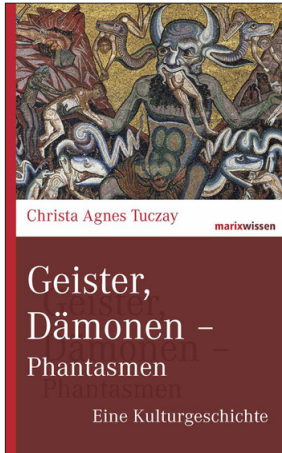


## BOOK REVIEWS

### A COMPACT OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD OF GHOSTS AND DEMONS



**Christa Agnes Tuczay. *Geister, Dämonen – Phantasmen. Eine Kulturgeschichte.* Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2015. 252 pp.**

The new book by Christa Agnes Tuczay presents a cultural-historic overview of the lore related to ghosts, with an emphasis on German cultural space. When picking up the book, the reader can wonder, for a moment, whether we would need yet another lexicon of ghosts, as many of the kind have already been published, also in German. Nevertheless, the world of ghosts has never ceased to excite people and although many belief creatures (e.g. dragons accumulating treasures) have lost their topicality in today's world, the readership interested in these topics is still large. The author, when writing her book, seems to have born in mind as vast an audience as possible. On the one hand, the text is easy to read for an ordinary reader and the terms have been explained in detail (for example, the author mentions at least on three occasions the connection between the term 'demon' and the verb 'share'). However, on the other hand, at the end of each keyword article researches published about the corresponding creature have been enumerated. This way the book is also helpful for the scholars who need more detailed information about a concrete creature. It is somewhat confusing, though, that there are no references in the text – it is hard to understand whether the presented conclusions come from the author herself or from some source she has cited.

More often than not, the author uses the historic-geographical method, trying to find the place of origin and spread of the beliefs connected with a certain creature. However, in the case of some beliefs it is quite probable that they have emerged simultaneously in several places, which could be due to similar sources of subsistence and social environments – as the author herself also admits (p. 237) when speaking about the development of ghost beliefs.

In some cases the reader is left with a wish that the author had defined more clearly which era she was talking about; for example, on page 74 she discusses, in the present tense, money spirits who in most cases have been deprived of their traditional shape in today's lore. On the other hand, when talking about a belief related to switched children, the author, referring to a lawsuit in 1690, mentions that in the period under discussion they were still viable (p. 89). As there are plenty of belief records and legends about the motif of a switched child dating from even the end of the 19th century, I would dare to assume that this kind of idea was somewhat topical even two centuries later.

In the case of review books covering voluminous material there is always the question of the extent to which a phenomenon is discussed. I would have liked to read more about the plague spirit as plague lore has had a considerable impact on European culture and beliefs in a wider sense; yet, the book mentions the plague spirit only in a few words (p. 104). However, it is most appreciated that the author has also discussed several more recent beliefs (e.g. those related to vanished hitchhikers or aliens) as well as the current features of the still topical creatures (e.g. ghosts, poltergeists, and their depiction in movies). Another advantage of the book is that it focuses not only on belief creatures but also on human beings, describing communication practices used to come into contact with the inhabitants of the afterworld.

As concerns the structure of the book, it is somewhat questionable why the rubric dealing with people's love affairs with demons is placed under the chapter speaking about disease spirits.

In general, however, the book makes a spirited read, suggesting how multifaceted and colourful Europe's religious worldview was in the past times, building a background also to contemporary beliefs. The author's thorough detective work in the world of belief creatures and the extensive research on the topic has brought to light exciting and even surprising cultural connections – for example, a fine network of linkages between Saint Nicholas, water spirits, Santa Claus, and even a crocodile.

Reet Hiimäe

## YET ANOTHER COLLECTION OF UDMURT FOLKSONGS

**Irina Pchelovodova & Nikolai Anisimov.** *Lymshor pal udmurt"eslen kyrĵan gur"essy / Pesni iuzhnykh udmurtov / Songs of southern Udmurts.* Izhevsk & Tartu, 2015. 374 pp.

Since the 1990s, Udmurt ethnomusicologists have been deeply engaged in the publication of Udmurt musical folklore. They have mainly drawn on the material collected so far; yet, fieldwork has also been ongoing. Even today Udmurtia and its diasporas preserve their folkloric

diversity of genres, including in the sphere of folksongs and other folk music; however, the survival of traditional culture cannot be guaranteed for years to come. The influence of mass media can be especially fast and devastating in the case of songs as novel ways of self-expression and registers steamroller in different forms of media and therefore generation exchange can bring about also change of culture, which cannot be hindered even by the reproduction of song repertoire by specially founded singing groups at festivals and other events.

