiiumaa said that there are meadows and fields on the Moon." The man from Kiideva village then asked, "Would there be people from Hiiumaa there, too?" (ERA II 55, 66 (29) Ridala, 1928). There is a written record from Setumaa: *Kuu seeh üldäs olõvat lat's vihaga*'. – 'It is said that there is a child with a whisk on the Moon' (AES Setumaa). In some texts people live on the Moon, the darker spots are their cabbage patches (e.g. corpus of astral lore, ERA II 129, 382 (45) Rapla). There are trees growing on the Moon and the soil there is cultivated. However, there were discussions after World War II that might have been inspired by space travel and in which people believe the Moon to be ill-suited for living: "Moonspots – some folks calculated that there was supposedly also some kind of land there and that the air was so heavy that it would press blood out of your pores. (RKM II 147, 98 (27) Häädemeeste, 1962).

Since we have a number of opinions about the nature of the Moon recorded from Lithuanians, we can see some similar generalisations, for exmple 'the Moon is the earth', 'an earth like ours with people living on it', 'some kind of a stone' and 'frozen stone'. (VAIŠKUNAS, 2006) These beliefs were probably also known among Baltic-Finnic and Slavic peoples, although this has never been recorded.

Moonspots

In the Northern Hemisphere, a common perception of the Moon's spots is a human face. In Lithuania, people believe the spots form a face with a nose, eyes and mouth, and there are similar reports from Estonia (e.g. digital corpus), as well as from the Votes (Ariste 1974: 175). The Belarusian tradition recognises the Moon as the head of John the Baptist (Boganeva & Avilin 2017). The same motif can also be found in the wider Slavic area (Gura 2010). Many believe the spots are connected with the Moon's ability to take people up on its own: we see people who for various reasons have ended up on the Moon. Explanations can predominantly be divided into:

a) visible moonspots marking human activity, or the results thereof on the Moon, for example cabbage patches; the spots being a man on the moon cutting trees, a motif also known in the wider Finnic-Ugric area (Harva 1948: 159);

b) the Moon taking a person up out of pity (mainly a person carrying water).

The major belief about Moon spots, and most common motif apart from a human face, says that we see the figure of a person fetching water, holding water pails in his or her hands. Yuri Berezkin (2010; 2015) has found parallels to this motif among a number of ethnic groups in northern Eurasia, for example in the Baltic-Finnic region, female water carriers predominate (cf. Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2015). The distribution of the 'water carrier on the moon' story in Europe coincides approximately with the distribution of Balts, Slavs and Baltic-Finnic nations. (Balts: Lithuanians (Kerbelite 2001: 70; Laurinkene 2002: 365; Vaiškunas 2006: 158), Latvians (Pogodin 1895: 440). Baltic-Finnic: Estonians (Kuper-

janov 2003: 72), Votians (Ariste 1974: 5; Ernits & Ernits 2011). Slavs: Belarusians (Boganeva & Avilin 2017), Bulgarians and Ukrainians (Gura 2010).) There is also a version of the story in which the main protagonist is male (adult or youth) or two children. This story is less widespread, or is absent, in southern Europe, but in Estonia there is a version featuring a girl in the Moon.

There are three main motifs relating to the female water-carrier on the moon in Estonia:

1. The moon takes someone up out of pity.

The most popular version tells of an orphan (or woman) exhausted from a hard life and endless work who, when carrying water from a spring or brook, asks the Moon to take her up to him. The Moon pities her and takes her up to the sky, where we can see her on moonlit nights (Kuperjanov 2003, see also Votian version: Ernits & Ernits 2011).

There is an adaptation of another well-known astral myth which greatly resembles this legend (e.g. the corpus of astral lore, ERA II 77, 572 (86) Nissi). This is the legend of a man, wolf and bull on the Moon, probably influenced by myths about Ursa Major: a poor farmer is on the road with his horse and cart when a wolf attacks the horse; all three of them are taken up to Heaven because the Moon feels sorry for them.

2. The Moon takes someone up for insolence.

A woman carries water buckets and asks the Moon for help. When the Moon does not help, she abuses it and the Moon snatches her away. This motif is less common.

> In the old times once there was a woman who went to fetch water. She had shoulder poles with buckets on them. It was late evening and the Moon was shining. She looked up and was in a bad mood about having to fetch water so late: 'Why are you lazing about? Take the poles, you try carrying them, see if it's easy!' The Moon promptly snatched her right up

together with the buckets: 'Now you'll have it good and easy here!' For this reason there is a human face in the Moon. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 77, 281/2 (74) Hageri)

3. A criminal act leads to the character ending up on the Moon, for example public sex in the moonlight, stealing, insulting the Moon or arrogant behaviour. Some texts are related to Christian protagonists. Well-known characters from the Bible and the Apostles end up on the Moon for their wrongdoings, stories that often revolve around fratricide.

Motifs of punishment for offending the Moon by breaking a law or taboo in the moonlight are widespread in Estonia. These transgressions can either be theft (a globally known motif), wife killing (in south Estonia), an act of love (in west and north Estonia) or insulting the Moon (in Lutsi, Estonia a woman said her bottom was whiter than the moon). There are no gender differences, both men and women can be taken up to the sky.

An intriguing taboo is found among belief motifs: anyone ***in the sauna late on a Saturday evening (or generally late)*** will be taken to the Moon. Many north Eurasian peoples share the obligation to leave the sauna for the spirits, specifically for Christ, Mary, God or nature spirits who either live there or arrive at dusk. "I've heard that Christ went to the sauna and was holding a whisk. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 163, 261 (39) Setumaa).

Another very widespread motif, in addition to the water carrier, is the story about ***tarring the Moon***. Moonlight is too bright for those wanting to carry out sinful or nefarious acts so perpetrators tar the Moon. The evildoer gets stuck in the tar or is pulled (often with the tubs of tar) up to the Moon, where we can still see him.

The following two examples describe crime and moon-tarring motifs:

> A man had killed his wife. The Moon was watching and laughing: 'I see you!' The man grew angry and took a pot of tar and a brush. He climbed up onto the Moon and started to tar it. His hand was shaking. In some places there was a lot of tar; in others very little. That's why the Moon is spotted. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 115, 644 (3) Urvaste)

> A boy took buckets of tar and went to tar the Moon so that it would not throw its light on him when he went stealing. But he got stuck in the tar. Since then there has been a Moon boy on the Moon, his hands spread wide, holding buckets of tar. (Corpus of astral lore, RKM II 195, 688/9 (9) Iisaku)

Votian writing indicates that the shadows of three thieves can be seen on the surface of the Moon. The three men went to the Moon to cover it with tar because they wanted to go thieving, but there was moonlight. So they decided to tar the moon, but they got stuck there (Posti 1980: 203).

All three of the main Estonian motifs have widespread parallels in other groups. Among the Samis, the Sun takes a girl to give her in marriage to his son and throws her onto the Moon with her pails (Charnoluski 1930). Other eastern parallels are found among the Komi-Zyrian, Komi-Permiak, Udmurt, Chuvash, Mari, Bashkirs, Volga Tatar, Samoyed, Selkup, Khanti, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. A few versions are found in Archangelsk and other places close to Finno-Ugric areas (Gura 2010), although this list could certainly go on if we consider the subject matter of additional Finno-Ugric people and more recent Slavic sources. For example, in the Moksha version, Škai, the king of the gods, does not permit the Moon to be looked at for long. Whoever violates this prohibition would be beheaded by the king of the gods; to this day they stand by Škai's table on the Moon (Devjatkina 2008). The Komi people had other common motifs in addition to the

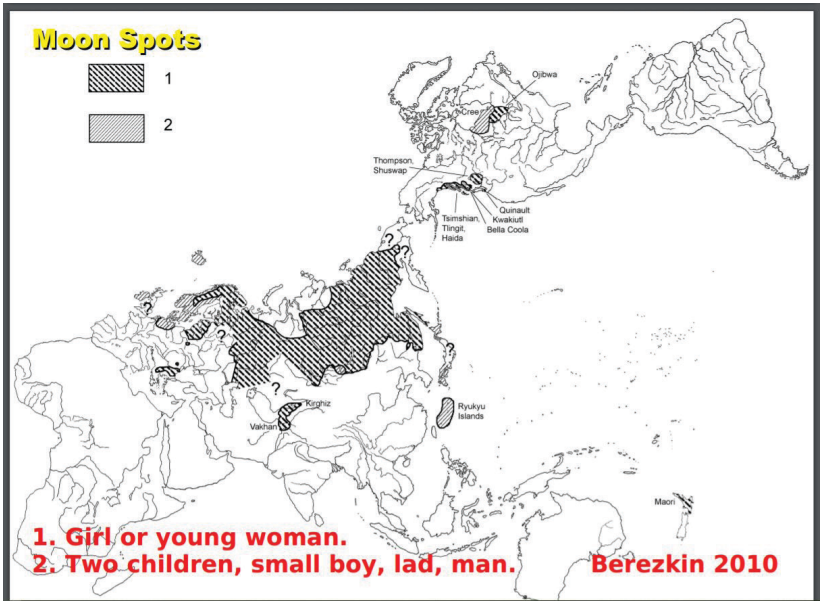
story of the orphan ending up on the moon. At the same time, the story of an orphan who was tortured by her evil stepmother and taken by the Moon at her request, together with her shoulder poles and buckets, is the most popular and is part of the corpus of origin and explanatory legends. The Moon answered the request of the orphan and the god Jen expressed gratitude by declaring the Moon his own creation (Konakov 2003). One Komi-Permiak fairy tale with a mythical background tells the tale of a man and a woman with three daughters. A black bear came to ask for the hand of the eldest daughter, a black raven came to ask for the hand of the middle daughter and the Moon came to ask for the hand of the youngest daughter. The suitors were turned down, but they waited until the girls left the house to work and then kidnapped them regardless. Later, they invited the parents of the girls to visit them. All three took human form when they appeared before the parents (Konakov 2003).

Yuri Berezkin (2010) finds that some peoples in Asia and America have the same motif of the water carrier on the Moon: the Kazakh, Kirgiz, Kets, Khakas, Evenki, Nanai, Lamut, Nikhv, Buryat, Mongolians, Japanese, Ainus, Chinese and Tlingit, as well as some Palaeoasiatic peoples like the Chukchi, Koryak and Kamchadal.

It is interesting to note that predominantly Lutheran Estonians, Finns and Latvians have few astral myths with Christian or Biblical protagonists, especially when compared to Orthodox Slavic peoples (Gura 2010, or Boganeva & Avilin 2017). However, many Europeans do indeed see Biblical characters, saints and historical figures on the Moon. One of the few such beliefs held by Estonians is that the spots are the result of a quarrel or argument between the brothers Cain and Abel (cf. the corpus of astral lore, ERA II 206, 100 (22) Mustjala). The motif of fratricide (Cain and Abel) is widespread in Lithuania (Vaiškunas 2006, citing also Balys 1951: 9–11) and Belarus (Boganeva & Avilin 2017).

Belarusians also link fratricide to other Biblical characters who can be seen on the Moon for similar reasons, for example the sons of Noah, one of whom killed the other, Abraham and Isaac, and the Apostles Peter and Paul.

These beliefs are most widespread in European Slavic areas. Adam and Eve, the icon of Matthew the Evangelist, Saint George frightened by lightning or playing musical instruments, a chained Satan crucified by God, the witch Twardowski from Krakow, the Tsars Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great and the piebald head of King Marko's horse are just a few of the Biblical and historical persons, based on research by Gura.

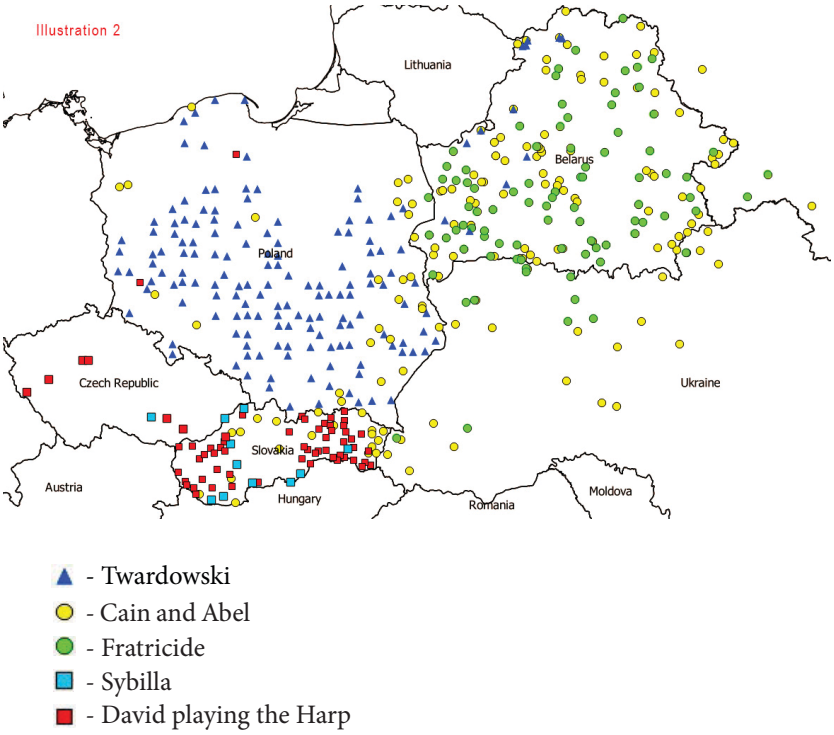


Ill. 1. The distribution maps prepared by Yuri Berezkin show that the motif of the water carrier is widespread among Eurasian and North American people.

This list also features a local Lithuanian–Polish–Belarusian motif – it is believed that in the Moon we can see the legendary Lithuanian–Polish wizard Tvardauskas or Twardowski, whom the Devil took to Hell but lost on the Moon (Vaiškunas 2006: 176, Balys 1951: 9–11); the motif of the wizard Twardowski, who owns the black book and sold his soul to the Devil, on the Moon is known in western parts of Belarus (Boganeva & Avilin 2017).

Summaries on the subject of Moon myths

Where many myths and religious beliefs are concerned the question of the potential for universal myths shared by people in different regions arises. (See the maps for the dominant local motifs.) The image of a living Moon and the Moon as a place to live were definitely universally known in the beliefs of a number of regions. The most popular Moon myths are very widely known indeed, the distribution areas stretching across the world at similar latitudes. Beliefs related to Moon spots are also universal: the image of a human head or a human is present in both hemispheres and various regions. At the same time, it is clear that in northern Europe the spots are rarely associated with animals, while animals provide a popular motif in the southern hemisphere and among many American nations. The water carrier motif popular among Baltic-Finnic people is widespread in northern Eurasia. However, the male version of the water carrier is more widely known in Asia and also in a more local area in North America. Given the widespread nature of ancient water carrying methods, the motif should be known much further away. The next question pertains to whether more concentrated collection efforts, for example in African and American communities, would demonstrate the existence of this motif. Migration and other aspects of transnationality have helped to spread motifs, meaning that this kind of development is not impossible.



Ill. 2. The distribution of the Twardowski motif in Belarus and Poland, map by Boganeva and Avilin 2017.

The most common motifs in our Moon spot stories are related to the special power the Moon has to take people up, at its own discretion, for example pity, as a punishment for giving offence to the Moon, or for performing immoral or forbidden acts. People share the system of norms and prohibitions that result in some ending up on the Moon out of mercy or as a punishment, for example point a finger at, mocking or ridiculing sacred objects was banned, as were commit discountenanced acts in moonlight (theft, sex or slaughter). These prohibitions represent core values the violation of which is followed by symbolic punishment. The

norms are invariable, for example working during divine liturgy leads to a real or mythical punishment.

The tradition related to Moon spots also has regional traits, meaning that it is important to map the traditions of different nations, including small ethnic groups. Baltic-Finnic people have other astral myths related to Moon spots (for example the myth of the origin of Ursa Major). Some stories related to Moon spots serve as warnings, and can be found in the constellation names in sky atlas produced by a number of European nations. In the traditions of Baltic-Finnic Orthodox contact people fratricide is punished with banishment to the Moon. Such stories reflect the patterns, events and characters of Biblical myths – important Christian characters or the Devil serving his punishment can be seen on the Moon. In the myths of neighbouring and contact nations, historical persons appear together with saints and characters from the Bible. This is a reference to various rulers, but also to the semi-mythological witch Twardowski from Lithuanian-Polish-Belarus territory.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the protagonists and main actors in Baltic-Finnic legends are ordinary people, usually poor peasants who farm the land. This determines the social framework and time of the stories as prior to the 19th century. Widespread orphan or slave-child motifs create interesting associations. The sad fate of the orphan (alongside the motif of baby killers) is part of the folklore and literary leitmotifs of the 18th and 19th centuries. The social and economic defencelessness and tragic fate of children raised without parents were expressed in hundreds of songs in the older song tradition of northern Estonia, giving cause to define orphan songs as a distinct sub-genre. The motif of the fate of the orphan is represented not only in legends, but also in fairy tales (to make use of the type terminology employed in folkloristics). It should also be noted that the orphan in Baltic-Finnic myths is a girl. But the question here is not whether the

popular legal system (which was based on verbal agreements) was enough to protect orphans, solitary or seriously ill people – no system can do so completely. Instead, the myths provide us with a powerful artistic and psychological generalisation.

The man on the Moon has spread in oral heritage as well as in literary fiction, and both strata – oral and literary – have influenced each other. In children's books, the Moon is often a kind of Moon-man. Although the Estonian language lacks gender and the Moon has none, contextual hints lead us to conclude that the Moon is male. We also see allusions to this in old epic songs (the daughter of Day marries the Moon and they sit together on the edge of the world). In the 19th century and more recently, visual media has played its part, for example postcards, book illustrations, etc., depict the Moon as male.

It is interesting how often Moon myths found their way into 19th-century primers and school textbooks, where they were chosen as one example of national mythology. The water carrier on the Moon obviously fitted in well because of its human(itarian) message: there is always hope in a difficult situation. The story also has key concepts of ethnic identity, i.e. pointing out the difficult situation and backbreaking workload of the poor (Estonians being lower-class labourers). The humour and didactic messages found in other stories, for example tarring the Moon, made it an indispensable school myth. To sum up, the most important Moon-related astral myths and narratives expressed the sort of messages that would fit with the rising national movement whilst retaining the importance of the stories in the mythological efforts of the 20th and 21st centuries.

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On the Religious Manuscript Tradition of the Upper Vychegda: The 'Singers of the Good News' as Part of Komi Religious Folklore

Pavel Limerov

Abstract: The Komi mystical sect known as the Burs'ylys'ians (Komi 'бурсьылысьяс', the 'Singers of Good'), is a unique phenomenon in domestic religious culture that, at the same time, has parallels in a number of Russian mystical movements, such as Khlysty, Skoptsy, Dukhobors, etc. To date, the doctrine of the Burs'ylys'ians and their cult practices, which received a lively response among the Komi population of Verkhnevychegda volost, remain a mystery. This is due, first of all, to the limited study of the handwritten religious literature created by the Singers and the repertoire of spiritual songs. This article describes the Singers' monument of literature, a liturgical text outlining the basics of their faith, including what prospective followers of Burs'ylys'ians need to know about salvation, but above all about the path that leads to Communion with God, i.e. meeting God. The manuscript is called "Cathedral Rank" and is introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

Keywords: Singers of Good, creed, religious literature, mysticism, conversation, inner cry, the heart's eye

In recent decades, the study of monuments of written religious folklore, concentrated in the manuscript collections of village believers, has gradually entered the circle of topical problems of folkloristics and ethnology. A fairly representative article by Y. M. Shevarenkova, which precedes the collection of texts, correctly outlines the boundaries of this topic, a brief historiography of which can be found here (Shevarenkova 2008: 5–29). Our article is about the religious manuscript tradition of the Upper Vychegda, a region where the mystical sect known as the Burs'ylys'ians, the 'Singers of Good', operated from the end of the 19th century until relatively recently. The phenomenon is to a certain extent unique because the followers of the Singers created a manuscript in the Upper Vychegda dialect of the Komi language even before the norms of the modern Komi literary language, which is based on the Prisyktyvkar dialect, were established. Aleksandr Chuviurov raised the question of the status of women in the sect (2001, 2002 2004), although this topic requires additional research. The task of my article, however, is the doctrine of the sect, i.e. more in the field of folk theology.

The Vologda diocesan office became aware of Stefan Artemyevich Ermolin as the founder of heretical doctrine, in contrast to the dogma of the Orthodox Church, at the very beginning of the twentieth century. The priest of the Myeldinskaya church in Ust-Sysolsky uyezd, of which Stefan Ermolin was a parishioner, reported to the authorities about the independent 'admiration' of spiritual teaching by the peasant Ermolin. Allegedly this peasant arranged spiritual conversations, distracting parishioners from church services. In 1905 the diocesan office forbade Ermolin from teaching, he was given a written instruction not to hold further

spiritual meetings, and a fine was imposed (Gagarin 1978: 219). However, diocesan sanctions led to nothing and Ermolin continued his activities. In 1912 a special mission was sent to Ust-Sysolsky uyezd to investigate the phenomenon of Ermolin. As a result an article was published in the "Vologda Diocesan Vedomosti", the author of which did not specify his name, signing the article with the pseudonym Vologzhanin (Vologzhanin 1912, Nos. 19, 20, 21, 22).

Stefan Ermolin was born in the village of Myeldino and belonged to the peasant class. Having received his primary education in a parochial school, he was engaged in peasant labour until he made pilgrimages to the holy places of Russia including various monasteries. It is obvious that Ermolin was a religiously gifted man who spoke Russian well, knew the Holy Scriptures and had an understanding of liturgy. Ermolin's knowledge of the Russian language suggests that for some time he lived in the Russian provinces, where he could familiarise himself with the activities of Russian mystical sects[1].

By the time he began his independent religious activity in 1895, Ermolin had an idea of the liturgical gatherings of Russian sectarians, the so-called "conversations" ('beseda') and "passions" ('radeniya')[2]. This is why he called his gatherings *burkyvzöm*. This word, with the light hand of the very same Vologzhanin, is translated as "conversation" (Vologzhanin 1912 (19): 478), although this is not quite correct. The analogue of the Russian word conversation in the Komi language is the word *sörni* 'conversation', 'talk' (буркывзӧм). It is quite likely that Ermolin could not call his meetings using the neutral *sörni*, so he invented the neologism *burkyvzöm* by combining two words, *bur* + *kyvzöm* ('good' + 'listening'). This word combination is not used in the spoken Komi language, but in a religious context it acquires connotations unusual for neutral speech. *Burkyvzöm* literally translates as 'good listening', in other words 'listening to the Good News', i.e. the Gospel. Accordingly,

Ermolin calls himself *burvištalys*, i.e. a 'teller of the Good News', an 'evangelist'[3]. The same neologisms are used for Ermolin's associates as a group, i.e. *bursylylysyas*, literally 'those who sing the Good News', or 'Singers of the Good News', in addition to which Ermolin's parishioners were *burkivzylysyas*, 'those who listen to the Good News'[4].

Initially Ermolin helped local priest Savvati Sumarkov, translating his sermons into Komi to make them accessible to parishioners, although he soon began to preach on his own. Yuri Gagarin, who studied this issue, notes that Ermolin translates psalms, something from the Psalter into Komi, and also composes spiritual songs (Gagarin 1978: 218). The remark is important because translations and independent creativity in the Komi language later become a characteristic feature of the activity not only of Ermolin himself, but also of subsequent adherents to the doctrine *of Burs'ylys'ians*. Thus, the reason for Ermolin's success among the peasants of Myyölda volost was the language factor: his sermons in the Zyryan language were understood by the parishioners. The fact is that at the end of the 19th century the ancient class privileges of the Zyrian clergy were breaking down and Russian priests who did not know the Komi language began to be assigned to Zyrian parishes more and more often. While Zyrian priests could explain the words of the sermon to parishioners by translating it into the Komi language, Russian priest could not do so. Because of this, there was inevitably a language gap between priests and parishioners that could only be crossed by learning the Zyrian language. Against this background, Ermolin's preaching in the parishioners' native language became more acceptable than a temple service in incomprehensible Church Slavonic.

However, language was hardly the only factor. An important role was also played by the religious charisma of Stefan Ermolin himself, without which the success of his preaching would not have

been as comprehensive. Called to investigate the phenomenon of Ermolin, Vologzhanin writes:

> Stephen has some special power that attracts people to him. As people are drawn to any sin or wine, so they are drawn to Stefan. Women leave their homes, their children, their cattle without any pity and spend time until midnight. Nothing is spared just to see and hear Stephen. One man said of his wife: "She is a literate woman. I have the Gospel, a prayer book and other books. Pray, I tell her, at home – so no, at home there is no diligence (Vologzhanin 1912 (19): 480).

Elsewhere in the same article Vologzhanin complains that the women of Myyolda prefer Ermolin's sermon to the liturgy, travelling twenty miles to the village of Ust-Nem to hear him, and the men who had been to church said: "The batiushka spoke well today, he must have learnt from our uncle Stephen!" (Vologzhanin 1912 (22): 558).

In 1912, the 'Stepan faith' embraced five Verkhnevychegodsk parishes in the villages of Myeldino, Ust-Nem, Pozheg, Bolshelug and Don. In terms of social composition, the adherents of the bursiylysyas were peasants, among whom women predominated.

Ermolin's religious authority was also supported by his gift of 'clairvoyance': it was as if he could hear the thoughts of others, could find out about events in a place far away from him, and could determine the degree of sinfulness of the person standing before him. The impact of Ermolin on ordinary people was enormous. Having joined his conversations, many stopped drinking alcohol and smoking, and began to lead decent lives. Answering Vologzhanin's questions, peasants noted that after Ermolin's sermons their lives changed. Thus, one of Ermolin's followers, A. D. Chistalyov, pointed out that before he led "a thin and sinful life", but after lis-

tening to Stephan, he completely changed and felt joy in his soul (Vologzhanin 1912 (20): 506).

Ermolin's authority was also supported by the parishioners' belief in his holiness, in the grace given to him by God. His holiness was confirmed by rumours that his clothes glowed, and that there were "luminous circles", i.e. halos, over the heads of his followers. A sign of Ermolin's holiness was also his visions. In his conversation with Vologzhanin he confessed that his ministry began after he was shown a vision of two crosses, one simple the other eight-pointed, a vision that gave him faith (Vologzhanin 1912(20): 511). The invisible cross can be seen only with what Vologzhanin calls "the heart's eye", i.e. spiritual sight, which ordinary ministers of the church do not have.

The concept of spiritual sight lies at the heart of Stefan Ermolin's teaching and is one of the most significant components of the mystical component of his Burkyvzöm discussions. It is a special grace, sent down by God to the most worthy *бурсыылысьяс(burs'ylys'ias)* adherents. With "heart eyes" one can see Jesus Christ and angels, invisible crosses that are given in the 'high world' to the organisers of discussions, halos over the heads of the most faithful of Ermolin's associates; in other words, one sees the true state of affairs with inner sight. To Vologzhanin's remark that his visions of the cross with his 'heart's eye' could be a delusion, Ermolin replied that the devil could appear to a person in various ways, but not in the form of a cross. The custom of Burs'ylys'ians to lower their eyes, not to look directly at a person when talking, and for women to cover their faces with a handkerchief – "If you look at a person, you will see neither Jesus nor angels" – is also connected with notions of spiritual sight.

According to Y. Gagarin, the Burs'ylys'ians were characterised by "deification" of their preachers (Gagarin: 220). It is not quite clear whether the Burs'ylys'ians recognised Ermolin as an incarnation of Jesus Christ. Gagarin notes that Ermolin's admirers called

him Christ and behaved as if they would drink the water in which he washed his feet (Gagarin 1978: 220). Vologzhanin also gives similar examples, with among Ermolin's sins the most prominent being the self-declaration of his teaching title. Most likely, we are talking about some signs of Ermolin's 'godlike' rather than divine incarnation, as is characteristic of Christovism. Nevertheless, the influence of Christovism can be detected in the idea of the possible incarnation of the Virgin Mary in any of the female Burs'ylys'ians. For example, Vologzhanin writes about a repentant woman who confessed that she was considered "the Mother of God" among the Burs'ylys'ians. She was allegedly mentally ill at that time and does not remember anything about it (Vologzhanin 1912 (21): 582). While Vologzhanin mentions only one such case, Gagarin writes that in the 1920s incarnations of "godmothers" were multiple (Gagarin 1978: 253). In an ecstatic state, which was explained by the descent of the Holy Spirit called *Duk pyr addzöm*[6], women godmothers uttered prophecies. The strengthening of the 'god-bearer' prophetic aspect in the Burs'ylys'ians movement can be explained by the general eschatological mood of society in the post-revolutionary period, as well as by some changes in attitude towards ecstaticism in the ritual practices of the Burs'ylys'ians that took place after Ermolin's death. Thus, in the 1920s the rite of "dying and resurrection" appeared, when during prayer one of the participants suddenly "died" and was "resurrected" and would then tell others about his or her visions (Gagarin 1978: 253).

Initially, Ermolin's lectures were limited to reading and interpreting the Psalter and the Holy Scriptures translated into Komi. However, some time later, a certain structure of conversations known as *burkyvzöm* appeared, involving alternating reading and interpretation of liturgical texts, singing spiritual verses and preaching by Ermolin himself. Accordingly, the burkyvzöm stretched over the whole day, with small breaks for meals and rest for the preacher. The general schedule of conversations is known

from the records of diocesan missionaries: it was first presented, with some condescension and irony, by the same Vologzhanin (Vologzhanin 1912 (19): 479), but is considered in more detail in Gagarin's work: "general morning prayer, tea drinking, preaching and interpretation of the Scriptures, lunch, singing of spiritual songs, tea, conversation with the preacher, singing, tea and dinner, evening prayer, akathist" (Gagarin 1978: 25). Ermolin sat in the red corner on a cushion; next to him were his singers, actually Burs'ylys'ians. The interlocutors sat on benches facing the preacher and the icons. All those who wished to listen to Ermolin could not fit on the benches as according to the same Vologda missionary from thirty to sixty people gathered for these conversations. They all had to be fed, and a conversation was quite expensive for a peasant family, about three to five roubles. As a compensation for material expenses, the family acquired spiritual gifts. For example it was believed that the host who organised a conversation received an invisible copper cross, for organising a second a silver cross, and for the third a gold one. At the same time, the third conversation was equal to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and for this the sins of the whole family were cancelled. The conversation itself was equal to the Divine Liturgy.

It is important to note the ecstatic impact of the conversations. Vologzhanin writes that people during the conversation "lose their mental balance" and look crazy. This state of incomprehensible joy people call *Yen kodön kodalöm*, 'Drunkenness from God'. It is as if the Holy Spirit descends on them and they become drunk: "their mirth is in the name of Christ". From the looks of it these people gave the impression that they had been drinking alcohol (Vologzhanin 1912 (19): 481). Gagarin explains the religious ecstasy by the fact that during the conversation the believers were in complete detachment, made long "exhausting prayers" and listened to or indulged in "dreary singing" (Gagarin 1978: 219).

These components, of course, had an impact on the interlocutors, although they were hardly the main factors.

The nature of entering the ecstatic state is not clear, although according to the ethnographer I. N. Ilyina, in 1981 one of the informants reported that a female Bursylysys who came from Myeldino village in the early 1906s to Dzol village taught people to pray in circles, although nobody succeeded in doing this. This fact is eloquent evidence that the Bursylysys practised special actions similar to the circumambulation of Christovism (Panchenko 2002: 235–311).

It is obvious that Ermolin possessed some techniques for entering an ecstatic state: people interviewed by Vologzhanin pointed to his 'spiritual drunkenness' and his state of general communion with the Holy Spirit. As one witness to the conversations says, "a state of general joy" was more attractive to the peasants than a church dinner. In addition, peasants came to the conversations to listen to prophets from among the Burs'ylys'ians, who had access to certain channels of sacred information during conversation. Prophecy initially occupied an important place in the Burs'ylys'ians movement, but in the 1920s, apparently due to the increased eschatological moods in society after the revolution, prophets became especially numerous. A contemporary researcher Aleksandr Chuviurov writes that an OGPU report from 1925 reported that among the Burs'ylys'ians there were already about 80 women prophets (Chuviurov 2001: 78). The structure of the sect's prayer meetings also changed during the 1920s. As Gagarin notes, the conversations in the Komi language retained their importance, but along with them the rite of dying and resurrection appeared, during which one or more people fell to the floor during prayer and 'died', remaining in a state of complete insensibility for about two hours before being 'resurrected', i.e. coming to their senses. They were then blessed with the sign of the cross while repeating "Christ is risen!". The resurrected told of their meetings with God and

angels, but most often with the souls of the dead (Gagarin 1978: 253). This rite was practiced for quite a long time and certainly living witnesses were encountered during the field expeditions of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the Upper Vychegodsk villages. According to their stories, the rite was performed in a circle with those praying standing against each other singing spiritual songs while they waited for the Holy Spirit to descend. When the Spirit descended on someone, he or she 'fell dead', and when they awoke spoke about their visions. According to Evdokia Timovna Shakhova from the village of Pozheg, as a rule, prophets met with parents while 'dead'. Pozheg had its own prophets, but the prophets from Myyoldino enjoyed the greatest authority. Between the 1930s and 1960s such a prophetess was Nasta pöč ('grandmother Nasta'), who, living in Myöldino, knew the news in Požega better than the Požega people themselves. She is believed to have predicted the beginning of the Second World War and its end. According to an informant, there was no radio in the village, and no one knew the news. But Nasta used to run around the village in the early morning on 9 May shouting "*Görd petuk vermis!*" ('The red rooster has won!'), heralding the victory of the Red Army.

The religious practices of the Burs'ylys'ians came to an end during the repressions of the late 1930s, when the most prominent of the clergy were arrested. They never returned to the villages, so the tradition of clergy was interrupted. Nevertheless, religious life in the villages of Upper Vychegodsk did not cease, despite repression, direct prohibitions and active atheist propaganda. Throughout the Soviet years communities of believers took responsibility for ritual life in these villages. They held services on local feast days and on some major Orthodox holidays, but mainly performed baptism and burial rites. At present, these communities no longer consider themselves to be Burs'ylys'ians, although they perform the same spiritual songs and use (rewrite) their manuscripts, or create new ones based on the manuscript tradition of Burs'ylys'ians.

The content of the *burkyvzöm* 'conversations' corresponded mainly to the order of prayers, readings and hymns from the Service Book of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, a significant number of readings were in the Komi language, and the hymns included non-canonical spiritual songs in Russian and Komi. A joint meal held with the Singers and parishioners had the symbolic meaning of the connection of the gathered with God, functionally replacing the sacrament of the Eucharist. The interpretation of sacred texts by Ermolin himself and his sermons were important, although the information of missionaries and researchers does not contain information about special service texts that would systematically present his teachings.

The manuscript monuments of the Burs'ylys'ians, widespread in the Upper Vychegodsk villages, could shed light on the foundations of Ermolin's doctrine. However, they were of no interest to researchers of the Soviet period because of their religious content. Only in the late 1990s and early 2000s, thanks to the works of Aleksandr Chuviurov (2002: 62–69; 2004: 385–415) did they become interesting. The recent work of Ekaterina Prokuratova considers the Gospel stories in the manuscript tradition of the Upper Vychegodsk Komi (Prokuratova 2018: 458–481). The spiritual poems and prose published by these researchers are mainly translated from manuscript collections from the Russian tradition. Accordingly, their content does not reflect the theology of the Singers.

In 2000, 2004, and 2005 we conducted special field research in the villages of Pozheg, Myyöldino, Ust-Nem, and Pomozdino, villages where the Singers were particularly active. In the course of these expeditionary studies we obtained new materials that significantly expand our understanding of both the oral and manuscript tradition of the Upper Vychegda. First of all, it is a living tradition of singing songs with spiritual content in Komi and Russian (many were not translated from Russian). I was also

surprised by the composition of the collections, in which, along with the classical spiritual poems "About Alexei, the Man of God", the apocryphal "Dream of the Virgin" and "The Walking of the Virgin in Torment" were found in the Komi language. Manuscript collections are compiled in ordinary notebooks of 12, 18, 36, 96 sheets. There can be from one to twenty or more such collections in a family, depending on the literacy of the owner or the degree of his or her immersion in the religious tradition. For example, in the family of Raisa Ivanovna Zaikova, a resident of the village of Myyöldino, we recorded about 12 manuscript collections in notebooks of various formats. The manuscript collections once belonged to her relative Tekusa Ivanovna Zaikova and her husband Efim Egorievich Zaikov, who led the local religious community between 1950 and 1970. These are mainly collections of akathists, songs, and prayers in Komi and Russian, with the Komi texts mainly being translations from Russian. Our attention was drawn to two notebooks that do not follow the general trend.

On notebook 1, with a blue cover and 24 pages, the cover reads, "*Söbirajtchöm rad*". The text is written in cursive, in the Upper Vychegodsky dialect of the Komi language, using Russian church vocabulary. Notebook 2 consists of 30 sewn sheets under a cardboard cover. In the main part, the texts of both notebooks are identical, although notebook 1 lacks an introduction and spiritual songs, and there are also differences in the content of the text. Thus, the text of notebook 1 is incomplete in relation to notebook 2, and has some distortions. The title *Söbiraitchöm rad* consists of two Russian words adapted for the Komi language, so the meaning of the Komi version of the phrase differs from the Russian. In Komi it should be translated as *Soborny Chin* because the word *rad* (Rus. 'row') is used here as a synonym for the word 'order', 'rank'. This service text is Burs'ylys'ians, most likely being composed to be read or sung at conversations. According to information from

informants, today *Söbiraitchöm rad* (hereinafter *Chin*) was read in the context of funeral and memorial rites.

The content of these notebooks, in our opinion, is the service of the Burs'ylys'ians. The discovery is important, because the information about the service of the Singers, as well as about the peculiarities of their doctrine, is rather vague. Meanwhile, the study of the foundations of the doctrine born in the folk environment actualises the question of the problem of folk theology. In fact, all religious folklore, including folk hagiography, as well as the religious manuscript tradition, are not folk (folklore) theology. This is especially true of such phenomena as the Burs'ylys'ians, where knowledge of the basics of Orthodox dogma was cultivated and other interpretations of it were born.

The aim of this paper is to translate and analyse the text of the *Cöbiraitchöm rad* "Soborny Chin" and to try to find from it some aspects of the folk theology of the Singers.

In terms of composition, *Söbiraitchöm rad* consists of an Introduction and a main section. The Introduction consists of three parts entitled "Songs"on 3 pages; the main text is a sequence of 37 separate Songs. Unlike the Introduction, the Songs of the main text are numbered: Song 1, Song 2, etc. The Songs also include several spiritual songs, labelled in the notebook as "Prayers". Song in this case is opposed to the ordinary song, for this genre in the Komi language there is a word sjylankyv "song", and the performance of spiritual songs is reflected in the self-name of the sect - Burs'ylys'ians. To all appearances, the Söbiraitchöm rad were sung by one or several readers during the divine service. The texts of the Songs are not syntactically arranged into sentences, dots and commas have no punctuation value, they, together with vertical dashes, divide the text into rhythmic pauses. For example:

"Rememberöy Gospoddlis. / Bordasasni kydchi i orolyas. Quitelya veritchei Gospod setas fortress aslasi yozli" (Remember the Lord. The patient will be changed and strengthened. / They

will soar like eagles. Have full faith, the Lord will give strength to his people" (l. 1).

The numerous insertions of the union "and" between words serve for the convenience of singing and also have no semantic meaning. In general, the author of the text had no idea about modern Komi grammar, including orthography. For example, he uses "щ" instead of "дж", "ч" instead of "дз", "е" instead of "э", "и" instead of "ы", does not know the separating properties of the soft sign. Such "mistakes" suggest that the author wrote this text before the adoption of grammatical norms of the Komi language in the 1920s. The imitation of printed semi-ustav, the use of the ъ sign at the end of words in some places of the main part also suggest that the text was rewritten from an earlier protograph. Among the peculiarities of the text are the multiple inclusions of words of Russian and Church Slavonic vocabulary in the structure of the text: "Blessed is Christos the God and our God, who very wisely sent them the Spirit and the Holy One" (Blessed is Christos the God and our God, who very wisely sent them the Spirit and the Holy One). 2) In this sentence there are six words of Church Slavonic vocabulary, even though these words can be found analogues in the Komi language. This inclusion of Church Slavonic words indicates the intention to bring the text closer to the church liturgical format. For the same purpose the author gives additional Christian religious shades of meaning to Komi words, for example, in the above sentence the word kysysys literally translates as "hunter", but in this context it has the meaning "catcher".

All these details allow us to presumably date the text to the beginning of the twentieth century, and its author could very likely be Stepan Ermolin himself. The text of the "Chin" reveals the key provisions of the Ermolin doctrine. These are, firstly, the notion that Ermolin received religious knowledge directly from God himself. Vologzhanin writes about it from the words of Ermolin himself: "Stephen receives knowledge from God, God reveals it

to him. God himself gave him the power to teach" (Vologzhanin, No. 20: 512). Secondly, it is the provision about the cross invisible to ordinary sight, which Vologzhanin calls "the basic doctrine of Stephen" (Vologzhanin, p. 511). (Ibid., p. 511). Thirdly, it is the provision about the inner sight – "heart eyes" (Ibid.) These three aspects of the doctrine of the Singers are known in the literature, but in the first three songs of the Introduction they are revealed in their entirety. The first song, for example, speaks of the necessity of directly perceiving the Law of the Lord through listening to the teaching of the Son:

Remember the Lord. Those who are patient will be changed and strengthened, they will soar like eagles. Have full faith, the Lord will give strength to his people. The Lord will bless his people with peace. When you are strengthened by the Great Spirit, then your spirit will be embraced by long-awaited joy. People-loving Lord, Your Truth was and is the Verb. Easy for me, my son, and good. God is good to me (from) the Law from Thy mouth, better than thousands of gold pieces and silver pieces. On Tabor it was said, He is My beloved Son, listen to Him. That's how Heavenly Father was pleased. May we listen to the teachings of the beloved Son. Through Him man will become pleasing to God."

Помните Господа. Терпеливые переменятся и окрепнут, окрылятся как орлы. Сполна веруйте, Господь даст крепость своим людям. Господь благословит своих людей покоем. Когда вы укрепитесь Великим Духом, тогда твой дух долгожданная радость обнимет. Людей любящий Господь, Истина же Твоя была и Глагол. Легко мне, сын мой, и хорошо. Хорошо же мне (от) Закона из Твоего рта, лучше тысяч золотников и серебряников. На Фаворе было сказано: Он есть Сын Мой возлюбленный, слушайте Его. Вот как было угодно Небесному Отцу.

> Пусть, мы станем слушать учение возлюбленного Сына. Через Него человек станет приятным Богу (Vologzhanin 1912: 1).

Here it is said that the comprehension of the Law requires a certain effort, so the author initially emphasises the concepts of patience and faith: only to the patient and "full" believers the gift of the Holy Spirit descends. Patience and faith make it possible to achieve what, from the theological point of view, is defined as joy – a spiritual uplift, a direct effect of divine grace, which makes it possible to go to the next level: to listen to the teachings of Jesus Christ. This is the covenant of the Heavenly Father, who transmits His wisdom to people through the Son. Listening to the teaching takes place during the conversations-burkyvzöm, and it is assumed that Jesus Christ mystically participates in the conversation, as if he himself were expounding his teaching to the listening Burs'ylys'ians, as he once did to the apostles who became prophets. In Song 5 this position receives a finalised form:

> "Among us Christ himself, by His love and his grace, by his readiness to hear our prayer, our requests fulfils. It pleases and pleases the Lord God because we, with our love for him and our faith and hope in his mercy, gather with his holy name. As, for example, it is pleasing to the Father when children from different directions gather in his hut to celebrate his birthday – or some other holiday. During the conversation, the Lord God is close to us with his mercy, and we are close to him with our hearts and thoughts... Our Lord Jesus Christ instructs us. He said to them, "If anywhere you are gathered together in twos and threes and by My Name, then I am also among you." But if so, then no doubt Christ Himself is also among us" (fol. 5 – 5 ob.).

It is assumed that Jesus is invisibly present at the conversation, but it is also obvious that his direct participation in the conversation through one of the most prepared adepts is assumed. Such was Stepan Ermolin himself - hence the indications of his godhood and his authority in interpreting the Scriptures. There were also bearers of the image of Christ: Vologzhanin mentions a woman-bursylys who called herself Christ (Vologzhanin 1912, No. 20: 482). But the most widespread was still the penetration of the Holy Spirit into some members of the sect, who acquired special gifts of clairvoyance, foresight of the future, and knowledge of the posthumous fates of relatives. It is these people that "Chin" calls "friends of God", prophets, likening them to the apostles "catchers" to whom Christ sent the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the gift of prophecy is manifested as a consequence of patient and unceasing listening to Christ's teachings during the conversations, and serves as an indicator of a person's maximum closeness to God. The motif of hearing is supplemented by the image of spiritual sight - the sight of the heart. It is reported in the third Song of the Introit:

"Lord and Jesus Christ, open my eyes of the heart (komi – sin sjölöm). Your words to hear and understand. Try to live by them, for I am a wanderer on earth. Do not close Your commands from me, but open my eyes and I will understand the wonders of Your Law" (fol. 2 ob.).

The correct understanding and assimilation of Divine Wisdom is possible only with the vision of the heart. This inner vision, seeing with the eyes of the heart is contrasted with physical sight, as listening to the Truth, which presupposes a mystical hearing different from physical hearing. In this opposition of the semantic pair of true hearing and heart sight to the physical, hearing and sight, the opposition of the high spiritual life in the Law of God to the lowly worldly existence (cf.: "God has given them a spirit

of putting to sleep, eyes with which they do not see and ears with which they do not hear" (Rom. 11:8).

True hearing and sight are the gift of Jesus Christ, hence the appeal to him in the third Song: "Lord and Jesus Christ open my eyes of the heart...". But this gift is not valuable in itself, it is nothing more than a tool to liberate the human mind to perceive the mind of Jesus Christ: "Glorify my mind and thoughts with Your bright mind, for You have also illuminated those in darkness who are in darkness. Every gift from You is good, every bestowal is good and full. Lord Jesus Christ, Feast and Light" (fol. 2). Glorification by the mind reveals the mind of man proper, his ability to perceive the teaching of the Son:

"Thy wise teaching help us to comprehend and understand, to savour sweetly. To rejoice and be glad with Your pure conversation, care and diligence, to change our own behaviour and behaviour according to this conversation. From nowhere else can we find such an easy and clear path. As from a shining mirror and from You, to the Holy Gospel incline my heart with Your testimony. Open my hearing from Thy mouth with conversation, turn my eyes that they may not see vanity" (l. 3).

True reason opens to the inner sight access to the Holy Gospel, but just reading the text is not enough, for an adequate understanding of it requires a living conversation with Jesus Christ Himself, His direct testimony to the correctness of understanding. Only in this way can one come to the Way of Jesus Christ, which leads to salvation.

The doctrine of the cross was an important aspect of the doctrine of the Burs'ylys'ians. The cross is spoken of in the second Song of the Introduction:

"Rejoice Russian Orthodox people: a deep, beautiful, priceless gift has been sent to you by God. Even the ancient fathers wandered in darkness, plunging deep into it from ignorance, and you have been appointed to keep the truth, you have been chosen to pray

to the cross. But do not forget the truth even for a time, (do not think) that there is a gift greater than this, you must (you) from the depths of your soul give thanks, use this (gift) wisely, endeavour more, and you must carefully guard this (gift). Carry worthily the banner of the cross of Christ, be a pure utensil of God's grace. Without sleep you must keep this gift. This song was taught by Andrew the First Called, put the cross before you – always be baptised" (fol. 1 ob.).

Contemplation of the cross, seeing the cross, praying to the cross is as much a gift as inner sight. Vologzhanin writes that Ermolin himself taught to constantly "imprint in the heart" the cross, He himself as if he constantly sees it "with his heart's eyes" in his heart and "in the air" (Vologzhanin, No. 20: 511). The author appeals to the authority of Andrew the First-Called, who allegedly approved the sign of the cross before the image of the cross that opens to the inner sight.

It should be noted that the Church accused Ermolin not of deviation from the Orthodox dogmas, but of "admiration" of the teaching title, of self-appointed, without blessing teaching. Of the eight points of the charges brought against Ermolin, his self-appointed teaching comes first, while "the beginnings of mysticism," as the same Vologzhanin calls them, come last (Vologzhanin, No. 22, p. 561). Meanwhile, the point of divergence between Ermolin's teaching and official Orthodoxy was precisely what the missionary called mysticism. The Vologian himself mentions more than once visions of Christ, the Virgin Mary and angels, as if they were available to Ermolin and other Burs'ylys'ians, but treats this fact with a degree of condescension. However, the essence of the doctrine was that it gave its followers the possibility of direct divine communication. This means that any of the followers of Burs'ylys'ians could receive a living response from God in answer to their prayers or requests. The way to this was through the meetings and conversations of the Burs'ylys'ians, at which the

text "Chin" was sung. Apparently, this text not only fulfilled an official function, but was also a guide for inner spiritual training.

If the Introduction is a representation of the main points of the Singers' doctrine, the following 37 Songs set forth everything that a Christian should know about God and salvation, but most of all about the path that leads him to God-communion, to the meeting with God. The beginning of this way is to be found in a spiritual meeting, a conversation – this is stated in the first Song:

"Come, then, and assemble, to the great Divine – sitting. That all men may be saved, attain true knowledge. To turn round, to come alive, to be changed. And by your conversation, cheer and praise God, labour the Lord with gladness. Come to Him with joy" (l. 4).

The conversation Burs'ylys'ians corresponds to the heavenly original: the Law was handed down by the Heavenly Father to the Son, who in turn passed it on in the form of teaching to his apostles-prophets, so that the spiritual assembly inherits the pattern of the apostles' conversations with Jesus Christ in Song 9:

"Mad worldly places of useless conversations. Help me much, Oh Lord, with heavenly conversation, shut my ears tightly, so that vanity's talk may not be heard; from useless staggering both on the broad road and places of commerce" (l. 7).

In Song 9, spiritual conversations are contrasted with worldly conversations as impure conversations, and this opposition is conceptual: henceforth, the participants in proper, spiritual conversations seem to be cut off from the rest of the world, which is directed into darkness, while they, marked by light, walk on the thorny heavenly road to meet the Lord. Not all can move along this path, it is the path of asceticism, the majority prefers just the "broad road", moreover, it is intolerant to those who have chosen the heavenly way: "To whom much has been bestowed, he must in this life often suffer, be afflicted and persecuted all the time" (l. 7). This is the path of prophetic ministry once travelled by the apostles – disciples of Jesus Christ; accordingly, the teaching of the

Burs'ylys'ians is justified by the highest examples. The singers are called to proclaim the teachings of the Saviour to the Zyryan people, hence the constant trips of Stefan Ermolin himself outside his volost, as well as the trips of his adherents to other volosts – they can be classified as missionary trips with good reason.

The following Songs contain instructions on how not to stray from the right path leading to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The adept must renounce "vanity ties" and various sinful thoughts. The mind needs self-control, and the soul needs uninterrupted communication with God, so a person must be in a state of constant prayer:

"Not only when you come to church, but also at other hours do not leave this endeavour: whether you are working or sleeping or walking along the road, eating or drinking or lying down - do not interrupt your prayer, because you do not know when your soul will be demanded, do not wait for the day of Resurrection or a holiday, do not choose separate places, but in different places pray with an inner cry - there is no place for sin" (fol. 13).

"Inner cry" is not just a figure of speech. The skill of inward crying or shouting is achieved through long spiritual work, or, if I may put it this way, long psycho-physical exercises. It means that the adept has completely abandoned his "earthly" sinful cravings that push him into darkness. "...A sacrifice pleasing to God is an inward cry. He who has sorrow for God, who presses away sins from himself, and breathes heavily, though he has lived his age without coping with his works, he will see grace on his last day" (l. 18). The soul of man, delivered from sins, becomes his "inner teacher" who unites him with God. The external manifestation of the inner cry is spiritual singing, which acquires meaning only in this connection: "Stronger than the inner cry of arms there is neither on earth nor in heaven. The inner cry will never be defeated by evil thoughts, spiritual singing is feared by demons" (l. 26). In the last, 37 Songs of the Chin, there is a return to the theme of spiritual conversation with which the story began. However, it is

no longer a spiritual meeting on earth, but a conversation with God himself, and it is the soul purified from earthly things that enters into this conversation:

"My soul, who loves God, nothing is so sweet as the thought of Divine conversation, to whom the time has come, to whom Divine conversation is sweet. If you surrender to God, you will see God. True love leads to a guarded wharf, it is accomplished with Christ. Where love is, there is simplicity; in simple hearts God rests. This will be fulfilled with Christ" (fol. 30).

Thus, the manuscript text "Söbiraitchöm rad" (Sobornyi chin) is an example of the theological literature of the Singers of Good. Its performance during the divine service at the "conversation" also had the function of edification, which outlined the main aspects of the doctrine of the followers of Stefan Ermolin. These are the idea of receiving true knowledge directly from God, the provisions about inner sight and spiritual crosses invisible to the ordinary eye. The main text is composed as a soteriological plot, in the course of the unfolding of which the soul of the adept seeking salvation passes from earthly conversation to heavenly conversation. On this path it acquires qualities such as the sight of the eyes, the inner cry – preparing it for the encounter with God. In addition to its theological value, the text of the Chin has value as an example of folk literature of a religious nature.

In some aspects the Bursylys are similar to the Pentecostals and others. Their uniqueness lies in the Komi language of preaching, as well as in some doctrinal points, which are discussed in the article, especially in its second part, which deals with a liturgical monument, the author of which is presumably Ermolin himself.

Preaching in the Komi language, mass compilation of religious literature in the Upper Vychegodsky dialect of the Komi language, including translations from Church Slavonic, Russian, as well as author's texts – are evidence of ethnic and regional specificity.

Notes

[1] It cannot be excluded that Ermolin was familiar with the spiritual practices of the Old Believers of the neighbouring Kerchomskaya volost and the Old Believer villages of upper Pechora.

[2] By "rejoicing" is meant solemn prayers followed by ecstatic dances, as well as the whole totality of sectarian ceremonial (Panchenko 2002: 235).

[3] Cf. the modern translation of the word Gospel is *Burvisitalöm*.

[4] In literature, as a rule, burvysylys is translated as "singers of good".

[5] A detailed description of the composition of the collections is not included.

[6] Hereinafter the text of "Chin" according to the manuscript (FFIYALI R1205) translated from Komi by the author of this article. Hereinafter we give the texts in translation, the folios are given in brackets.

[7] The Komi peoples (Komi-Zyryans and Komi-Permyaks) belong to the Finno-Permian branch of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The Komi-Zyryans are the indigenous population of the Komi Republic. This article deals with the Komi-Zyryans inhabiting the areas of the upper reaches of the Vychegda River. In the pre-revolutionary period, the ethnonym "Zyryans" was more common.

[8] In the Bursylysiyans movement women dominated quantitatively, but initially only men conducted worship services. After the death of Stefan Yermolin, from the mid-1920s women began to lead the congregations as well. Thus, in Myeldino village, in 1924 the community was led by Ustinya Fedorovna Parshukova, and in the 1960s and 1970s by Tekusa Ivanovna Zaikova. Not much is known about the 'Virgin Marys', only that they could fall into a religious trance and in this state were visited by visions of saints, deceased fellow villagers, and relatives.

[9] During this period, the doctrine of the coming of the Antichrist to the world was actively spread among the Burs'ylys'ians. The Soviet authorities were was declared to be his power, the Soviet government to be the Antichrist's helpers, and Soviet workers and communists to be his servants. Against this background, rumours were spread about the imminent end of the world, when all people on earth would perish,

and only true adherents among the Bursylys would be saved. In the mid-1920s, more than 400 families in Myelda volost abandoned their farms and moved to the upper reaches of the Nem River, waiting for the terrible judgement for a month and a half. Eschatological sentiments came to naught in the 1930s under the influence of collectivisation and repressions (Gagarin 1978: 254).

[10] Ermolin undertook missionary journeys to other volosts. As a rule, women predominated among those accompanying him. After the diocesan authorities banned Ermolin from making these trips, women prophetesses began to go on missions.

[11] A detailed description of the composition of the collections is not included.

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

Reet Hiiemäe

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 (Hiiemäe 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. Hiiemäe 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. Hiiemäe 2004, Hiiemäe 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. (Hiiemäe 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 (Hiiemäe 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 Mauritii 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" (Hiiemäe 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 (Hiiemäe 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 Hiiemäe 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. (Hiiemäe 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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Ethnomedical Ritual in the Context of Rites of Passage. Belarusian Tradition

Tatsiana Valodzina

Abstract: The paper explores folk medical rituals in Belarusian villages and reveals the main conceptual schemes of magic healing. Van Gennep's concept of the rite of passage ("*le rite de passage*") is a starting point for the research. A diseased person is represented as a liminal being in traditional ritual healing; their biological status does not correspond to their social status. A ritual (which is a variant of a rite of passage) is used to correct this condition and replenish or receive new physiological potencies. This ritual is aimed at restoring the social status of the sufferer. At a deep semantic level, Belarusian ethnomedical rituals restore the lost integrity and microstructural equilibrium of the human body, and symbolically recreate the harmony between the human and the Cosmos, neutralise the danger associated with the disruption of their relationship structure, and reestablish the proper status and place of the individual. The paper is based on the data from the late 19th to early 21st centuries. A considerable number of sources come from the author's fieldwork, conducted over the past 20 years as part of an on-going research programme[1].

Keywords: Belarus, folk medicine, folklore texts, rites of passage, liminality, spells, magic practices

Ritualism is such a typical feature of folk medicine that it is impossible to find a folk medical system that lacks it. The phenomenon of ritual healing demonstrates the effect of symbolic activities that are not objectively connected to the etiology of the illness where the connection only exists the individual's mind. Nevertheless, ritual healing, despite being a purely semiotic phenomenon, may lead to subjective, and sometimes even objective improvement in a diseased individual's condition (Tkhostov 2002: 110). Academic medicine has sought to identify the natural and material bases of the rituals, assuming that the curing effect results from specific activities (for example, phytotherapy, physical methods) accompanying the ritual rather than from the ritual itself. But the effectiveness of 'natural' healing methods often significantly decreases in the absence of a ritual, while the ritual activity alone still has an effect. As Lévi-Strauss (1963: 191) argued, "in all these cases, the therapeutic method (which as we know is often effective) is difficult to interpret. When it deals directly with the unhealthy organ, it is too grossly concrete (generally, pure deceit) to be granted intrinsic value. And when it consists in the repetition of often highly abstract ritual, it is difficult for us to understand its direct bearing on the illness".

It is only possible to understand ritual healing if one accepts the idea that an illness is not just the disability of a certain body part, it is first and foremost a reflection in the individual's mind, a mental image that reflects the state of the person's body and ailment. The essence of any explanation of the origin of an illness boils down to a disruption of natural balance and the intervention of the forces of chaos upon the individual's world. Any treatment, then, is a ritual aimed at restoring the familiar and natural order of things. "All etiological constructions (i.e., explanatory mythologies) can be

regarded as a modelling system, because they programme specific types of practice, namely, healing rituals that are in turn practical representations of these myths" (Arnautova 2004: 36).

Explanations for the causes of illnesses fit into the concept of causality typical for a given culture, which is a pivotal element of its worldview and results from its dominant mindset. The mythological consciousness replaces causal relationships with precedents, blends the origin of an object or phenomenon with its essence, and relies on immediate, pre-reflective knowledge. Academic medicine has largely lost track of the strong emotional connection between sufferer and illness. Physicians tend to regard an illness merely as a pathology, even when it has a more profound meaning and implications in the individual's mind. It is precisely this affective aspect of the mythological consciousness that produces symbolic representations, such as those discussed in this article. The author uses the fieldwork materials, which are deposited in the Archive of the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore (AIAHEF) at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. All recordings were made by the author unless specified otherwise.

Ethnomedical practices as rites of passage

Despite differing folk interpretations of their meaning, the semantics of many rituals derive from ancient mythological ideas about the possibility of travelling from one world to another and returning in a new capacity. This common model fits well into Arnold van Gennep's concept of the rite of passage, which was later developed in Victor Turner's work on liminality. In a traditional society, all the spheres of life are regulated, and any changes are accompanied by a ritual aimed at marking the transition and avoiding problems or losses. In such a context, human life is marked by consecutive transitions from one social status to another, from one group to

another with the individual passing through various stages (birth, physical and social puberty, marriage, parenting, status elevation, ageing, death). Each of these stages is accompanied by activities, all of which have the same goal: to ensure the passage of the individual from one definite status to another equally definite status. These rhythms of passage can also be observed in nature, thus Arnold van Gennep compares rites of passage to the rituals that mark celestial changes (van Gennep 1960: 3–4). Van Gennep's ideas were then developed by field researchers. Among them was the English scholar Victor Turner who, while working among the African Ndembu people, compared the initiation rites of the tribal leader to the rituals surrounding a barren woman and discovered that they were based on a common original archetype: the idea of second birth. "What is being washed off in these life-crisis rites is the state of ritual death, the liminal condition between two periods of active social life," wrote Turner (1967: 77). Thus a refinement of research methodology helped to ground Arnold van Gennep's theoretical ideas.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the theory of rites of passage is not a law guiding every ritual but rather an analytical scheme and a research tool. Rites of passage, along with a common goal, share the same three-part structure: "preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)" (van Gennep 1960: 11). Yet van Gennep himself notes that "in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated" (ibid.). Despite this the theory still provides a helpful framework to explain various folk medicine rituals.

Although researchers have drawn attention to Arnold van Gennep's theory in describing individual aspects of folk medicine (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2019, Dutta and Biswas 2019, Fusu 2020, etc.), a comprehensive picture of the healing ritual according to the Rites-de-Passage scheme has not been presented.

The liminal features of a sufferer. At certain moments in his or her life the individual faces crisis situations when a discrepancy occurs between their biological status and their social status. In traditional societies ritual serves as a primary means of eliminating this discrepancy. For example, when a child is born the main purpose of ensuing ritual practices is to strip them of their 'natural' qualities and endow them with 'cultural' features and attributes. In other words, in order for a newborn to become a human being, it is necessary to make them into one with the help of a ritual (Bayburin 1993: 57).

With diseased individuals the discrepancy lies between their physiologically unhealthy state and their social status as a normal, living human being. An illness is an occurrence that disrupts one's daily routine and renders one unable to go about one's usual activities, such as working or carrying out various biological and social functions, i.e. fulfilling their social role in its entirety. As a consequence, the sufferer could drop out of the group, which in traditional societies could make their existence challenging. "An illness is both a biological and a social category, as it is related to a person's need to combine the obligatory, the desirable, and the possible" (Arnautova 2004: 164).

A diseased individual's status is ambiguous and unclear: physically they belong to the human world but symbolically they bear the mark of death and decay, which gives them a transitional, liminal status. When someone was cursed in Belarus, they were called "neither alive nor dead" (Wereńko 1896: 213), cf. Russian *zhit' mertvym* (literally "to live as a dead person") meaning "to be ill, injured" (Ivashko 2003: 416). Recovery is reflected in idioms such as, "as if [he/she] was born for the second time"; "as if [he/she] returned from the next world". The well of life force that allowed the sufferer to resist both external and internal adversities has diminished or run out, necessitating replenishment and the acquisition of new physiological potentialities, as well as a status

adjustment. And in this case, similarly to life cycle rituals, "one way of resolving the tensions that have emerged is used consistently: the natural is transformed into the cultural, the artificial with the help and over the course of a ritual" (Bayburin 1993: 121).

During rituals the negative characteristics of a sufferer as a liminal being, which manifest themselves in both physical and social deficiencies, are transformed into positive ones, leading to the leveling of the individual's status. This means that a diseased individual is not unlike other liminal beings, for example a woman in labour, a newborn, newlyweds, or a deceased person. A sufferer is perceived not only as subject to decay, but also as an impure and dangerous being who is controlled by otherworldly powers. This very status pushes the diseased person to the margins (including temporal and spacial), where appropriate rituals must be conducted. Existing on the margins (which corresponds to van Gennep's separation phase) is a period dominated by chaos and death, a phase of disorganisation when the individual lacks a stable definition, and the universe itself becomes ambiguous. But the healing process is predicated on a symbolic connection to an otherworld from which the life force needed for healing is drawn. The very situation necessitates an acceptance of chaos, as the revival can only start here. "Since every discontinuity in social time is the end of one period and the beginning of another, and since birth/death is a self-evident 'natural' representation of beginning/end, death and rebirth symbolism is appropriate to all rites of transition and is palpably manifest in a wide variety of cases" (Leach 1976: 78–79).

Ritual death as a precondition for the recovery/'rebirth' of the sufferer. Ritual magical healing is similar to other "medial" rites of passage, which combine "the two aspects of a ritual (destroying the old and creating the new) and, consequently, both components of the key dichotomy 'death – birth/revival'" (Bayburin 1993: 171). The inclusion of the concept of death in the semantic field of

disease appears logical even from the perspective of modern common sense, but it should be remembered that in the deeper logic of mythology, death is a necessary prerequisite to revival and new life, i.e. recovery is impossible without it.

The first stage of a rite of passage involves the subject's gradually shedding the qualities that are indicative of their previous status. During this stage, the limits on social interaction and on the capabilities of the sufferer that result from their illness are supplemented by purely ritual requirements of either full or partial isolation. Like a dead body, an ailing individual is often placed on the ground or on an object that has otherworldly symbolic connotations. In Belarus, this object is usually a straw and fur coat (*kazhukh*), often a black one:

> Бабкі лячылі тыя прыпадкі. Некалі бабка кажа, дык яна лажыла на кажух шэрсьцю ўверх, і тады выстрыгла і загаваравала, малітву казала, выскубала з гэтага кажуха, тады выкачавала па цельцы па рабёначку і кідала ў печ.
>
> The village healers (*babki*, literally 'old women') would cure seizures. Once a healer said that she laid [an ill child] on a fur coat turned inside out and then cut [some fur] and said the spell, recited a prayer, pulled out [the fur] from the coat, then rolled it over the child's body and threw it into the stove.
>
> AIAHEF, Smolnica village, Smalyavicki district, Minsk region – T. Valodzina, T. Kukharonak < V. M. Isaychuk, b. 1929 (2010).

> Як спужаецца, на чорны кажух клалі, стрыгуць накрыж тры разы поўсці і кураць яго.
>
> When they are frightened, they are laid on a black fur coat, the fur is cut criss-cross three times and smoke it[2].

AIAHEF, Shylina village, Shumilinsky district, Vitebsk region < Anelya Volkava, b 1914 (1993),

In the case of epilepsy:

трэба на лицо голою задницою систы и сказаты: «Яка гость, така и чэсть». И хутчий кожуха чорного, шоб хто накрыв.

It is necessary to sit on [the sufferer's] face with a bare ass and say: 'The honor befits the guest' (literally 'such a guest, such an honor'). And someone should quickly cover them with a black fur coat (Agapkina 2003: 266).

Straw and fur coats are symbolic as they belong to both the 'cultural' and 'natural' spheres. According to Zbigniew Libera, putting a sufferer on a bed, on the ground, burying them in the ground, or putting them into water, i.e. limiting their mobility, is an act of likening them to a dead body in order to give them the possibility to recover and come back from death and illness to life and health (Libera 1995: 65).

The following ritual may be interpreted as a total desemiotisation (up to depriving a person of his or her name) and return to the 'clean slate' condition associated with birth:

Кончаецца дітына, не могла снуты, плачэ як глуха ніч». Знахар пашаптаў і даў параду: «Не старайцеся паказываць яго, по менью не звітэ і чэрным глаза накрывайтэ». Калі за 9 дзён паправіцца, добра, будзе жыць, а не – памрэ.

'The child is ailing, he cannot sleep, he is crying in the dead of night'. The healer said the spell and gave some advice: 'Try not to point [at him], don't call him by his name, and cover his eyes with black'. If he recovers during the next nine

> days, that is a good sign, he will live; and if he does not, he will die (Strakhov 2005: 175).

Social seclusion is further reinforced by various requirements and taboos concerning food, clothing, and mobility to which the sufferer must adhere. From a traditional point of view, "the initiate is at this stage 'contaminated with holiness': being in a sacred state, he (she) is also dangerous and therefore 'dirty'. Consistent with this ideology, the rituals which bring the initiate back into normal life again nearly always involve such procedures as ritual washing, designed to remove the contamination" (Leach 1976: 78). At this liminal stage, ritual washing and bathing is aimed at separating the person from their previous status and at helping them acquire new qualities. In contrast to the ritual washing of a deceased person or a newborn, which constitutes only part of a rite, water manipulations in ritual healing may have an independent and self-sufficient meaning. Moreover, the initial qualities of such water were imbued with significance, and after the ritual the water that was used in any of the rites of passage was removed from the domestic space and placed into locations with mediative semantics. It should be noted that medical rituals also involved drinking such water, although some of it had to be disposed of anyway. The attributes of the sphere of death are especially evident in the preparatory manipulations. Firstly, water has dominant connotation of wilderness and chaos, which belong to the next world. Water with such qualities was deemed to take away what belonged outside of this world.

One may speculate that washing the sufferer's body in today's medical procedures harks back life cycle rituals where washing was "connected with the logic of the ritual, according to which the protagonist (a bride, a deceased person) must be transferred to the 'primal' (natural) status and only then their passage to the new quality is made possible. Washing and the lack of clothing

that accompanies it, the absence of any signs that link the subject to the sphere of 'culture' was likely to symbolise their 'natural', 'primal' status" (Bayburin 1993: 43). Additionally, "both on the cosmological and anthropological planes immersion in the waters is equivalent not to a final extinction but to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life, or a 'new man,' according to whether the moment involved is cosmic, biological, or soteriological" (Eliade 1987: 130–131).

An imitation of a diseased person's death constitutes a separate group of medical rituals. It is usually interpreted as a ritual deception of the illness. "The ultimate means to cure a child's seizure is as follows. When the seizure starts, all the people in the house become solemnly quiet, everyone remains still in the place where they were caught by the command uttered by the diseased child's mother, who immediately covers the child with a white blanket, holds a Candlemass candle[3] over it and burns incense. To put it shortly, if anyone were to enter the house [at that moment], they would think that someone had died. The Death that was sent for the child would think the same way and would not touch the child" (Nikiforovskiy 1897: 43). Such an interpretation may be valid in this case; however, it is important to stress that folk medical ritual is aimed at the sufferer's revival, which always implies death.

With severe diseases in particular, for example epilepsy, a ritual was practiced that involved pulling the child through a hole dug in the boundary between two fields or plots of land. In the ritual, the child would be put in the ground and then retrieved later. While the semantics of revival is evident in this ritual, equally important is the symbolic burial of the sufferer, which is also reflected in their external attributes. Most notably, this involved undressing the child, thus 'naturalising' it, i.e. returning it to a natural, primal status:

Па восені выкапалі мяжу, раздзець рабёнка і праз тую мяжу працягнуць тры разы, а яго рубашачку разарваць і там закапаць.

In the autumn holes are dug on the boundaries, [one must] undress the child and pull it through the holes three times, then tear off its shirt and bury [the shirt] there,

AIAHEF, Vaslavova village, Ushacky district, Vitebsk region < V. I. Bumaga, b. 1933 (1997)

Як дзецкая балезь бывае. Насілі тожа на растанькі, выкапывалі ямку і прасаджавалі яго тры разы. Выкапалі пад мурам, штоб прасадзіць. Яна там возьме і перадась мне, і так тры разы. Каб каляная зямля, каб не абсыпалася. І валасы стрыгуць, прасьвердзя ў дзераве і тыя валосікі, і кіпцікі забівалі. І памагала.

At times, a child would get sick. We would take [the child] to the crossroads, dig a hole and pull it [through the hole] three times. We dug the hole under the masonry to pull [the child] under it. She [the other participant in the ritual] would take the child and hand it over to me [under the ground], and we would repeat it three times. The soil should be hard enough so as not to collapse. And we would cut the [child's] hair, and make a hole in a tree and put the hair and fingernails inside. And it helped,

AIAHEF, Vishchyn village, Ragachouski district, Gomel region – T. Valodzina, T. Kukharonak < N. A. Kuzhava, b. 1928 (2009).

There are certain parallels between the covering of a liminal being (the veil covering a disease sufferer or a bride has meaning of hiding them, making them invisible, and also of 'undomesticated',

shapeless cloths, cf. shroud) and a sick child who was covered by an Easter tablecloth:

> Капают на граніце яму, шоб пралесть, бярут скатёрку пасвяцёную, у хаті разденься і голая ўранцы бяжы туда, і там эту скатёрку с себя скідай, тры раза пралезь, скатёрку кідай і бежы дамой гола і наденься. Мінаеця.
>
> They would dig a hole on the boundary in order to pass through it, take a blessed tablecloth, undress at home and run there naked in the morning, take this tablecloth off there, pass [through the hole] three times, leave the tablecloth and run home naked, then dress up. The disease is healed.
>
> Polesie Archives of the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (PA), Prisna village, Vetka district, Gomel region – M. Borovskaya.

Using a wedding gown both at a funeral and during a medical procedure is also emblematic: a child suffering from epilepsy was often covered with its mother's wedding gown (Belarusian Folklore-Ethnolinguistic Atlas (BFEA): Parakhonsk village, Pinsk district, Brest region recorded – T. Gerasimovich). These rituals also included burying a child's shirt on a border, i.e. the symbolic burial of a child's sick double. Thus, similar features and practices are evident in a disease sufferer and a deceased body. They are immobile, they are washed, their 'living' clothing is substituted with a cover, their hands and legs are tied. Similarly, tying a string around a body was a method used in both funeral and healing rites, with the latter including those that did not necessitate 'deadening' (killing) pain, such as panic attacks or the evil eye. Epilepsy, for example, was cured using a string that had been used to tie a dead person's legs. The string was used to measure the sufferer's

height and an odd number of knots were tied in it, after which the string would be carried around the person's neck. An ailing person was also placed in a marginal part of the house, i.e. they were endowed with the qualities of a deceased body.

The sphere of death in medical rituals is also constructed with the help of such categories as West, North, the Moon, bottom, left, dark, etc. These categories are relatively well-developed and are represented by numerous variants and configurations. The world of illness, as well as the world of death, is a world turned upside down, a mirror reflection of the world of normal, healthy, living people. The silence that is normative in folk medical procedures is also essential as it indicates the patient's proximity to the next world.

A number of folk medical rituals are based on an awareness of the necessity of taking the sufferer through death and the need for their future 'resurrection'. Alternatively, they are taken not just through death, but also through a symbolic burial. Among such rituals is washing a sufferer's body with sand from a grave, followed by the return of the sand to the grave (Tolstoy 1983: 259), and the burial of an ailing person's symbolic double (represented for example by a shirt) with a deceased body.

> Каўтун -- валасы зліпаюцца ў кучу комам, звіваюцца, што і не рашчэшаш. Вродзе атразаць нільзя. Ён должан атыйці. А то казалі – узяць шарсцяную нітку і змераць свой рост, а затым эту нітку складаваць ды тых пор, пакуль не палучыцца клубочак. Палажыць эты клубок у гроб пакойніку.
>
> A Polish plait is a lump of hair that is interwoven together so tightly that it is impossible to comb it. Apparently, you cannot cut it. It must go away. It was told that [one should] take a woolen thread and measure one's own height and then

> wind this thread until it forms a ball, then put this ball into a dead person's coffin.
>
> AIAHEF, Ramashkava village, Tolochik district, Vitebsk region < Zhana Vaskrasenskaya, b. 1938 (2007).

In this context, it is notable that the sufferer is ritually sent to the cemetery. If a fever attack starts during the night, the sufferer mounts a fire iron and heads for the cemetery where they squeeze themselves between two recent graves (Nikiforovskiy 1897: 276);

> Хинта. Советали – найти башмак на улице и той башмак надо техти на могилке (абуць і ісці). Чи штоп сонца не фсходило, чи штоб зашло. Зашло сонце и тегни, фстретила кого – не говори ничего.
>
> Fever. [They] advised to find a shoe in the street and to put it on and walk in it shoe to the graveyard. Either before the sunrise, or after the sunset. After the sun sets, if you meet somebody – don't say anything.
>
> PA, Zaspa village, Rechytsa district, Gomel region – N. Sveshnikava < T. A. Stryzhak, b. 1913 (1982).

The inversion, the otherness of behaviour, is obvious in this case. The person heads for the cemetery at a time that is inappropriate for living beings. The way they move is also highly symbolic: riding a fire iron or walking in just one shoe is a means to transcend the border between the two worlds; the use of a found shoe emphasises its otherworldness. The ritual takes the form of an inverted burial that is conditioned by the inversion of the protagonist themselves: they are a diseased (i.e. bearing a death mark) but still living person. Moreover, a deceased body travels in one direction only (at least as far as the living can tell), whereas an ailing person's route is radically different, implying a later return.

Thus, the preliminal stage, which starts with the stripping of the sufferer of their old status and depriving them of social and cultural marks, reaches its apogee in the imitation of death and burial. "The interaction between the 'lower' chaos and the 'upper' cosmos in the process of creation leads to a situation whereby a person must sometimes descend into the hell of chaos and turn into the amorphous, the destructive, the inorganic, the intuitive" (Yevzlin 1993: 15).

The liminal stage proper involves a transition in a space that is extremely dense with symbols of death and otherworldliness and leads to the turning point of the situation. At this moment "a sharp diversion in the course of a ritual takes place and, consequently, the protagonists of the ritual start viewing the event from a different angle" (Bayburin 1993: 178).

First and foremost, the rite of passage revolves around the sufferer themselves, although in most cases, especially those involving serious illnesses and/or children, the sufferer is marked by their passiveness, and all the words and actions are transferred to another person who carrys out the transition, leading the diseased person between worlds and statuses. Attention is focused on the healer. According Valentina Kharitonova (1999: 305), a healer who casts spells as part of their job must transition into an altered state of consciousness and perform the necessary magical work while in this state, and then return to the normal state. The casting of spells consists of three main stages. In the first stage, the percipient is led to grasp the unusual nature of the event. This includes various preparatory activities, turning to higher powers for permission, etc. The second stage involves the magical manipulations per se. The third stage encompasses the final activities, e.g. thanking the higher powers, "relaxation for those who had a contact with the next world", which involves considerable neuropsychic and psychoenergic tension (Kharitonova 1999: 309–310). In this respect

charm- and spell-casting are rites of passage that involve the natural process of getting deeper into the psychic sphere.

The 'new birth' motif

The postliminal stage always implies that the patient will be endowed with new qualities. This stage can be regarded as a symbolic resurrection, it evokes second birth and thus is described in almost physiological terms and categories. In this context, the other world where the ritual death takes place is symbolically compared to the womb, and the process of healing is described using the terms of a birth ritual. The rebirth symbolism is especially evident in cases where children are involved, as they have not yet severed all the ties with the other world and with their mother.

Instances of symbolism revolving around female bottoms and genitals clearly demonstrate how such contradictory ideas as birth and death can be integrated within a single symbol. The perception of the abdomen (especially the womb) as representing the bottom, depth, underground speaks to the universal symbolic link between the earth and the woman. Closeness, narrowness, and darkness are attributes associated both with the other world and the womb. The ancient mythologem of the earth being the mother's womb is manifested both on the level of folk ritual and on the linguistic level, for example, the phrase *v zhivote byt'* (literally 'to be inside the belly') means 'to be dead' (Podyukov 1990: 62). In ancient cultures, female organs are associated with a cave, and the cave itself is perceived as being in close connection with the mother's womb. "The mythologem of coming into the cave denotes either penetration into the womb of Mother Earth or a return to the mother's womb, back to one's prenatal, 'pre-existing' status. The ideas of birth and death reveal a certain 'symmetry' in this context: the birth may be interpreted as coming out of a locked,

internal, 'cave-like' space of the womb into the endless universe, and the death and subsequent burial may be regarded as an attempt to renew the opposite situation, as a renewal of the initial status that takes one back to a space that is similar to the womb" (Toporov 1997: 475–477).

It is emblematic that there are parallels between these ideas and recent scientific findings relating to perinatal memory. According to Erich Fromm, in cases of extreme pathology a strong willingness to return to the mother's womb can be observed, and the sufferer tends to feel and act like a foetus. "In the behavior of such a person, we find a fear of life, and a deep fascination for death (death, in phantasy, being the return to the womb, to mother earth)" (Fromm 2008: 38). The analysis of internal and external symbolism typical of rites of passage demonstrates that their essential components are similar to this phenomenon, combining the ideas of conception, death and birth. In some cultures a single word can simultaneously mean pregnancy, burial, and consecration. Burials in the foetal position are also widely documented. Thus, from a mythological point of view, the female womb is described as a semantic equivalent to the earth and underground, while also being interpreted as a mysterious and dark origin rife with danger and even capable of causing death. In many contexts, the female bottom is interpreted as an entrance to the other world, or even the other world itself reduced to the size of a human body.

Verbal formulas in medical magic explicitly point to the female bottom as a tool of healing and rebirth: "What she used to give birth, that she'll use to cure". It is essential that the healing ritual should be performed by the mother, which the formulas reflect:

> А маці клала на зямлю, пераступала тры разы: Якая маці радзіла, каб тая і адхадзіла.

The mother put [the ailing child] on the ground, stepped over it three times saying the mother who gave birth, must cure,

AIAHEF, Myslbazh village, Lyakhavichy district, Brest region < A. K. Rakhmanets, b. 1930 (2005);

Ваўхвілі дзяцей этых. Я з воч, як дзяцёнак маленькі і сурочыўся і начніцы, сама первa, як мяне наўчыла бабка, ложыш падушку, на эту падушку ложыш дзіцёначка, і яго нічога ніякага во так во перахажавалі. "Хто цябе радзіў, тэй цябе атхадзіў", тры разы. Но толька ты сама не падымаеш, а падняць должан другі, мужык, ці сьвякруха ці хто.

The children were cured thus. If a small child was suffering from the evil eye or from notsnitsas[4], first, as my grandmother taught me, [I would] take a pillow, put the child on this pillow, and step over it [saying]: 'Who gave birth to you, will cure you', three times. But you don't then lift [the child] yourself, someone else must lift it, the husband, the mother-in-law or someone else,

AIAHEF, Grudzinauka village, Bykhauski district, Mogilev region – T. Valodzina, T. Kukharonak < T. A. Perminava, b. 1953 (2012).

A number of folk healing methods involve the sick child's tactile contact with their mother's genitals, by rubbing the child against what is euphemistically referred to as the woman's 'lower hem' (AIAHEF, Valyntsy village, Verkhnedvinsky district, Vitebsk region < M. M. Semezh, b. 1920 (2005); Выціраюцца заполом і кажуць: "Чым маты пародыла, тым і очышчае" ("[They] rub [the child] with the hem and say: 'What the mother give birth

with, she uses to cleanse'" (AIAHEF, Padlesse village, Zhabinka district, Brest region < G. I. Yermak, b. 1922 |(2000)), or the woman's underpants (AIAHEF, Martsinava village, Verkhnedvinsky district, Vitebsk region < N. M. Lamiskaya, b. 1931 (2005), or her own hand:

> Патрэць рукой па сваей намітусь, а тады па ліцу рабёнку: Чым радзіла, тым і лячыць буду.
>
> She rubs the back of her hand against her genitals, and then [rubs] the child's face [with her hand]. What [I] used to give birth, I will use to cure.
>
> AIAHEF, Padymkhi village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region < V. C. Karaban', b. 1932 (2002);

> <А што за малочай?> – Ета первы раз як увідзіш рябёнка, возьмеш, на пол паложаш, і во так черяз яго трі раза: "Чэм нарадзіла, тым і ўзьлячыла" і абратна назад пярейдзеш, і так трі раза. Толькі як первы раз. І тада так дзелаеш.
>
> <And what [did you use to cure] seizures in children?>
>
> When you see the child [having a seizure] for the first time, take it, put it on the floor, and [step] three times over it like this: 'What I used to give birth, that I will use to cure' and go back again, and three times like this. But only when it's the first time. And then you do it.
>
> AIAHEF, Garadok, Vitebsk region – T. Valodzina, U. Lobach < Y. F. Dzem'yanenka, b. 1946 (2011).

For a seizure, one of the most popular healing methods is to cover the sufferer's face with a naked female bottom. The fact that the ritual should be performed by the mother points to associations

with second birth: «Еслі падушча бросіт, сядаты тым мэстом і до губ ему дотыкаюцца. Только маці. Як поросёнка так, то до свінні "If one suffers from epilepsy, sit [on them] with that body part and touch their lips. Only the mother [can do it]; If it's a piglet, then it must be a pig" (AIAHEF, Dzyamenichy village, Zhabinka district, Brest region < Y. N. Germanovich, b. 1934 (2000)). The female bottom is viewed as a disease transmitter that works both ways: "Ад чаго стала, каб ад таго перестала" – "What caused it, should stop it" (AIAHEF, Galavenchycy village, Chavusy district, Mogilev region < M. S. Kahanouskaya, b. 1926 (2006)). In an everyday context, however, such contact between a child and body parts with an otherworldly association was forbidden and was seen as a potential cause of illness. It was believed that if a women showed her uncovered genitals when passing over a child, the child would stop growing (Romanov 1912: 305).

The symbolism of the second birth is closely connected to attributes associated with female genitals. These are symbolically represented by a skirt, a barrel, a horse harness, or a clamp, which cursed or frightened children would be pulled through. Tatsiana Shchepanskaya coined the term "pull-through symbolism" to denote acts of pulling a person through tunnel-like openings and the attributes associated with these acts. Such activities are interpreted as symbolic of resuming childbirth (Shchepanskaya 1999: 20). This is further reinforced by using the same shirt that the woman was wearing at childbirth: "У каторай рубашке ребёнка ражаишь, ту рубашку хавають и, як ребёнку што зделаица, дитя занедуже, дак тады праймають дитя три раза» – "The shirt that you were wearing when you were giving birth is then hidden, and if something goes happens to the child, if it falls ill then [it is necessary] to pull it through the shirt three times" (PA, Zalatukha village, Kalinkavichy district, Gomel region – A. Talstikhina). Alternatively, wedding clothes could be used for the same purpose, evoking the deep semantic link between the wedding and death.

A cursed, for example, child would be pulled three times through the wedding dress (Barszczewski 1990: 35). The symbolic appeal to the wedding inevitably evokes death: "Кажуць, як балезнь чалавека дужа часта кідаіць, вянчальную адзежыну на яго і ён тады быстра памрэць" – "[People] say that if a person is often sick, they are covered with a wedding gown, and then they will die soon" (AIAHEF, Gubina village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region < L. L. Baratsevich, b. 1912 (2006)), compare this with the requirement to sing a wedding song while helping with an epileptic seizure:

> Нада вясельную песьню пець і жопай сесь на ліцо. <*А якую вясельную песню?*> Любую, хто якую.
>
> You should sing a wedding song and sit with your arse on their face.
>
> <And what kind of wedding song?>
>
> Any kind, anyone can sing whatever they want.
>
> AIAHEF, Byvalki village, Loyew district, Gomel region < T. A. Fedarenka, b. 1932 (2009).

Birth symbolism is especially clearly reflected in the method that involves washing an epileptic child with the broken waters of a woman who is giving birth:

> Як перша дзіця хто ўродзіць, дак пайдзі вазьмі роду, гэтаго. І змый гэтым родам. Ды вылі на крыжавыя дарогі. <Кроў гэту?> Ну гэто, як родзіць дзіця.
>
> When someone gives birth to her first child, go and collect the birth fluid. And wash [the ailing child] with it. Then pour it on the crossroads.
>
> <The blood?>

> Well, the thing, when she is giving birth to a child.
>
> AIAHEF, Malyja Chuchavichy village, Luninets district, Brest region < A. M. Gargun, b. 1924 (2007)

Water can also have similar healing qualities if it is prepared in the following way: "На парозі нада стаць і тры разы кружку з вадой прадзіваць паміж ног. Прадзіваіш і кажаш: Адкуль радзіўся, тым і палечся" – "Stand on the threshold and pass a cup with water between your legs three times. Pass it and say: 'Where you were born, that will be your cure'" (AIAHEF, Prudok village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region – T. Valodzina, T. Pshonka < S. V. Zharnasek, b. 1924 (2001)). A symbolic correction of 'incorrect' childbirth that resulted in the birth of a sick child was also performed by 'repeating' the childbirth, but upside-down: a mother would undress, leaving only her shirt on, and pull her child three times between her body and her shirt, putting it under the lower hem and pulling it out through the collar (Nikiforovskiy 1897: 35).

The idea of leading a sufferer through a symbolic death and resurrection is reflected in rituals that involve putting the child under a trough, the symbolism of which is traditionally connected with that of the coffin:

> Накрывалі ад падучай начоўкамі, а тады нада каб первянец ішоў праз дзверы і кінуў збан, харашо, каб той збан разбіўся.
>
> [To cure] epilepsy, we covered [a child] with wooden troughs, and then a firstling should pass through the door and throw a jug, it's good if this jug breaks.
>
> AIAHEF, Parechcha village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region < K. K. Nyadbalskaya, b. 1924 (1994).

U nas, kali ŭ dziciaci Valiantova chvaroba, to paložać jaho pad paroham, nakryjuć načoŭkami i razabjuć z koĺki harščkoŭ (novych) ab načoŭki, to pad čas miniecca,

Here, when a child has St. Valentine's illness[5], we put it next to the threshold, cover it with wooden troughs, and break a couple of new jugs against the troughs, then [the disease] will pass in some time (Federowski 1897: 395).

This is a semantically multifaceted act: it indicates the new birth of the sufferer, symbolically resonates with the motif of 'breaking' the illness, and involves a set of activities that are performed to frighten a demon. Another symbolic representation of a coffin is a box where an ailing child was put for a short period:

Эта крыксы называецца. Бабы выгаварывалі. Насілі, у кухар паложуць і закрыюць, там паляжыць. А як бывае, што так крычыць, як сьвіньня верашчыць, тады насілі ў сьвінны хлеў.

It [the disease] is called kryksy[6]. Women would use charms [to cure it]. [A child] was carried and put into a chest and shut it there, and it would stay there [for a while]. Sometimes it would scream in a way that resembles a pig squealing, then it was carried into a pigsty.

AIAHEF, Prusy village, Staryya Darohi district, Minsk region < V. M. Sheshka, b. 1934 (2010).

Эта крыклівіца, тады ўжо адчынілі скрыню да палажылі ў скрыню да зачынілі. І пакінула крыклівіца.

It is [called] kryklivica[7], [we] would open the box and put [a child] into the box and shut it. And kryklivica would go away.

AIAHEF, Semezhava village, Kapyl district, Minsk region < N.M. Urbanovich, b. 1928 (2009).

To reinforce its symbolic connection with rebirth, the healing ritual was often supplemented with activities associated with a particular context of birth. It was seen as essential that the ritual be related to the specific place where a woman was giving birth. On the one hand, the 'birth place' possesses all the features of a marginal place; on the other hand, it is a particularly sacred centre, a starting point where a person was born and thus a microcosm was created. The well-documented tradition of guiding a woman in labour around a table might be related to this idea. The place of childbirth keeps its generative semantics and healing power for a long time after childbirth. The temporal dimension is added to the spatial one: "Only the midwife can prevent mesyachyna[8]; if she hasn't done it during the baby's first bath, she does it in a week, but it should be on the day and the hour of the baby's birth" (Nikiforovskiy 1897: 37). In cases of testicle inflammation in a newborn, the mother was advised at dawn to put the child either on the ground near the threshold, or, preferably, on the very spot where it was born (Federowski 1897: 403).

The idea of revival and rebirth is also linked to technological and mechanical processes that symbolically duplicate and enact the very concept of creation of the new. The culinary code is one of the most potent examples of this. Firstly, 'bread' is a common linguistic and cultural metaphor for human origin and existence, for example *z adnaho ciesta zlieplienyja* (literally 'moulded from the same dough', i.e. birds of a feather); *rasci jak na drazhdzhach* (literally 'grow as if on yeast', meaning grow in leaps and bounds); *niedapiechany* ('underbaked', or 'half-baked'); *paskrobak* (literally 'made from scratch', which can refer either to bread that was made from the last remaining flour, or the last/late child), etc. In folk medical practice the symbolic comparison between a child and

bread is especially vivid: "When they knead dough, they put the child (aged 1 month to 1 year) into the dough bowl and cover it with a lid, and keep it there for around half an hour (Shein 1902: 78)" – "Як родзіцца нежывое дзіця, так дзежку бяры адкрывай — і ў дзежку яго. Яно тога духа хопе і атойдзе" – "If a child is stillborn, open the dough bowl and put it inside. It will then take on some of the [bread] spirit and recover" (Lyada village, Vetka district, Gomel region – G. Lapatsin < E. P. Chvarkova, b. 1916).

The most vivid and widespread variant of the rebirth motif is 'rebaking' a sick child in an oven. This is based on the idea of a similarity between an oven and the mother's womb; thus, putting a child into an oven symbolised not only eliminating the illness by means of baking, but also the child's temporal relocation into the other world, where it acquires the necessary attributes of health ('is baked properly') and is then reborn. Interestingly, in some parts of Russia all newborns were 'baked' in a similar fashion. There was a belief that every child is born 'raw' and the first task for the family is to finish shaping its physical appearance (Bayburin 1993: 54); compare this with how "a raw child" in one of Russia's dialects means "a baby that was born weak" (Baranov 2001: 21). The culinary code and in particular the opposition between 'raw' and 'cooked' acquire a special meaning within the framework of medical practice. Claude Lévi-Strauss noted the opposition between raw and cooked, boiled, dried, or fried in his research. According to his studies, this opposition in various cultures often overlaps with other binary oppositions, such as alive vs. dead, self vs. other (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 334–342). The notion of 'raw' is evoked during the first stage of a rite of passage (for example a woman who has just given birth is called raw). Linguistic phenomena also reflect this pattern: 'raw' can refer to an illness ('*syra*' (Belarusian for 'raw') means 'cold' in Drybin district). A spell by Vetka reads: "Take the sleeplessness, *syrovets*[9], pain out of the slave of God…", etc.

The use of 'raw' or 'cooked' (boiled) water is also regulated. Spells were applied exclusively to raw water; a spell or a prayer was sufficient to render the water sacred. The status of raw water as an intact, natural, primal substance corresponded to the status of the newborn. Thus, "як первы раз купаіш, нада ваду браць цёпленькую, тока не кіпячоную. Нельзя. Вот кажуць: у вары купаны – эта пра злога чалавека" – "for the first bath it is necessary to take warm water, but not boiled, which is prohibited. The saying 'bathed in boiled water' means a wicked person" (AIAHEF, Vula urban settlement, Beshankovichy district, Vitebsk region < N. A. Bondarava, b. 1930 (2002)). But for further healing water had to be domesticated: "One should bring water in a new pot from such a place that no one has used for the past three years, boil it, put a knife, a needle and a spindle into the pot, cover it with a wooden bowl, put the pot under the cradle and gently turn it upside down" (Nikiforovskiy 1897: 38). To comfort a child during a panic attack one was only allowed to use cooked water, as water's otherworldly 'raw' qualities were neutralised by this domestication through boiling: "To heal the distress one should boil the water and carry it around the [child's] head three times" (AIAHEF, Yushki village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region < S. M. Shamshur, b. 1944 (1994)). The process of boiling is strongly associated with creation in medical rituals; such imagery is vividly reflected in folk tale motifs that derive from the relevant rites of passage (for example Baba Yaga the witch boils and bakes the hero; the hero dives into boiling milk, etc.).

The seme 'raw' is also evident in the term *suravaya nitka*, which means a coarse linen thread used in healing rituals. The thread embodies the dichotomy between culture and nature in a ritual setting. The preference for a coarse thread in folk healing is also related to its 'incompleteness', its roughness as opposed to the finished article (Strakhov 2005: 187). A coarse thread was used to measure the sufferer, then, if there was a dislocation or sprain

it was tied around the arm or leg, or it was used to cure warts, etc. However, the symbolism is particularly evident in the association between a coarse thread and a pregnant woman who is herself (alongside the baby in her womb) 'raw' and not ready for birth yet.

Polish researcher Katarzyna Łeńska-Bąk has noted the special role that salt plays in rites of passage; it is the first agent of change and a perfect way to transform the natural into the cultural. Not only does it signal passage between the sacred and the profane, but also conserves and stabilises a certain order of things, blocking further transformation (Łeńska-Bąk 2002: 86). This might lie behind the ritual of carrying salt around a cursed or distressed person, the ritual thus affirming their wholesomeness as a human being not subject to dangerous external forces.

> Прымаўку быстрэй усяго соллю выганяюць. Гаворыш: "Соль-саляніца, усяму свету памашніца, у моры пабывала, па свету пахаджала, усяму свету памагала. Памажы этаму там ці старому ці малому". І тады абносяць і ў печ. Каб нідзе не валялася эта соль.
>
> The fastest way to get rid of the evil eye is to use salt. One says: 'Salt, oh my salt, you are helping the whole world, you have been in the sea, you have travelled the world, you have helped the whole world. Help this old one or young one'. And then they carry it around and put it in the oven. This salt shouldn't be lying around.
>
> AIAHEF, Chyzhakha village, Berazino district, Minsk region < G. I. Korsuk, b. 1929 (2010).

Salt is one of the primary means of healing a curse; sometimes the salt is said to be blessed. Salt (along with bread) is a widespread offering both for sacred guardian helpers and for the illness itself.

While many rituals with rebirth symbolism involved imitating death, another group substituted death with sleep. Sleep is by itself a temporary transition into another state, it opens up the borders between this and the other world. Many traditional lamentations call on the deceased person to wake up, i.e. come back to life. For this reason, a number of magical manipulations aimed at healing a sick child are performed while it is asleep, considered to be the optimal setup because the child is in the other world. So, for example, when a child was suffering from notsnitsa, specially prepared water was placed under its cradle, its shirt was hung outside, etc. Sleep is one of the preconditions for the successful healing of an abscess, whereby merely falling asleep is seen to go a long way towards feeling better. In her analysis of lullabies that contain references to a child's death, Lilia Khafizova interprets sleep as one of the most potent depictions of passage. "A child's awakening is equal to its growing up and acquiring the status of an adult. Children get this status through sleep, which is interpreted as a temporal death" (Khafizova 2000: 94).

But on this journey of sleep, the sufferer had to be be provided with support from this world in order to be protected from being pulled into the other world. This explains the use of a number of wards and apotropaic symbols in all stages of magical healing. The setting of passage determines the openness to contact the other world and the fluidity of border, while the influence of the other world is constantly regulated.

The notion of way

In the semantics of rites of passage the idea of visiting other worlds and the very idea of passage can also be conveyed through the metaphor of the way, road, or journey. This was already pointed out by Arnold van Gennep, who noted that "passage from one social posi-

tion to another is identified with a *territorial passage*, such as the entrance into a village or a house, movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets and squares" (van Gennep 1960: 192, original emphasis). The spacial aspect of a healing ritual always includes the notion of way and a relocation that is not conditioned by utilitarian demands. In a number of cases, the healing ritual itself was reduced to relocation; however, its distinct spatial configuration lent it additional significance. The locations that were chosen for the ritual had a marked boundary semantics. The ritual focused on transcending the boundary, the spatial movement across the border, i.e. passage in the broad meaning of the word. One such location can be a threshold:

> Два парогі перайсьці, а на трэцьцім сказаць: "Добры вечар, я ўсьцікаюся, прасьці, я пакаюся". Трі разы перайці і трі разы сказаць.
>
> Cross two thresholds, say at the third threshold: 'Good evening, I wet myself, forgive me, I will repent'. Cross oneself three times and say it three times.
>
> AIAHEF, Zadvor'e village, Lyakhavichy district Brest region < M. M. Rakuts, b. 1936 (2005).

A bridge can be another such location:

> Крыксы ў яго. Мальчык быў дужа крыклівы. А ў нас мост чэраз рэчку быў. Ночы не спалі, а бабушке пасаветавалі. Ідзі пад мост і рукой пастукай: "Як этыя балкі маўчаць, каб так і мой унук спаў". І ўсё, як рукой зьняло.
>
> He suffered from kryksy. The boy was very loud. And there was a bridge over the river. [They] couldn't sleep at night, and someone gave advice to the grandmother. Go under the bridge and knock [on it] with your hand. 'These beams are

> silent, let my grandson sleep in the same way'. And that's it, he was cured.
>
> AIAHEF, Khodasy village, Mstsislaw district, Mogilev region < V. V. Pimakhova, b. 1939, and M. S. Gromava, b. 1938 (2011).

Another location associated with boundaries was a crossroads:

> Як крычалі малыя рабяты, іх тады вадзілі па крыжавых дарогах.
>
> When young children kept screaming, they were taken along the crossroads.
>
> AIAHEF, Turki village, Dokshytsy district, Vitebsk region < V. U. Mits'ko, b. 1926 (2005).

The material embodiment of the concept of 'way' is a road or a street, which often feature in folk magic: "When you utter the spell three times, you should carry the child across the street three times – there and back again" (AIAHEF, Usokha-Buda village, Dobrush district, Gomel region – H. A. Bartashevich, L. Barabanava < A. V. Yarmoshkina, b. 1913)). In another ritual, a sick child was to be carried in the hem of one's clothes twice a day, at dawn and at sunset, without looking back at the 'border', i.e. the rising or setting sun (Wereńko 1896: 207).

Relocation from one place to another in the course of ritual healing emphasises its original meaning in which the passage involves overcoming a certain obstacle and following rules (to be naked, to pass through holes, etc.) that highlight the link to archetypical symbols of passage and rebirth. "A healer called Mazenka took the sufferer to the barn, told him to undress and run to the neighbouring grove naked (and it was late autumn and frosty); he had to find two aspens growing from the same root and squeeze

between them. And old Mazenka was whispering something during the process" (Shlyubski 1927: 21–22).

"The way becomes the omni-way, it is the brightest and the most intense image of space that must be perceived as the omni-space, the universal space that combines both the sacred cosmogenic space of the Universe and the profane, modest, and cosily domestic everyday space" (Toporov 1993: 9). The role of the way in magical healing is especially prominent in the texts of spells and charms. In these texts, the way is the most direct and effective means of eliminating the original status and achieving a desirable outcome. Most eastern Slavic narrative spells revolve around a hero's way. The notion of way reflects the aspiration to reach the location where the ritual is performed (on a metatextual level) and the idea of visiting the other world in order to overcome the crisis (on a semantic level). Moreover, according to Sergey Shindin, "the image of way in magical practice can foreground ideas about the close relations between the events in the macrocosm and the microcosm and about the possibility of influencing individual or social life directly through a connection to the cosmos, the absolute sum to which the way is an equivalent" (Shindin 1993: 111).

The main motivation to embark on the way, for the subject of a spell or healing practice, is to meet representatives of the other world either on the way or at the end of the journey. Oppositions such as inside–outside, life–death, healthy–ill are resolved there, and the space of their journey represents the sufferer's status as lacking stability and being open to various influences. Return from this space and from such a journey is symbolically understood as a new birth (Libera 1995: 186). While the other is transformed into the self, the vector of movement shifts from the periphery of domesticated space to its center (Bayburin 1993: 192). In the case of healing magic this involves the relocation of the sufferer and the healer from a space where the ritual is performed. This way

is relatively well-marked and full of restrictions and taboos, such as 'one must not look back', 'one must not speak', etc.

Similar to rituals dominated by symbolism of the way/journey are those involving stepping into borderline locations and leaving the disease there. Such rituals are predicated on the existence of two subjects. The first subject is the sufferer themselves, whose action of stepping over certain objects or places is imbued with the symbolic meaning of overcoming their sick and 'borderline' status. Objects that are stepped over are united by their belonging to the boundary and even the other world. Among such objects are the fur coat (*kazhukh*): «Як дитя було бальное, то праз кожуха вывернута, казали, нада яму пераступить» "When a child was sick, they said that it should step over a fur coat turned inside out" (BFEA, Veluta village (Luninets district Brest region – T. R. Fedukhovich); and a threshold and a well: "Кажуць, над калодзесям носюць. А зараз яшчэ цераз парог: Крыксы-плаксы, выходзьце вон" – "They say, [a child] is carried over a well. And now also over the threshold, saying 'Kryksy-plaksy[10], go away'" (AIAHEF, Assyo village, Lepel district, Vitebsk region – H. A. Bartashevich < N. M. Sazon, aged 78). The second subject is the healer who steps over the sufferer. On one level, this implies that the ailing person is lowered, placing them in a location with an otherworldly association. On another level, there is a clear symbolic connection with the area between the legs as naturally connected with the idea of 'death-birth', since the dominant chtonic meaning of the legs is also connected to the reproductive function. The mediative aspect of the situation is reinforced by placing the sufferer in a border area, for example on a threshold, on the junction between floor boards, along a beam, with their head towards the oven:

> Кали дитя плачэ, дак можэ яму уроки случылись. Нада дитёнка палажыть спавитага чэрвоным паясом на масту

(на падлозе) удоль бруса (балька ў столі) галоўкай да печы. Мати пераступае яго правай нагой да прыгавора: Чым парадила, тым и атхадила. Тры разы так»

When a child is crying, it could be that someone cast an evil eye on it. You should put a red belt on the child, put the child on the floor along the ceiling beam, head towards the oven. The mother steps over it with her right leg and says: 'What I used to give birth, I'll use to cure'. And so it goes for three times.

PA, Grabauka village, Gomel district, Gomel region – T. Shchepanskaya < V. P. Aploshkava, b. 1936 (1982).

Клалі на ганак і маці пераступала туды-сюды тры разы, і прыгаворвалі: Якая маці радзіла, такая і адхадзіла.

[We] put [the child] on the porch and the mother stepped over it back and forth three times and repeated: 'The mother that gave birth will be the the one who will cure' (Piatrouskaja 1998: 119).

Як крычыць (дзіця), то надо де мостицы (дошкі ў падлозе) сходяцца, кладёшь и три раза перэходишь, и кажэ: Чым мать родила, тым и отходила.

When the child is crying, one should put it on the junction between the floor boards and step over it three times, and say: 'What the mother used to give birth, she'll use to cure',

PA, Verkhniya Zhary village, Bragin district, Gomel region – V. I. Kharytonava.

On the one hand, stepping over a child symbolically correlates with giving birth and indicates that the illness is left in the out-

side space. On the other hand, it endows the sufferer with vitality through contact with the female sexual sphere. It is significant that stepping over a child was prohibited outside the ritual context ("you won't grow"), and that if this was done by a demon, it foretold a misfortune: *jak čort pierastupiŭ* (literally 'as if a devil stepped over (someone)'), meaning that someone's life went awry (Vasyukovich 2000: 200).

Thus, the aim of a diseased person's relocation across the border (especially if it is a child) is to go through the stages of their socialisation. "In healing spells the way may also epitomize the process of healing. It is a process that happens along the way and implies certain dynamics. A small-scale model of this way indicates the aspiration to achieve the same goal in real life. According to the laws of an archaic mindset, if we model a successful outcome on a small scale, we can successfully accomplish it in real life" (Zav'yalova 2006: 190). The transition between self and other, life and death not only neutralises these oppositions but also marks the fulfillment of an appropriate social status.

Therefore, a magical healing ritual results in the renewal of an ailing individual's personal integrity, which consequently leads to the (re)establishment of social stability, while the individual overcomes the desemiotisation that was caused by their illness. Recovery is semiotically recognised as a return from the other world, inevitably leading to the "reestablishing of homogeneity in the living world" (Bayburin 1993: 116), which is a typical conclusion for all rites of passage. Consequently, it also leads to the restoration of the normal structure of the universe in general.

Conclusions

Within the framework of a rite of passage, a sufferer is represented as a liminal being whose biological status does not correspond

to their social status. However, equilibrium can be restored in the course of a ritual. The liminal stage of the ritual is expressed through a medical manipulation that should take place in a location that is rich in symbols of death and the other world. The main idea is to lead the sufferer through a symbolic death and resurrection. The postliminal stage, or, to be more exact, the symbolic resurrection, represents a second birth, and is thus described in near-physiological schemes and terms. This involves conceptualising the world where the symbolic death takes place as a womb, while the process of healing is represented as childbirth. The general concept of rituals involve the creation of a new person. Folk medical rituals specifically are regarded as the correction of a sufferer's physical state, which includes the separation and destruction of their (personified) illness and the strengthening or modification of their biological capacities and health.

The result of a medical ritual is that the sufferer acquires a clear and unambiguous definition, restoring both their personal order and social stability. The individual overcomes their desemiotisation, which was caused by the illness. If, however, the individual is captured by otherworldly forces and falls under the influence of death, they fall out the human semiotic sphere. Recovery can be symbolically represented as a return from the other world, the world of the dead, which inevitably contributes to the restoration of order in the world of the living and, consequently, the reestablishment of the normal structure of the universe in general.

Notes

[1] The fieldwork materials are deposited in the Archive of the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore (AIAHEF) at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

[2] All further recordings were made by the author unless specified otherwise.

[3] Candles blessed during the Candlemass celebrations were used in many Belarusian rituals, including a significant number of rites of passage (translator's note).

[4] *Notsnitsa* is a female nightmare spirit and the personification of child disease in Slavic mythology (translator's note).

[5] A vernacular term for epilepsy (translator's note).

[6] Another name for *Notsnitsa,* see note 4 (translator's note).

[7] Another name for the personification of children's desease (translator's note).

[8] One of the names for infant illnesses that are associated with the age of one month (translator's note, see Valodzina 2009).

[9] A term for malaise deriving from the word syry, which means 'raw' (translator's note).

[10] Plaksy derives from the world plakac', to cry (translator's note).

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Imperial History in an Estonian Folktale: Discussion in the Estonian Media in the 1890s

Katre Kikas

Abstract: In the summer of 1890 several Estonian newspapers published articles about the possible national and historical background of a folktale called *Majaussi kasvandikud* ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake'). The event started when schoolteacher Mihkel Kampmann published the narrative in the newspaper *Sakala* and insisted that the names of the protagonists (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, Truuvaar) looked suspiciously similar to the ancient kings of Russia mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle* (discussants use the earlier name *Nestor's Chronicle*). The discussion that followed focused on the question of whether there is any possible connection between those two narratives, and, if there is, what kind of new knowledge can be gained from the Estonian folktale?

In analysing the discussion, I was not interested in the scientific truth (be it history or folkloristics) behind the possible connection of the two narratives or the origins of the folktale. I enquired as to why this folktale was felt to be so relevant and what the questions and problems were that the participants hoped to solve with the help of the narrative.

Keywords: mythology, media folklore, folklore, fictional folklore, Ado Grenzstein

> Once upon a time, there was a man who had three sons. He found a bluish snake in the woods and brought it home for the children to play with. The snake soon became a house snake; it played nicely with the children and ate from the same bowl. The eldest son was quarrelsome and would not leave the others alone. The snake liked the middle son most, as he was placid and deft. But the third son was faithful and loyal and was the best of the three. When the boys had come of age, the house snake said: "I will go back to my place now, but first I will give all of you names: the eldest brother's name is Rahurikkuja[1], the middle brother's name is Siniuss[2], and the youngest brother is Truuvaar[3]. Then the snake returned to the woods.
>
> When a war broke out, the three brothers went to fight, together with others, and they won. Due to their bravery, they were elected tribal elders. Afterwards they became kings in foreign countries. (Rein Ruute, 8 July 1890, Väike-Maarja Parish; published in Grenzstein 1890b)

History writing is never neutral: it tells us as much about the present as about the past. Although history writers often argue that they merely write down what has happened, many of them also create new interpretations, i.e., *rewrite* history. Jaan Undusk has noted that while writing history "fixes the beginning of history", "[r]ewriting establishes someone's right to history. Rewriting indicates that each history has an alternative … that each one of us can become a subject to history" (1997: 722–723). To prove the 'history suitability' of a small nation, it does not suffice to merely highlight their existence; different rhetorical devices need to be applied to emphasise the nation's importance from the point of

view of humanity (ibid.). Undusk states that Estonian history writing started with different *rewritings* of history. Because Estonian historiographers initially had no new sources, they had to connect bits and pieces from earlier histories in which Estonians were not the main characters, and to create a *rewritten* version that put Estonians at the forefront (ibid.).

Undusk's idea is well connected with Eda Kalmre's (2013) approach to "the great stories of a small nation", i.e. stories about the Estonian origin of well-known people, the role that Estonians played in important historical events, etc. Kalmre writes that these "stories reveal the Estonians' latent cultural desire for a higher descent and personal and national success" (Kalmre 2013: 26). Usually these stories emerge and spread at unstable times in the life of a nation. So, despite the ephemerality of the stories, in a more general context we could speak about an enduring tradition: "We may not take these fantastic stories quite so seriously, but these stories shaped as legends and rumours still articulate the individual and collective aspirations and needs in certain periods of time" (ibid. 38).

This article focuses on a media discussion in the 1890s, which, on the basis of a folktale, made an attempt to (re)interpret the position of Estonians in the Russian Empire. The starting point of the discussion was the folktale Majaussi kasvandikud ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake'), published in the newspaper *Sakala* in the summer of 1890. Parish clerk and schoolteacher Mihkel Kampmann wrote a commentary to the story, in which he referred to its possible connections with the basic myth of the Russian Empire presented in the *Primary Chronicle* (also known as *The Tale of Past Years*) (see Cross & Olgerd 1953: 59–60). The discussion that followed raised the question of whether this connection could reveal some new information about possible relations between the Estonian and Russian nations in the past.

Below I would like to offer an insight into the textual field surrounding this article, both oral and written, public and private, those preceding and those succeeding Kampmann's article. For me, the most fascinating issue is the question of what made this narrative so meaningful and topical for these people at that time? But before contemplating the discussion itself, I would like to present some details about the historical context.

0.1 Estonia and Estonians in the 19th century

Before 24 February 1918, the territory we call Estonia belonged to the Russian Empire. Estonians did not have an administrative unit of their own; what is now northern Estonia was called the Governorate of Estonia, whereas southern Estonia was part of the Governorate of Livonia (together with northern Latvia). Local power was divided between the Baltic-German elite and Russians; the Estonian-speaking majority was mainly agrarian (in the case of social advancement they generally became Germanised).

Throughout the 19th century, the status of Estonians improved. The abolition of serfdom (in the Governorate of Estonia in 1816 and in the Governorate of Livonia in 1819) and the establishment of the right to own land (in the Governorate of Livonia in 1849 and in the Governorate of Estonia in 1856) gave rise to economic independence. The formation of the village school network (fully formed in the Governorate of Livonia by the 1850s and in the Governorate of Estonia by the 1870s) brought about a considerable increase in literacy: according to the census of 1881, 93.7% of adults were able to read and 35.2% could also write; according to the census of 1897, 91% of the population was able to read and 77% also to write.

Economic independence and higher literacy rates can be linked to the rise of national consciousness. The breakthrough of national

ideas among Estonians is usually assumed to have taken place in the 1860s and was manifested in the establishment of various societies and the concomitant formation of the Estonian public sphere (Jansen 2004: 82 f.). National awakening meant interest in the nation's past and a wish to write a history with Estonians in the leading role.

0.2 History and folklore

As mentioned, Estonian history writing started with *rewriting* history. In these rewritings the earlier published histories were supplemented with material derived from oral accounts. Tiiu Jaago has noted that "in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, history and folklore were closely intertwined fields, both in the European research area and in Estonia" (Jaago 2014: 419). In the case of Estonia, this closeness stemmed from the fact that there were very few written sources about the lives of ethnic Estonians. All written histories focused on the deeds of the upper classes (who had a different ethnic background). In this context, oral texts were treated as a possible way to fill in the blanks in those written histories (or as a means of *rewriting* history in order to ensure a more central position for Estonians). One of the most efficacious images summarising this approach is Jakob Hurt's metaphor of folklore as "the chronicle of the Estonian nation" (Hurt 1989: 9–25). This image was strongly supported by the so-called synecdoche principle, the belief that the lore accessible today is a fragment of an earlier whole, and by means of these fragments it is possible to restore the former whole (be it an epos or history), so to say, to fulfil the synecdoche (about the synecdoche principle, see Undusk 1995: 669–70, about fulfilling the synecdoche 1995: 679, 749).

The metaphor of 'folklore as the chronicle of the Estonian nation' was coined by Hurt in 1871 – almost twenty years before

the discussion. In the meantime, several histories of the Estonian nation written by Estonians were published (see, e.g., Hurt 1879; Jakobson 1882; Eisen 1877). Yet, there was still hope that something hidden could be found by delving into folklore (see, e.g., Truusmann 1887b) so that by the late 1880s, folklore collection had become an almost nation-wide enterprise. The campaigns organised by Jakob Hurt and Matthias Johann Eisen had more than 2,000 participants (Kikas 2024: 13–15; Jaago 2005; Kuutma 2005), and newspapers were quite willing to report the progress of the campaigns (Kikas 2024: 57–61). The organisers of the campaigns often referred to this earlier metaphor praising good collectors for having written "an extensive chapter for the ancestors' chronicle" (Hurt 1889). Although the discussion examined here was not directly connected with the campaigns, it could certainly credit the well-established undertaking with the creation of a suitable atmosphere. By the way, almost all the people who participated in the discussion had also participated in the collecting campaigns (Kikas 2016: 25–26).

0.3 History and Russification

The discussion that this article focuses on took place at the beginning of the 1890s, a rather complicated period from the point of view of the nation, i.e. the so-called era of Russification[4]. Starting in the mid-1880s, different reforms were carried out in tsarist Russia and its client states that aimed to unite the empire more strongly. The reforms were mainly administrative, and in the area of today's Estonia they mainly targeted the special privileges of the Baltic-German elite (Raun 2009: 123; about so-called administrative Russification see 131–138). This was accompanied by tightened censorship, restrictions on political activity, a distrusting attitude towards the national ambitions of non-Russian nations, and the

exclusion of local languages (Estonian and German) from official procedures; the court system and schools also became Russian-language (in 1885 and 1887 respectively) (ibid.: 139–151).

Russification was justified by a parallel approach to history that emphasised how the cultural differences between Estonians and Russians were so small that the Russification of Estonians would have been quite painless and natural. For instance, in his book *A Short History of the Baltic Krai* (1884) Evgraf Cheshikhin emphasises how the territory of Estonia "is nothing but a continuation of the territory of the Russian state next to the Baltic Sea that is not separated by any natural barriers" (Cheshikhin 1894: 1). Statements about close Estonian and Russian historical contact were based on references to the *Primary Chronicle* which depicts Estonians, Russians and other nations living in vicinity as acting together in different situations. Although the chronicle allows for different readings regarding the relations between these nations, Cheshikhin stresses one that sees Estonians (and the other nations) as subjected to the rule of Russians: "Paying tithes to Russian princes and accepting Orthodoxy prepared Latvians and Chuds for a final union with the Russian nation" (Cheshikhin 1894: 7).[5]

These kinds of statement are quite explicitly directed against the ideas expressed in the histories written by Estonians themselves. Contrary to the 'no differences between the nations' approach, Estonians stress the uniqueness of their nation. By the way, most of the history writing done by Estonians in the 19th century does not make any use of Old Russian chronicles, all the material is taken from West European sources. If there is a reference to the relationship between Estonians and Russians before the 13th century, the equality of the two nations is always emphasised (Kukk 2009: 194–197).

Early Estonian history writing has a sub-branch proceeding from Orthodox circles that was based on the *Primary Chronicle*; we can call it a non-Russification-minded reading of the chronicle.

There are two books published by the Orthodox Church in Riga: *Eesti rahva kalender* ('Calendar of the Estonian People') in 1855, with a longer overview under the heading *Teädus Lätlastest ja Eestirahvast, enne kui Saksad nende maale tullid* ('A Study of the Latvians and Estonians before the Germans Came) (ibid.: 33–50), and a history book *Venne rahvas ja Venne riik* ('Russian Nation and Russian State'), written by Jakob Lindenberg, a schoolteacher and Orthodox priest (1872). Both authors emphasise the equality of the two nations, for example all decisions were taken after democratic discussion (*Eesti rahva kalender* 1855: 44; Lindenberg 1872: 9).

Although from the point of view of Estonian history writing these two books are rather marginal curiosities, their existence relates well to Toivo Ülo Raun's recognition that in the pre-Russification era the Orthodox Church did not receive support from the state to operate in the Baltic governorates (Raun 2009: 147). Therefore, we could assume that these interpretations of history constituted a conscious attempt by the Orthodox Church to get closer to Estonians. On the one hand, these interpretations enabled the Church to emphasise the long-term good relations between Estonians and Russians, while on the other hand, the aim was to underscore the democratic attitude of Orthodoxy towards other nations (as compared to the rather German-dominated Lutheran Church). Yet, it is quite certain that after 1885 the Orthodox Church drew rather on Cheshikhin-style Russifying approaches to history.

As we will see, the discussion makes use of both readings of the Primary Cronicle – the Russification minded and non-Russification minded –, although the relationship between the two is rather ambivalent. In the next sections I will delve into the discussion. I start with the newspaper article by Mihkel Kampmann that introduced the topic and look at the different public reactions it got. After pursuing the public part of the discussion I end with events and actors that did not make it to the public space.

1. The beginning of the discussion: what does the similarity of names mean?

On 9 June 1890, the newspaper *Sakala* published Mihkel Kampmann's[6] article under the heading *Majaussi kasvandikud: Tähelepanemise väärt Eesti muinasjutt* ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake: A Remarkable Estonian Fairy Tale'). For the most part, the article is a retelling of the folktale *Majaussi kasvandikud* (see the abstract), but the author also explains why he thinks that this tale needs the attention of researchers. In the author's opinion, the fairy tale could be interesting to a wider readership because the protagonists' names (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, and Truuvaar) are very similar to "the names of the first Russian princes Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor" (ibid.) mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*. And although he admits that historians have long considered "these three princes as fairy-tale", he still emphasises that the Estonian fairy tale may have historic value, as it "further complements the story about inviting the three famous princes to rule". With this remark, Kampmann refers to the episode in the *Primary Chronicle* in which the princes are asked to come and rule:

> 6368–6370 (860–862). The tributaries of the Varangians drove them back beyond the sea and, refusing them further tribute, set out to govern themselves. There was no law among them, but tribe rose against tribe. Discord thus ensued among them, and they began to war one against another. They said to themselves, "Let us seek a prince who may rule over us and judge us according to the Law." **Accordingly they went overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes**, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the

> Slavs, the Krivichians, and the Ves' then said to the **people of Rus'**, "Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us." They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, **Rurik**, located himself in Novgorod; the second, **Sineus**, at Beloozero; and the third, **Truvor**, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of 60 in the Russian Primary Chronicle Rus'. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but in olden times they were Slavs. (Cross, Olgerd 1953: 59–60, emphasis added)

I have marked in bold the details that will be at the centre of the discussion later (the people of Rus, the overseas element, the names of the princes). However, it is important to bear in mind that at the time there were probably very few Estonians who had read the *Primary Chronicle*. If people who read Kampmann's article happened to have any previous knowledge of the story, it came from some kind of retelling in a history book.

The most detailed retellings can be found in the early Orthodox publications I referred to earlier (*Eesti rahva kalender* 1855; Lindeberg 1872; Lindeberg's version is also repeated in C. R. Jakobson 1875), and there are also some overviews in books of general history (e.g. Körber 1860; P. Jakobson 1885). The two sets of publications convey the story somewhat differently: whereas the first set focuses on Estonian history, these publications also stress that the inviting was done by many different nations (including Estonians); the second set uses the Russification-minded reading of the chronicle and depicts only the Russians as the inviters of the princes[7]. As can be seen in this article, most of the people who participated in the discussion knew the Russification-minded

version of the story, only one was aware of the non-Russification-minded version.

2. Positive responses: finding connections between the folktale and the chronicle

There were two newspapers that reacted to Kampmann's article in a positive vein: a Russian-language article was published in the cultural supplement of the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* 1890 ('Estonian Governorate Gazette'), and two articles in one of the most widely-read newspapers *Olevik* ('The Present', Grenzstein 1890a, 1890b). Both of these articles stress that *Majaussi kasvandikud* is a really exceptional find, and maintain that as the Estonian-language versions of the names (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, Truuvaar) have a meaning, they must be older than the Russian versions (Ruurik, Sineus, Truvor) which are (or seem to be) meaningless.

However, the discussants do not limit themselves to names only, they also try to find other connecting details between the chronicle and the folktale. For instance, they raise a question about who the Rus' were (the nation from which, according to the chronicle, the princes originate) and which sea they crossed.

To get to the meaning of the name Rus', the author of the article in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* of 1890 proposes three possible connections between this name and the Estonian language, two of which are explanations to the first one. Firstly, the name can refer to an ancient parish in eastern Estonia called Rusti (or Russi – the article uses them interchangeably). Secondly, it can refer to the Swedish origin of the inhabitants of the parish *rootsi* ('Swedish') > *russ*. And thirdly it can refer to the extraordinary strength of the inhabitants of this parish *rusikas* ('fist') > *russ*.

The question of the possible location of the sea is taken up by Grenzstein[8]. He suggests two solutions: the *sea* could be Lake Peipus, or it could just refer more generally to foreign origin: "Nobody knows which sea it was. It could have been Lake Peipus, which the Russians knew very well. Besides, it is not certain that the three brothers were invited from across the sea, as за море in Russian also means a foreign country (заморские товары – foreign goods)" (ibid.). Interestingly the first part of the hypothesis fits well with the idea that Rus´ is connected with the name of an ancient parish because this parish was located on the shores of Lake Peipus.

Although the argumentation in the two newspapers is rather similar, there is a difference in the tone. While the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* is quite moderate and neutral (it was a Russian-language weekly that mainly published official announcements), the discussion in the *Olevik* is rather heated and expresses explicitly what the story seems to be implying: "If it is really an Estonian fairy-tale, it complements an important Russian fairy-tale and is significant because it might mean that the first Russian princes Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor went to Russia from amongst Estonians" (Grenzstein 1890a). For Grenzstein it was not enough just to report and add something, he really wanted to investigate the matter and keep the discussion alive. So, in addition to retelling the previous articles, Grenzstein also introduces the story of the inviting of the princes in the *Primary Chronicle* to his readers. However, the version of the story he retells is the Russification-minded reading of the chronicle, which depicts the inviters as solely Russians (Grenzstein 1890a). In addition to this he organised a visit to the teller of story published by Kampmann (Grenzstein 1890b) and encouraged his readers to collect more variants[9].

3. Critical response: a midpoint between Scandinavia and Russia

The last to intervene in the discussion is linguist and censor Jüri Truusmann[10]. His article was first published in Russian in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* ('Estonian Governorate Gazette') and later in translation in the newspapers *Eesti Postimees* ('Estonian Courier') and *Valgus* ('Light') (Truusmann 1890). Truusmann shares the opinion that the story is an important discovery for science: "by acknowledging the great power of poetry and the vividness of folk creations, the Estonian fairy-tale has also preserved historical truth" (ibid.). However, he is concerned about Grenzstein's conclusion that the existence of the folk tale could refer to the Estonian origin of the ancient princes: "Estonian newspapers and the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* have published articles about this fairy-tale, obviously claiming that the founders of the Russian state, namely Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor, originated in Estonia; it is highly probable that such a subjective explanation remained incomprehensible to true Russians" (ibid.). Unlike other discussants, who encouraged readers to participate in the discussion, the pointedly scientific argumentation of Truusmann's writing is rather directed to the termination of further discussion.

Jüri Truusmann refuses to share other discussants' belief in the primacy of the names of the protagonists. Rather, he maintains that the names of the princes originate from Scandinavia, and he sees the Estonian versions (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, and Truuvaar) as an intermediate stage between the Russian and Scandinavian versions. He exemplifies this with a reference to the modification Sineut (Scandinavian version of the name) > Sineus, arguing that, as the t > s change is characteristic of Finno-Ugric languages, Russians could have borrowed the name Sineus through the mediation of Finnic peoples, as proposed by linguist Arist Kunik[11].

Truusmann finds that the *Majaussi kasvandikud* folk tale is convincing proof of this version, so presents the modifications as Sineut > Siniuss > Sineus.

Truusmann also criticises other ideas that emerged in the discussion from the Scandinavian-centred point of view. He writes, for instance, that the sea the princes crossed was not Lake Peipus but the Baltic Sea, and that the name Rus' is derived from *rootsi* ('Sweden') (this interpretation was already published in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja*; however, Truusmann presents it as if it had not yet been stated).

Yet another peculiarity in Truusmann's approach is his greater attention to the original text of the *Primary Chronicle*. While Grensztein introduces the version of inviting the princes in which the inviters were only Russian (see 1890a), Truusmann highlights the presence of other nations as well. He finishes his article with the question of whether the Chuds mentioned in the chronicle might have been Estonians. By answering it in the affirmative, Truusmann also refers to the contradiction in the argumentation of the other discussants: if Estonians are Chuds, the idea of the princes being invited by Estonians would cast Estonians simultaneously in two roles, the inviters and the invitees, whereas the text of the chronicle clearly mentions that the princes were invited from *outside*.

This makes Truusmann's position highly ambivalent. On the one hand, hinting about the puzzlement of 'real Russians' at the beginning of his writing he positions himself as an official of the Empire. From this position he strictly disagrees with the interpretation that gives the Estonians a special position within the Russian Empire. However, on the other hand, he does not agree with the official Russification-minded readings of the *Primary Chronicle*, which stress the Chuds' subjugation to the Slavic tribes; rather he insists that the beginning of the empire involved cooperation

between several nations and languages, and that these nations had the right to preserve their particularity.

4. Back to the beginning: Whose idea was it in the first place?

In the article that initiated the discussion, Kampmann remains rather taciturn as to the origin of the folk-tale; he refers neither to the source nor to the place where the story was transcribed. He merely notes that "it was told by an old person who did not know any foreign languages or printed sources" (ibid.). In the course of the subsequent discussion, it appears that the story was told by Rein Ruute from Väike-Maarja Parish, and that the first to transcribe (i.e. 'discover') it was not Kampmann but Rein Ruute's grandson Voldemar Lurich, a 17-year-old who had just graduated from gymnasium (Kampmann 1890).

Both Kampmann and Lurich were Jakob Hurt's folklore correspondents. Kampmann joined Hurt's campaign at the beginning, in 1888, while Lurich's first delivery reached Hurt in February 1890, only a few months before the discussion was initiated. He had started collecting material for his first delivery at least a year before (*Majaussi kasvandikud* was written down over Easter 1889). As the young man lacked the courage to send his material to Hurt, he first showed them to Kampmann, the most prolific folklore collector in the area, and it seems that it was only feedback from Kaupmann that encouraged Lurich to post the collected material.

When he showed his material to Kampmann, Lurich also drew his attention to one tale, wondering about the similarity of the protagonists' names to those of the ancient Russian princes. Lurich, therefore, was not only the first to transcribe the tale, but also the first to notice the possible connection with the Russian chronicle. It is not too difficult to guess why Kampmann did not refer

to the youngster in his article. References to anonymous people and (as if) illiterate sources definitely sounded more authoritative than admitting that it was a connection established in the mind of a youngster trying his hand at folklore collecting. However, if we look from a wider perspective, Lurich's role is rather telling.

On the one hand, we must keep in mind that Lurich did something that folklore collectors often do – we find a lot of (pseudo) etymological explanations to the collected folktales on the manuscript pages. What is peculiar at the moment is that most of these ideas do not reach public space. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that Lurich had just graduated from a Russian-language gymnasium, where he had definitely studied the history of the empire (possibly including the Russification-minded version of the story of inviting the princes). It is most likely that graduating from the gymnasium made him stand out in his predominantly agrarian environment. And it could be that *Majaussi kasvandikud* offered him a possible connecting link between the things studied at school and those heard from his grandfather or other people.

Conclusion

At the beginning of my article I asked what made this story so important and topical for people at that time. The simplest answer would be that history and its reinterpretation was in fashion. Quite a few histories written by Estonians had been published, yet there were still many loose ends, especially in the more distant parts of history. History was discussed in newspapers, at meetings of local societies, and also in works of fiction. So we can conclude that this discussion was part of the broader process of discussing history.

What makes this discussion stand out is the diversity of participants, especially the role played by a 17-year-old Lurich. How could it be that his mind-play elicited the reaction it did from

the official censor? Of course, he did not participate on equal terms with others; his words and ideas were mediated by more educated participants, yet nobody doubted the connection he had noticed. In the case of Lurich, we can speak about searching for what Eda Kalmre (2013) calls "the great stories of a small nation". He does not focus on creating a complete new version of history, but rather enjoys the discovery of a connection. Grenzstein and Truusmann, on the other hand, focus on something more general and more complete, *rewriting* history in a way that would provide Estonians with a positive role in the empire.

This particular discussion was influenced by the changing political situation. The tsarist state was in the process of consolidation and although it was mainly aimed at weakening the positions of the Baltic Germans, it also had an effect on the cultural identity of Estonians. Taking this into account, we can look at the discussion as an identity-related work of a nation that tried to see these changes in a positive light. They were not pro-Russification, but they believed that even in this context it was possible to retain their national identity. The discussion is a kind of sign that Russification was not only straightforwardly oppressive, but that it also gave rise to new ideas that helped people to rethink Estonianness. It is paradoxical (or even ironic) that at the time when the Estonian language was practically ousted from official use, someone initiated a discussion in the press that focused on an interpretation of the Basic myth of the empire, based on the etymology in Estonian language. However, we can also say that it was specifically the peculiarities of the linguistic situation that made this discussion possible. The increase in the importance of Russian (including Russian-language education) also meant a rise in the number of Estonians who mastered Russian, increasing the number of people who were able to read in Russian. In turn, Estonians educated in Russian were interested in finding possible connections between these languages and their cultural traditions.

Notes

[1] Troublemaker.

[2] Blue snake.

[3] Loyal man.

[4] Several historians have called for the term Russification to be abandoned as the name of the era, referring to the excessive vagueness and judgemental nature of the term (see, e.g., Miller 2009; Brüggeman 2010; Karjahärm 2012). Due to the lack of a better alternative, I stick to the term Russification; I hope that my approach will help to show that the influence of so-called Russification could be rather varied.

[5] Estonians are not mentioned in the excerpt. However, the ethnonym Chuds designated different Baltic-Finnic nations, including Estonians (Cheshikhin 1894: 2–3). In the 19th-century Estonian retellings of the story, the name 'Chuds' is usually translated as Estonians.

[6] Mihkel Kampmann (1867–1943) was a school teacher, cantor, newspaper editor, literary historian. Published several schoolbooks and works about history of Estonian literatuure.

[7] Another indication of the fact that the names and activity of the princes were not widely known in Estonian-language written sources was the lack of a unified tradition of presenting Russian names in the Latin alphabet. So, in the pre-discussion texts, the name Рю́рик is spelt Rürik (Lindenberg 1872) and Ruurik (C. R. Jakobson 1875; P. Jakobson 1885), the name Синеус is Sineus (Lindenberg 1872; C. R. Jakobson 1875) and Siineus (P. Jakobson 1885), and Трувор is Truvor (Lindenberg 1872) and Truuvor (C. R. Jakobson 1875; P. Jakobson 1885). It seems as if every user takes as the basis the Cyrillic name form, which they modify as they think best. In the following discussion, the names of the princes are also spelt differently. The Latinised variations of the name Трувор are especially interesting: Kampmann is the only one to use Truuvaar, yet it is considerably better at emphasising the similarity in the names than the variants used by the others.

[8] Ado Grenzstein (1849–1916) was an Estonian journalist, writer and teacher. His newspaper Olevik (1881–1915) was one of the most read newspapers of the time.

[9] He received three answers to this appeal (Koit 1890; Pihlakas 1890; Lurich 1890). Considering how many people actively collected folklore at that time, this was a rather meagre result. However, this might be yet another indication of how underrepresented the story of inviting the princes was in Estonian-language written sources.

[10] Jüri Truusmann (1856–1930) was a writer, linguist, ethnographer, and censor.

[11] Truusmann here refers to the Die Berufung Der Schwedischen Rodsen Durch Die Finnen Und Slawen: Eine Vorarbeit Zur Entstehungsgeschichte Des Russischen Staates, vol. 2 (1845).

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Notes on Belarusian Mythology Studies: Personalities and Research

Anastasiya Gulak

Abstract: The article examines the formation and evolution of Belarusian mythology studies from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, focusing on the key representatives of the mythological school and their contribution to the development of Belarusian folkloristics. The study traces the methodological shifts from early romantic mythologisation and prescientific interpretations (Pavel Shpilevsky) to empirical documentation and the integration of comparative-historical approaches (Adam Kirkor), and later to positivist models centred on systematisation, classification, and the concept of survivals (Pavel Shein, Piotr Bessonov, Dovnar-Zapolsky, Lyatsky, Nikiforovsky). The article highlights how Belarusian scholars aligned mythological research with broader European academic trends—linguistic theories of myth, evolutionism, and cultural-historical paradigms—while simultaneously constructing a national scholarly tradition. The legacy of the mythologists is assessed through their influence on contemporary Belarusian humanities, especially the modern encyclopaedic projects and interdisciplinary approaches combining

folkloristics, linguistics, ethnography, and semiotics. The article argues that despite methodological limitations, the foundational work of the 19th-century mythologists remains crucial for the reconstruction of Belarusian mythopoetic consciousness and for understanding the deep symbolic structures of traditional culture.

Keywords: Belarusian mythology, mythological school, folkloristics; evolutionism; demonology; Slavic mythology; Belarusian folklore studies

The history of academic reflections on the folklore and mythology tradition of Belarus is associated with the first academic direction in the Belarusian ethnography, which dates back to the 1840–1890s period. Soviet linguists and folklorists recognised that Shpilevsky, Kirkor, Bessonov, Shein, as well as Bahdanovich, Dovnar-Zapolsky, Lyatsky, Nikiforovsky and Romanov paid tribute to mythologists' philosophical and methodological principles (Kabashnikau 2004: 15–16). Their inputs into the scholarly field were represented by a significant number of works, from reviews in the periodicals of the 1850–1870s period to modern historiographical and folklore research. However, the conceptual understanding of the nineteenth century mythologists' contribution to the study of archaic consciousness and culture has become the focus of Scientists' attention relatively recently.

In Soviet folklore studies, which functioned within the boundaries of ideologically biased literary criticism, mythological imaginations were often identified with the early forms of religion devoid of ethno-cultural elements. Such an approach did not facilitate an objective assessment of the mythologists' academic works. They were either regarded as students and members of the brothers Grimm school, or identified with Slavophiles. Such an interpretation asserted that the mythological direction was regarded as reactionary for a long time. Despite adhering to an

opposite point of view, mythologists' critics could not deny that the representatives of the mythological direction played "a positive role in raising interest in the people's spiritual culture within the comparative study of the folklore, belief and rituals of the Slavic peoples" (Bandarchyk 1964: 52). The problem was further complicated by the fact that the concept of an *academic school* in the humanities was undeveloped (Bayev 1977: 503) and a biographical and descriptive approach was prevailing in the analysis of the academic works of earlier researchers.

Contemporary analysis of mythologists' theories accounts for the fact that the establishment of Belarusian folklore studies was tightly connected with the academic schools and trends that existed in the European and Russian science of the 19th century. It is important to understand that in the first half of the 19th century the study of mythology played a unifying role for several individual disciplines. According to Toporkov, academic interpretations of myth was only partially carried out within the disciplines of mythology and archaic belief studies. The most notable researchers of mythology and folklore of the 19th and early 20th centuries were also either linguists, literary historians or ethnographers (Toporkov 1997: 17). It also is necessary to add that a significant part of the mythological studies of the mid-nineteenth century appeared within the context of journalism and local history studies.

On the one hand, the mythological direction in Belarusian folklore studies should be treated as a functional autonomy of its representatives conditioned by a common theoretical background. On the other hand, the differentiation between these representatives should also be taken into consideration as it helps to reveal individual research paradigms of every scholar. The mythological direction existed as a non-institutional community of Belarusian researchers of oral and poetic heritage; the focus of this community was the concept of myth as the basis of spiritual culture. Academic communication between the members of the community was

generally impersonal (it was carried out through academic, methodological and journalistic texts). The theoretical principles and methodological approaches towards mythology were formed and implemented in different locations independently and relatively simultaneously. As a result, new conceptual ideas of the genesis and semantics of Belarusian mythopoetic heritage and folklore emerged within the context of folklore research and journalism.

In search of the Belarusian Atlantis

The initial phase of the mythological school research is dominated by the artistic mythologisation of Belarusian folk culture, correlated with the romantic idea of the discovery of the Belarusian religion. This was exemplified by the corpus of Slavic mythical characters of Pavel Shpilevsky (1840–1850s). His articles about Slavic antiquities, under the title "Belarusian Folk Tales" (part 1, 1846; parts 2–3 titled "Belarusian Folk Beliefs", 1852) are the most characteristic examples of this tendency. Shpilevsky's work "The Study of Werewolves in Belarusian Belief" (1853) is also dedicated to mythological research. Pavel Shpilevsky's belonging to the mythological school also appears in his article cycle "Belarus in Characteristic Descriptions and Fantastic Fairy Tales" published in *Pantheon* magazine (1853–1856).

The works of Pavel Shpilevsky should be regarded as a prescientific approach to the description of Slavic mythology that was conditioned by its very nature as it was perceived by a researcher of the first half of the 19th century. The main meaning-making principle of this approach is the modality principle, which implies an author's subjective relationship with the scientific facts; their interpretation is simultaneously a basis for the assertion of these facts. We should take into consideration that Pavel Shpilevsky's texts include references to a fairly high number of 19th century

scholarly works, although these references are often fragmentary. But the aspiration to refer to a large number of sources indicates that Shpilevsky aimed to educate his potential audience. The analysis of his belonging to the mythological school should account for the fact that he did not aim to reconstruct the mythology as a type of culture or a form of consciousness based on archaic forms of mentality, but was rather constructing "the narrative and personified basis" (Pivoev 1991: 14) of Belarusian paganism.

Shpilevsky expresses thoughts that resonate with the ideas of German romanticism: "Different studies about the antiquities of Athens and Rome constantly appear on the pages of our magazines ... Whereas the antiquities of Western Russia, and especially Belarus, seem to be considered too insignificant to be discussed in the periodicals' publications. I do not know how to explain the indifference of our scholars towards Belarus. Perhaps it can be explained by the fact that it is easier to write about the Roman and Greek antiquities in the office using foreign sources, but in order to write about Belarus, it was necessary to know it, live there, observe all its antiquities for a few years onsite" (Shpilevsky 1846: 1).

In search of mythological characters Shpilevsky turns to folklore, following the lead of Jacob Grimm and Fedor Buslaev and treating Slavic folklore as a relic of the ancient myths. He argues that mythology is present in folklore texts in a distorted, altered form, and the task of a researcher is to reconstruct the ancient myths from their relics.

Levkievskaya (2002: 311–352) conducted a thorough analysis of the characters of "Belarusian folk tales" according to several criteria. It is important for our study that being a mythologist Shpilevsky understood that, on the one hand Slavic demons lack the morphological detail, but on the other hand, they are numerous and diverse. Moreover, it is possible to argue that he comprehended the significance of folk demonology as an important and integral part of the archaic Slavic culture. For example, he thoroughly

analysed the folklore and mythological semantics of the image of a werewolf that was later referred to by almost all the researchers of Belarusian mythology.

The image of the werewolf in the "Belarusian folk tales" can be considered entirely correct, although there is a tendency of significant subjectivisation of its text. The pattern of the folk story about the werewolf is fictionalised by Shpilevsky and is thus turned into a sentimental novel. Shpilevsky's journalistic text illustrates the method of the compilation of genuine mythological functions of certain characters of Belarusian traditional culture with the motifs and functions that exist in or are determined by the literary tradition. For example, fictionalised essays about the Belarusian folk characters Klyaskun, Bagan, Bordzya, Kumyalgan, etc., are among the examples of the author's myth-making, as his critics pointed out.

Generally speaking, "Belarusian folk tales" lack verification (the absence of verification being a typical feature of the mythological school) as a logical and methodological procedure for establishing the authenticity of a theoretical postulate based on its congruence with empirical data (Gulak 2009). Shpilevsky's "scientific and poetic love of people" causes factual errors in his ethnographic descriptions. Pypin (1892: 75) commented on them in the following way: "unfortunately, he had no ethnographic training; moreover, the general literary principles did not contain enough knowledge about the proper handling of folk life and poetic heritage; a large part of his essays has only a fictional value and does not have sufficient scientific validity".

Thus, the elements of academic knowledge that transpire at the level of the artistic mythologising of Belarusian folk culture phenomena can be spotted in Shpilevsky's, and other researchers', inconsistent use of works on lexicography and the origin of the language. That leads to the organic connection between the names of some mythical characters of the corpus and the word

formation paradigm of the East Slavic mythological vocabulary. The idea that the mythical characters first described by Shpilevsky in his works on Belarusian folklore belong to the category of so-called armchair mythology has become common in folklore studies. While acknowledging the correctness of such criticism it should be noted that examples of the armchair mythology should be considered within the context of the history of folklore studies; it is thus necessary to take into account the level of development of mythological study in the 19th century, which was in its early stages back then. The arguments of the researchers of 19th century mythology should be interpreted within the context of the formation of the theory and practice of scientific research. The main ways in which Shpilevsky expressed his personal opinion of the scientific facts were the author's interpretation of the facts of Belarusian culture in the absence of verification as a logical and methodological procedure to establish the scientific authenticity of a postulate, the author's compilation of the genuine mythological functions of certain characters of Belarusian traditional culture with the motives and functions conditioned by literary tradition.

Empiricism and the first theories

The second stage of the mythological direction development is characterised by the shaping of the empirical base for the study of mythology. It is embodied by the academic and journalistic activities of another notable representative of this school, namely, Adam Kirkor. His principal research work, which lays out his analysis of Belarusian mythology, is titled *An Ethnographic Overview of the Vilna Governorate* (1857).

Kirkor's academic worldview was shaped by the linguistic theory of myth. He consistently refers to Müller and Kuhn's solar-meteorological theory (Gulak 2008). The comparative-

historical method in Kirkor's research takes the shape of a typological comparison of the mythical characters of different cultures (Ancient, Germanic, Slavic), with the focus on the facts of the East Slavic/Belarusian traditional culture. The empirical base of Belarusian mythology research is significantly enriched in the middle of the 19th century thanks to Kirkor embracing materials from Western European medieval texts, the relicts of Slavic palaeography and the publications of the Slavic Pantheon categorisations of the second half of the 18th century. He also put these data into the context of Belarusian culture.

Thus, Kirkor used the medieval Russian epic poem "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" as material for mythological interpretation. The poem was published in 1800 and is considered to date back to the late twelfth century. In 1818 one of the pioneers of Slavic studies Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski discussed the value of this poem formythology and folklore studies in his work "On Slavism and Christianity". Drawing upon Dołęga-Chodakowski's ideas Kirkor's essay "The Artefacts of Ancient Times" begins with literary and journalistic reminiscences related to this poem. Kirkor lists "the old gods that lived in folk memory despite the people's conversion to Christianity": Boyan the diviner, the grandson of Veles, who was able to give wisdom and poetic inspiration; the winds that were the grandchildren of Stregod; and a prince's army, the soldiers of which were the grandchildren of powerful Dazhdbog the son of Perun. Kirkor (1993: 236) argued that "these gods have been reigning in Belarus for such a long time that they are not alien to people even now". The author also refers to the East Slavic chronicle titled *The Tale of Bygone Years*, published in different compilations between 1804 and 1841, the *Russian Chronicle of the Reverend Nestor* (14th century), etc.

Kirkor reflects on the mythological aspect of the research works on (local) history and archaeology. According to Tolstoy, "the almost complete absence of the data on Slavic religion until the sixth

century and the scarcity of information on it dating back to the period between the 6th and the 11th centuries compelled researchers to reconstruct the ancient Slavic religion with the help of later material" (Tolstoy 1996: 145). This later material was published by Teodor Narbutt and Józef Kraszewski. Kirkor also starts actively using the data on history and traditional culture collected by the Provincial Statistical Committee, as well as material published in periodicals, 'commemorative books' and the collections of Russian Geographical Society in the academic research.

While conducting his research on local history Kirkor meticulously documents ancient Slavic artefacts. He writes that many ancient settlements, assembly of the people sites, court locations, places of sacrifice and meeting points for local residents have been preserved in Belarus. He publishes original toponymic legends on historical topics, such as a legend about Lake Knyaz and the castle of the Slutskys-Olelkovich princes, a legend about church bell that dates back to the times of the Great Northern War, a legend about the capture of Mogilev by the armies of Charles XII and Peter the Great during the Great Northern War, a legend about Dubrowna in Orsha district and a legend about the Rogneda mountain in Polotsk in the *Picturesque Russia* edited volumes. The legends about Krichev and Turov are of particular interest because their mythological potential lies in the use of motifs of petrification, drowning or falling through the ground, vanishing into the earth/water spells, stealing unbaptised children, impossible tasks and supernatural guards.

The fictionalised descriptions that Kirkor published in *Picturesque Russia* aimed to reaffirm mythologists' idea of the extraordinary archaism of traditional Belarusian culture: "Belarus, with the majestic Dnieper and Dvina rivers, with its dense forests, impassable tundra and swamps, is the kingdom of wolves and roe deer, forest spirits and mermaids, witches and fairies … Although it accepted Christianity early, it preserved ancient pagan legends

and rituals for a long time. Even now a Belarusian appreciates his home penate *Tshur*[1], he still knows the gods of each season of the year and can even describe the appearance of each of them. He remembers the appearance of *Yarila*[2] and still evokes *Lada*[3] when calling the spring, he is able to hide from the *Lesun*[4] in the forest, and sometimes even deceives him, he knows how to tease the mermaids, but not be caught by them. He cherishes his *Lyolya*, the goddess of spring, his nourisher, the goddess of summer *Tsyotsya*, when she takes the form of a beautiful, well-built woman with the ripe ears of corn on her head and with fruit in her hands, but he knows how to please the terrible *Zyzya*[5], the severe and deadly *Karachun*"[6] (Kirkor 1993: 236). The inclusion of the characters that have no pronounced mythological status in the demonological system of Belarusian mythology is evidence of the researcher's desire to construct a demonological level for Belarusian mythology. Such inclusion is appropriate in many cases. However, the attempts to reconstruct the myth, to create a hierarchy of mythical characters, as well as a disregard of the idea of folklore genres evolution sometimes led Kirkor towards ungrounded conclusions.

Kirkor's important field of activity within the area of mythology is his participation in data collection for the archaeological dictionary that was published in the journal *Antiquities: The Proceedings of the Moscow Archaeological Society* (1865–1867). Kirkor's short articles describing his own research on the artefacts of Slavic and Baltic material culture (including some of its mythological aspects) "still provoke interest today, although they are sometimes controversial" (Karsky 1903: 60). The materials of the archaeological dictionary illustrate how linguistic data, such as analysis of the naming forms, are elevated to the status of major source in the study of mythology. This status "facilitates the transition from the field of linguistic into the field of historical comparative mythology" (Toporov 1996: 162). A case in point is Kirkor's analysis of

the Svintarog valley micro toponym. The image of the legendary Lithuanian prince Svintarog (Šventaragis, 13th century), who was considered the founder of the funerary cremation ritual, was obviously attractive for Kirkor as a mythologist, archaeologist and explorer of the numerous mounds on Lithuanian and Belarusian territory.

Kirkor expands the sources of mythological study "adding new information to the mythological concept of his predecessor Pavel Shpilevsky that aimed to reinforce the academic perspective on the Belarusian oral poetry as a deeply archaic art form" (Cishchanka 1986: 198). This information comprised the prosaic genres of folklore, calendar rites, customs, beliefs and ritual regulations, and partly also the song texts.

The legends that included the motifs of cultural hero, petrifaction, punishment for insulting a holy stone, as well as toponymic legends and tales of evil spirits published by Kirkor (1993: 275– 351) reveal significant aspects of the mythology.

In his research into Slavic mythology Kirkor relied on the descriptions of rituals, customs, and prosaic genres of folklore to a much greater extent than Shpilevsky, however, he did not consider the texts of traditional songs to be a significant source for the study of mythology. Generally speaking, Kirkor's historical and archaeological experience supports the idea of the commonality of Slavic and Baltic mythology. The researcher is the first to analyse the mythological aspect of many genres of Belarusian ritual and non-ritual culture.

In the mid-1860s mythologists' works centred on generalising concepts that integrated the study of mythology, ritual and verbal folk art, and language. Mythologists adopted a broad perspective on the object of their study and defined it as "a holistic culture that integrates its verbal, material and symbolic manifestations" (Toporkov 1997: 381). However, in line with the romantic quest for national particularities, the study of oral folk poetry and folk belief

gradually shifted towards the establishment of a realistic worldview in the middle of the 19th century. Historicism, evolutionary methods of thinking, attention to specific facts and the surrounding reality were formed "within romanticism" (Myagkov 2000: 19–20). Other scientific theories influenced the concepts of the mythological school in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Moreover, according to Myagkov, a researcher from the Russian historical school, the relationship between romantic aesthetics and romantic artistic creativity, on the one hand, and the realism of the middle of the 19th century, on the other hand, has the features of both a sharp shift and a smooth transition.

Research under the umbrella of positivism

The third stage of the academic study of Belarusian mythology is marked by the formation of a new methodology. There is a gradual departure from the focus on abstract, speculative problems, from the interpretation of folklore texts as evidence of the bygone mythological consciousness. There is a tendency towards factual accuracy, collection and systematisation of various empirical materials, as indicated by a clear dominance of the empirical data in the academic works that adhere to the spirit of positivism, for example 'provisional descriptions', 'artefacts', 'reviews', 'materials for study', 'collections' and 'assemblages'. New approaches to the understanding of folklore are created, and new concepts of the archaic folk culture genesis emerge. Researchers' adoption of positivist philosophical concepts gives the humanities a powerful impetus for development. The mythological study of the Belarusian past is gradually evolving from a romantic fascination with antiquity and archaism to the positivist ordering and analysis of national heritage.

This is evident in the tendency to collect examples of oral poetry and generalise them via systematisation and classification. Such generalisation became possible because researchers of mythology of the 1860–1870s drew upon the legacy of Slavic folklore studies from the first half of the nineteenth century. The general theoretical framework of the studies conducted by collectors and researchers belonging to the romantic and democratic intellectual traditions, such as Dołęga-Chodakowski, Kireevsky, Maksimovic, Holovatsky, Sreznevsky, Bodansky, Metlinsky already implied a desire for objectivity and specificity of knowledge. They gradually withdrew historical cultural heritage "from the scope of pseudohistorical schemes and subjected it to consistent historical analysis that takes into consideration its particular aspects" (Myagkov 2000: 19–20). This manifested itself in the creation of the collection tradition and the development of the principles of folklore documentation (Sojmonov 1960: 148–150).

In the 1860–1870s notable mythologists Pavel Shein and Piotr Bessonov deconstruct the original ideas that were prevalent in early mythological research and adopt other scientific theories of the second half of the nineteenth century. While trying to identify the scientific schools that influenced these researchers in the most profound way, it is first necessary to consider the fact that various scientific directions and elements of different schools coexisted in the 1860s, and could also coexist within the work of a single researcher.

Bessonov's main work in the field of Belarusian mythology studies is the folklore collection *Belarusian Songs Accompanied by a Detailed Explanation of their Creativity and Language: Essays on Folk Rituals, Customs, and Everyday Life* (hereinafter *Belarusian Songs*). Evdokim Romanov appreciated Bessonov's comments and explanations and wrote that "Bessonov's essay should be a handbook for a folklore collector, if he wants to engage thoroughly with it" (Romanov: viii).

Bessonov applied the method of synthetic analysis to Belarusian oral poetry within a broad cultural context in the comments to the collection. He interprets Belarusian calendar ritual poetry within the framework of the people's mythological worldview. He argues that the ritual language of Belarusian folklore is more ancient than the epic language of Russian folk legend and historical epic. He also consistently uncovers Slavic mythopoetic and ritual counterparts in the Belarusian calendar and ritual folklore phenomena. For example, *Belarusian Songs* describes the Belarusian rite of *Kust*[7], outlining the general ritual actions, chronology and locality, i.e. the "Pinsk area where Belarusian features already mix with Little Russian ones" (Bessonov 1871: 25). In the context of analysis of the *Kust* and *Kupala*[8] rituals Bessonov cites the examples of the Serbian rituals Kraljice and Dodola, which involve songs and protagonists with the same names as the Belarusian rituals. Bessonov compares the songs of the Belarusian Kupala Night ritual with the Ukrainian, Galician and Polish Sobótka songs. These and a number of other ideas illustrate that the information on mythology contributes to the scientific value of *Belarusian Songs*. The influence of the cultural-historical school on Bessonov's work can be traced in his handwritten essays about Belarus (1865-end of the 1870s) where he analyses the processes of ethnogenesis and class and religious differentiation in Belarusian society, and promotes the idea of the uniqueness of Belarusian national culture as well as its historical and cultural specificity.

In parallel with the adoption of postulates from the cultural-historical school, from the mid-1870s East Slavic folklore studies start to embrace ideas of evolutionism that were laid out by British social anthropologists Edward Tylor, James Fraser and Herbert Spencer. The evolutionists' ideas form the basis of the anthropological (ethnographic) school in Eastern Slavic folklore studies. Its main postulate was the discrete spontaneous generation of folklore motifs and themes (the theory of the spontaneous generation of

motifs). This is interpreted as proof that different people went through the identical stages of evolution.

Mangart's program, which was published in 1867 as an appendix to *The Antiquities of the Moscow Archaeological Society*, inspired Shein's collecting and publishing activities. As a tribute to Mangart, Shein published a special article in the *Etnographicheskoe obozrenie* ('Ethnographic Review') in 1890.

Shein's ideas on mythology are most comprehensively outlined in his works titled *Belarusian Folk Songs with the Rituals, Customs and Superstitions* (1874) and *The Materials for the Study of Everyday Life and Language of the Russian Population of the North-West Region* (*Part I Belarusians Everyday and Family Life through the Prism of Rituals and Songs*, 1887). Shein came close to the folklore tradition via large-scale and active communication with his correspondents. The communication followed Mangart's model. This sets him apart from Bessonov, who interpreted folk texts but had only indirect knowledge of the living folk tradition as he accessed it via other sources. Shein does not rely on random materials from other researchers' collections, but seeks to create its own sources for the study of particular mythological phenomena.

The analysis of harvest rituals semantics and the functional characteristics of mythological characters such as Sparysh[9], Valos,[10] etc., are among Shein's relevant contributions to the study of Belarusian mythology. For example, when conducting an etymological analysis of the semiotised lexeme *Raj* (Paradise) in Belarusian traditional culture Shein aims to incorporate "the data of the Indo-Germanic peoples comparative mythology into it at least to a small extent" and begins with Sanskrit, referring to the entries from the *Sanskrit Dictionary* (which comprises seven volumes, 1855–1875). "The word rai is defined by the concepts Besetz, Habe, Gut, Kostbarkeit, which mean possession, property, wealth, value … Is it a coincidence that these words have a closer etymological connection with the Belarusian word … but all the

variants we have cited seem to justify fully its Sanskrit meaning" (Shein 1874: 18).

The large number of references to the Indo-European languages in mythological studies of the second half of the nineteenth century indicates the significant influence of the migration theory. However, the folklore and mythological research that relied on this theory had several limitations, such as ignoring national and social factors in the spread of folklore, formal and structural comparisons of the plots and motifs, a sometimes non-critical approach to the indications of borrowing and identifying 'Indian influences' in very diverse materials. In line with Bessonov's ideas, Shein advocates the great potential of the Belarusian calendar and ritual folklore as a source for mythological studies, in contrast to epic poetry, which was of primary importance to the representatives of the Russian mythological school.

Makhnach, the researcher into evolutionism in the national ethnography, notes that form the mid-1890s researchers were increasingly interested in the evolution of Belarusian social institutions and material culture (Makhnach 2005: 49). Nikolay Nikiforovsky, Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapolsky, Evgeny Lyatsky and Adam Bahdanovich published studies of the archaic phenomena of Belarusian traditional culture. These researchers discussed the relicts of mythological consciousness in their works, which through certain historiographic studies claimed that they belong to the mythological school. Indeed, their research still partly relies on the legacy of the mythological school.

Nikiforovsky's essay "Evil Spirits: A Collection of Common Folk Legends About Evil Spirits in the Vitebsk Region of Belarus" (hereinafter "Evil Spirits"), written in 1898 (Vol. 2, 1907) is considered by some researchers to represent the first systematic scientific description of Belarusian demonology that was based on popular legends and lore. Indeed, "Evil Spirits" clearly has certain features that illustrate the influence of the mythological school. This is a

detailed and somewhat fictional description of the origin, hierarchy, localisation and function of demonological beings which primarily advocates the idea of their significant number, diversity and omnipresence (Nikiforovsky 1907). The hierarchy of mythological characters that Nikiforovsky constructs evokes a certain methodological paradigm that was created by researchers of the mythological school in the middle of the 19th century.

Nikiforovsky almost entirely omits the theoretical aspects of mythology. The only exception is the idea about the helplessness of the ancient ancestors before the forces of nature that is outlined in the introduction. This alleged helplessness is considered the reason for the deification of the natural elements; the deification is transmitted from generation to generation within traditional culture. Guided by the ideas of the anthropological (ethnographic) school, Nikiforovsky interprets the phenomena of spiritual culture as survivals that are kept in a modified form and which adapt to new conditions and acquire new functions.

The influence of Western European evolutionism on Bahdanovich and Dovnar-Zapolsky is evidenced in their use of British evolutionists' research models. For example, Bahdanovich's essay "Survivals of the Ancient Belarusian Worldview" (1895) borrows the basic theoretical background (in particular, the concept of survivals) directly from Tylor's research. But in their study of the genesis of Belarusian mythological belief Bahdanovich, and later also Karsky, rely on the postulate of the solar-meteorological theory of myth (Bogdanovich 1895: 80–127; Karsky 2001: 128). However, they interpret the development of the primitive forms of religious beliefs within the framework of evolutionary theory. Karsky writes that "the images of the gods are a result of the cultural evolution of individual peoples … However, the still undivided Indo-Europeans already laid a solid foundation for mythology. The main deity was the sky … other phenomena and forces of nature also found their place in religion, but compara-

tive mythology has not yet managed to accurately determine their meaning" (2001: 128).

According to Lyatsky, the main factor that conditions the preservation of mythological consciousness in survivor forms of culture is pagan dualism. In his work *Belarusian's Ideas about Evil Spirits* (1890) Lyatsky argues that in the people's subconsciousness "nature embodies the struggle between the two principles of good and evil, light and darkness, harm and usefulness" (1890: 25). Lyatsky argues that under the influence of Christianity dualism is transformed into, and leads to, a polarised worldview. The beliefs associated with "good patron gods" are embodied by the Christian God and the "saints that express his will", and the ideas about the evil forces of nature are embodied in demonological characters. "The Belarusian understands any manifestation of evil forces under the term 'evil spirits', and the concept of the demon [--]> is not conflated with the notions of his subordinates, such as the household, forest and water spirits, and mermaids who live exclusively in this world, while the devil himself may be both in this and in the other world" (Lyatsky 1890: 26).

Dovnar-Zapolsky interpreted ethnographic materials from the standpoint of evolutionist methodology. His work *The Belarusian Wedding in the Context of Cultural and Religious Survivals* (1893) is devoted to the evolution of marriage and family relations, which is a typical research issue within the framework of evolutionism. The work discusses the folklore and ethnographic material on the Belarusian wedding that Dovnar-Zapolsky collected during fieldwork in the Ihumen, Babruysk, Rechytsa, Mazyr and Pinsk districts in 1890–1891. He argues that the dominant forms and the main "living thoughts" of the past are transformed into survivals in the later periods of cultural evolution and are kept as relics and artifacts of a "distant tradition". According to Dovnar-Zapolsky, "the whole ceremony [of a Belarusian wedding] takes place under

circumstances that are dominated by religious survivals" [Dovnar-Zapolsky 1893: 51].

Dovnar-Zapolsky interprets a lot of the stages of the wedding ceremony (matchmaking, engagement, *pasad* (ritual sitting)[11], korovai ceremony[12]) as manifestations of "earlier meanings". For example, the cult of the hearth and the veneration of the dead can be traced in the *pasad* ritual. The veneration of the dead is manifested by "walking around a table, which replaced the ancient altar, and bowing at the corner where the location of the ancestors' spirits was moved; setting the hair on fire with 'thunder candles' (gromnice)[13] that are kept throughout the year behind the icons [symbolizes] the fire that is lit on an altar" (Dovnar-Zapolsky 1893: 51). Dovnar-Zapolsky also lists the tradition of cutting the bride's hair, covering her head while she is sitting on the *pasad*, and the use of fertility symbols (a bread bowl and sheep's skin, etc.) among the "cultural and religious survivals" of the *pasad* ritual. Thus, Dovnar-Zapolsky follows the ideas of evolutionism by arguing that a significant number of cultural survivals exist in the Belarusian wedding ceremony.

The legacy of the mythologists in modern academic discourse

It should be noted that the academic value of the 1890s texts devoted to mythology is significantly limited by the almost complete absence of metadata on folklore materials. In terms of the methodological aspects of the first researchers into Belarusian mythology, it should be noted that they did not create any methods for collecting and analysing mythological material. The creation of a system of theoretical and cognitive categories, as well as the development of the disciplinary research methods of Belarusian folklore studies, began in the 1990s.

However, the mythologists' main methodological asset, adopted and expanded by contemporary scientists, is the reconstruction of mythological plots with the help of comparative historical research on the reflections of these plots in the Belarusian and other ethnic traditions. The study of Belarusian mythopoetic heritage at the crossroads of folkloristics, linguistics, literary history and ethnography that was initiated by the mythologists of the nineteenth century, today has transformed into the synthesis of traditional folkloristic approaches with the methodology of cultural anthropology, linguistics and semiotics, and is the main strategy in the study of East Slavic paganism.

The conceptual aspect of the mythologists' legacy defines the understanding of mythology as a primary form of consciousness and the ideological basis of Belarusian traditional culture. This legacy also defines the relationship between mythology and language and poetry and the understanding of the transformative potential of poetic forms of popular culture. Mythologists noted that Christmas, Easter and Midsummer rites are well-preserved and constitute the highlights of Belarusian folklore, and are also exclusively informative for the reconstruction of ancient beliefs (Gulak 2007). The studies of the nineteenth century mythologists were the first to reveal the interweaving of pagan and Christian traditions, the commonality of East Slavic mythology with the mythological systems of other Indo-European peoples and the distinctive features of Belarusian mythology.

The actualisation of many issues of folk tradition that were first recorded by mythologists began in the 1970s when Belarusian folklorists started publishing the *Belarusian Folk Art* academic series. Works by Kirkor, Bessonov, Shein, Dovnar-Zapolski, Lyatsky, and Romanov turned out to be valuable sources for the following volumes: *Winter Songs: Christmas Carols and Schadrouki*[14] (1975), *Spring Songs* (1979), *Valachobnyja*[15] *Songs* (1980), *Kupala*

and St. Peter's Day Songs (1985), *Ballads* (Vols 1–2, 1977–1978) and others.

In the late 1980s, Belarusian scientists had a growing interest in the mythopoetic folk heritage. Vasiljevich, Nenadovec and Konan wrote research works on mythology in the 1990s-early 2000s. A wide range of issues of Belarusian mythology are explored by Valodzina, Duchyc, Zaykovsky, Lobach, Novak, Prokharau, Sanko, Sharay, Shved.

The first edition of the encyclopaedic dictionary *Belarusian Mythology* (2004), which was compiled by Sanko (academic editor), Valodzina, Vasilevich, Duchyc, Zaykovsky, Kruk, Lobach, Prokharau, Salavey and Shved, gave an overview of Belarusian scientists' theoretical contributions to the study of mythology and gave significant impetus to further research in this field. Antropau, Bulanava, Kuharonak, Lapatsin, Filipenka, Yankousky and others joined the research team at that time.

Today *Belarusian Mythology* (2011) is the first attempt to systematically and comprehensively describe and analyse Belarusian cultural heritage within the Belarusian humanities framework. Many Belarusian cultural heritage phenomena discussed in the volume remain relevant and illustrate the uniqueness of this heritage. The Belarusian mythopoetic worldview is represented by about 1,000 articles in the 2011 edition. The articles are thematically categorised according to the 15 main codes that constitute the internal structure of the Belarusian mythopoetic worldview. Plant and animal codes are discussed in more than 120 dictionary entries. Landscape and topographical codes include the mythopoetic images of the iconic locations and settlements. The historical and legendary aspect give an overview of folk epic and published sources, as well as chronicles. Other iconic categories include cardinal directions and the locations of cultural space. The dictionary provides the first detailed review of the meteorological code, and further discusses the calendar aspect of Belarusian rituals. The

character code is the most popular within the dictionary (more than 200 entries). It was supplemented by material collected during recent fieldwork and information from dialect sources. The essays by Shpilevsky, Nikiforovsky and several other mythologists from the nineteenth century, were also partly included in the dictionary and were accompanied by careful and objective commentary by the academic editors.

Today there is a unique publishing outlet for researchers into Belarusian folklore and mythological tradition in the form of the edited volume *Belarusian Folklore: Materials and Research* (Issues 1–6, 2014–2019). Its publication was inspired, and it was edited, by Tatsiana Valodzina, head of the Department of Folklore and Culture of the Slavic Peoples at the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

Thus, contemporary Belarusian science has established significant conceptual generalisations on traditional folk culture, which, according to the researchers, is characterised by an unusual depth of folk memory. The existence of a large amount of material compiled by the most notable representatives of the Belarusian folklore studies from the 19th and 20th centuries (including representatives of the mythological school) allows researchers to carry out a systematic study of folk culture. Semiotic, ethnolinguistic and culturological theoretical and methodological approaches are being developed within this study.

The main assets of the mythological school that were further elaborated by contemporary Belarusian science include the approach towards the mythology as towards the basis of Belarusian traditional culture, the conceptualisation of mythological thinking as creative activity, and tracing the evolution of the mythological and folklore forms of folk culture. The issues of the reconstruction of mythological consciousness and the study of symbolic organisation forms of this culture are extremely relevant today.

Notes

[1] The word 'Tshur' is a theonym from Slavic mythology. Tshur is a family guardian, a clan's spirit guide.

[2] One of the gods of the Slavic pantheon. Rituals and ideas about Yaril relate to vegetation and the fertility of the earth.

[3] A mythological character, a female embodiment of the spring awakening of nature, love and marriage.

[4] A mythological character, a forest spirit, potentially hostile to humans.

[5] A mythological character, the embodiment of winter cold, frost.

[6] The word 'Karachun' is a theonym from Slavic mythology. Karachun embodies the concept of sudden death and convulsions.

[7] A ritual formally timed to coincide with the Christian festival of Trinity. Its mythological role relates to the worship of patriarchal clan values, fertility, and spring vegetation.

[8] A ritual timed to coincide with the summer solstice. It includes worship of the sun (fire), water, and vegetation. For Belarusians, the celebration of Kupala includes a variety of ritual practices, beliefs, songs, dances, and legends.

[9] A mythological character associated with grain crops fertility, harvests of wheat.

[10] One of the gods of the Slavic pantheon. The rituals and perceptions of Valos refer to animal husbandry.

[11] One of the stages of a wedding ceremony, the blessing of a bride.

[12] One of the stages of a wedding ceremony, where multiple people engage in making a wedding cake.

[13] A ritual attribute, candle.

[14] These are songs sung during a door-to-door ritual that relates to the Christmas festival. The content of the songs appeals to magical powers that may ensure the prosperity and well-being of the hosts.

[15] A unique phenomenon of Belarusian folklore. Songs sung during a door-to-door ritual, formally timed to coincide with Easter. The content

of the songs is representative of lyric-epic images of the life of a man, a woman, a boy, and a girl, as well as wishes of happiness to each listener.

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