APPLENTLY, there is no disease that attracts so much attention from researchers (both medical doctors and ethnographers) as kautun (Plica Polonica, the Polish plait). By the mid-nineteenth century over 900 (!) research articles had been published and their number increased steadily. In 1843 Beschorner, director of the first asylum in Poland, published a large population-based study. However, to this day there is no generally accepted solution regarding the etiology and history of the disease, which manifests itself in entangled hair and is accompanied by rheumatic pains, sores, rash, crooked nails, blurred vision, as well as attacks of nerves, spasms and increased heart rate. This article will feature Belarusian materials that represent the eastern extent of the area of beliefs related to Plica Polonica. The article is based on the folklore and ethnographic data collected by the author over the past 20 years, and aims to analyse the ontology of the disease named kautun, its involvement in human communication both with the body and with non-human beings. The article also provides comments on the historical evolution of beliefs and magical practices associated with the Plica.

Key words: Belarusian ethnomedicine, healing ritual, kautun (Plica Polonica), incantations, contemporary beliefs, ethnographic fieldwork.

CAUSES OF PLICA POLONICA IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Apparently, there is no disease that attracts so much attention from researchers (both medical doctors and ethnographers) as kautun (Plica Polonica, the Polish plait). By the mid-nineteenth century over 900 (!) research articles had been published and their number increased steadily. In 1843 Beschorner, director of the first asylum in Poland, published a large population-based study. However, to this day there is no generally accepted solution regarding the etiology and history of the disease, which manifests itself in entangled hair and is accompanied by rheumatic pains, sores, rash, crooked nails, blurred vision, as well as attacks of nerves, spasms and increased heart rate. One of the first researchers of the disease, Kajetan Kowakewski, wrote in 1839: “The plica is almost entirely confined to certain countries. It occurs in Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Hungary, Silesia, Transylvania, and Prussia. It is also occasionally met with in different parts of Germany; along the Rhine, Switzerland, in Holland and Paris” (Morewitz 2007). This article will feature Belarusian materials that represent the eastern extent of the area of beliefs related to Plica Polonica.
This article aims to analyse the ontology of the disease named Plica (kautun), its involvement in human communication both with the body and with non-human beings. It also provides comments on the historical evolution of beliefs and magical practices associated with the Plica. The folklore and ethnographic data from across Belarus were collected by the author over the past 20 years and represent the boundaries of research covering the traditional Belarusian medicine.

In his notes on his journey through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the second half of the 18th century, Englishman William Coxe provides information on the disease:

In our progress through this country we observed several persons with matted or clotted hair which arises from a disorder called Plica Polonica; it receives that denomination, because it is considered as peculiar to Poland; although it is not infrequent in Hungary, Tartary, and several adjacent nations, and instances of it are occasionally found in other countries. According to the observations of Dr. Vieat, an ingenious Swiss physician long resident in Poland, who has published a treatise on this subject; the Plica Polonica proceeds from an acrid viscous humour, penetrating into the hairs: it then exudes from its sides or extremities, and clots the whole together, either in separate folds, or in one undistinguished mass. The symptoms, more or less violent, according to the constitution of the patient, or malignity of the disease, are itching, swellings, eruptions, ulcers, intermitting fevers, pains in the head, languor, lowness of spirits, rheumatism, gout; sometimes convulsions, palsy, and madness. The Plica Polonica appears to be a contagious distemper, which, like the leprosy, still prevails among a people ignorant in medicine, and inattentive to check its progress; but is rarely known in those countries where due precautions are taken to prevent its propagation. Its contagion is probably prevented from spreading among the Russians by the use of the vapour bath.¹

Nineteenth century ethnographers associated the disease with a characteristic climate and life in the marshes, a lack of proper hygiene combined with hard work, fright, and the evil eye, among other causes. "The Polish plait is generated by poverty, damp and poorly constructed dwellings, wearing a warm hat on unbrushed hair, both in winter and in summer, as well as general uncleanness" (Толстой 1983: 6); "Marshes are a true curse of this region (Polesye), having an extremely negative impact on the health of its inhabitants. All sorts of diseases, terrible fever, typhoid, tuberculosis are common among the miasma of the swamp. Besides, a terrible disease unknown elsewhere has built its nest here – plica. Plica is the result of an acute unthriftiness suffered by many Belarusians. Every hair on the human head is filled with pus, and they all are entangled into a hideous mass, which can be neither touched nor scratched or washed, and has to be worn wrapped in a linen bag. Plica is accompanied by aches, sores, rash, crooked fingernails and an ingrown eyelid" (Сно 1904: 5).

Educated Europeans were actively involved in the fight against the Polish plait, viewing it as superstition and a result of uncleanness. William Davidson (1583–1669), the physician to the Polish King John Casimir after 1651, mercilessly cut plaits, telling the patients to wash their hair and use a comb. The court physician of King John III Sobieski, Irishman Bernard O’Connor (1666–1698), and a Jewish physician Tobias Cohen (1652–1729), also treated their patients by removing the neglected hair. In Galicia, Plica Polonica became less visible after Dr. Józef Dietl spread rumours that wearing a Polish plait would be taxed (Gagol, Herman). Yet, the statement that “the plica disappeared after in the second half of the 19th century the last doctors who believed in it had died” (Gagol, Herman) seems somewhat presumptuous, especially taking into account the huge number of folk expedition records of recent decades in Belarus (Валодзіна 2007: 410–432, Валодзіна 2008). The rich mass of data related to Polish traditions were analysed in a work by Mareczewska (2012: 113–149).

**PLICA POLONICA AND THE PRACTICE OF MAGIC**

Obviously, the Polish plait is not only a phenomenon of a purely medical nature, but also a whole complex of mythological beliefs. Irreversibly entangled hair was also associated with causes of a supernatural nature, often manifested in the context of imitative magic: the Plica was correlated with spinning at Christmas (Богданович 1897: 189), lost hair being picked up by a bird or a mouse and bedeviling crops in the context of imitative magic: the Plica was correlated with spinning at Christmas (Богданович 1897: 189), lost hair being picked up by a bird or a mouse and bedeviling crops in the fields with the magic rite of zalom¹. The crop and vegetable allusions of the Plica are most obvious, especially against the background of mythological and poetic comparisons of hair with vegetation in general. Related texts starting with zalom strongly refer to crops, which can serve as a reason for the Plica:

Залом дзелалі на полі, тады і на галаве бузе, скруціцца і нічым яго не расчэшаш.

Гаць залом, і памрэш.

А то расчэшаш і памрэш. Чараўніца як робіць залом, тваё імя скажа. Той кусок мусіць, залом зжала.

Залом was made in the field, and then it will be in the hair, too, it will be entangled and it can never be brushed. And if you brush it, then you will
Moreover, Plica therapy is correlated with crop-related manipulations:

- А які час выбіралі, каб зняць каўтун?
  – Як жыто стоіць на полю, стропы, тоді можна зняць. Зжыналі яго, і яшчэ тая ж дура.

- And what time was chosen to remove kautun?
  – As the crops are standing in the field, harvested, then it can be reaped. Reaped and the stubble is standing.

Kautun should be worn for a year. If you can wear it for a year, then you will have a headache. Whoever has kautun, she is told: you have probably reaped a kautun. Kaўтун нада год вынаўсіць. Єсли год вынаўсила, і нада иті ў поле, када звяляць жыто, і нажаць першы сноп і пасадзіць з тымі валасамі бабу і ўжо можна зняць.

In the western part of the European area of distribution of Plica-related beliefs the disease is clearly correlated with an intervention of a demonic character, including terminology and etiologic identification. A demon provokes a mat, which is named after the demon: the Slovak škrat, škratek, ‘spirit bringing wealth’, and škratec (Plica) (Hoffmann-Krayer, Bächtold-Stäubli 1935/1936: 1286), the Czech skřitek (skřotek, koltun) (Vyhildal 1900: 192); the Silesian and Moravian mamonuk (Bartoš 1906: 191). The Kushanian word píkas has two meanings, ‘Plica’ and ‘evil spirit’: zadok konus pikusa, “instil a disease and the evil spirit in a person” (Sychta 1970: 271), see also the Lithuanian pūkys (“in some regions (for example the Klaipeða region) Aitvaras bears the name pūkys” (Grymaiš 2003: 70)), which is probably linked to the German name for a household demon Puck. Bezlaj does not rule out the Serbo-Croatian name for Plica, vilovina, which is derived from vila “witch” (Bezlaj 1982: 317).

Particularly evident is the correlation of Plica Polonica with demons in the German tradition, where hair entanglement is attributed to almost all mythological chthonic characters, their names suggesting the names for the disease: cf. as synonymous Alp-, Druden-, Hexen-, Holen-, Mahr-, Schrätzleins-, Trenlenzopef, Alpklatte, Alpenschwanz, Bilschroß, Haarschrost, Hollerkopf, Mahrflechte, -klatte, -locke, -zotte, the English Elflock, the Swedish Martofse (Höffer 1899: 901). The Balts attribute the functions of a pathogenic demon to a spirit named Aitvaras who brings wealth, see Greimas (Grymaiš 2003: 78–80), as well as a quote from Rozenbaum’s report: “The Lithuanian night spirit Aitvaras, the Polish wieszczka or the white Panis (mermaid) and the night spirits Koltki, Skrzot have in folk beliefs an occupation of tangling hair, and since Wieszczyce, Koltki, Koltun were also used to name a disease, which as a result of a demon’s wrath could not be cured medically, according to the beliefs accepted at the time” (Rozenbaum 1838: 550).

The magic and demonic nature of the Polish plait is visible in the causes related to the intentional actions of sorcerers:

- А калтун? Ці чулі вы такое?
  – Маладая саўсем. Яшчэ пайшла гэта сена пазбірала і назаўтра захварэла. Гаварілі, што яна ўмеець паддзелаваць, дык у яе вырас такі каўтун. У яе такі рог

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Thus, the European perspective is dominated by understanding the Plica as a result of malicious actions by demons and sorcerers.

**INTERNAL PLICA**

In the Belarusian tradition, however, there are only a few cases of the Polish plait being caused by the intervention of evil forces. In most records, it is attributed to the eruption of an inner substance (inherent in every human being) under the influence of a number of factors:

- Every person has kautun, it only should be woken up, flurried, squeezed. Because of nerves, huge fright.

Co'kutun pr'y kazhdomu chlovievny e'sь: pr'y komu – 'placham, pr'y komu – 'snom, pr'y komu – 'pesnymi. Ne't resha trgovit.

*Kautun in every man: in crying, in sleep, in songs. It must not be touched.*

(Страхов 2005: 194)

Ka'u'tun? Et' ta jen – da sara'ka god yo' nam, a pas'lya sara'ka jen u kazhdaga. Et' ta jen samaya nery. U adnago vny takha, a' y'drugoga takha. Hto s'iVa ra'stroi'ca, tady ka'u'tun vyb'esh'sa navorj, tady komu i lyag'h.

*Kautun? This is, you do not have it until you are forty, and after forty everyone has it. This is the very nerves. They can differ. Whoever is really worried, then kautun will rise up, and then he feels easier.*

Such representations were known to the Poles, who argued that every person from birth had a *go'c'ca* (internal *Plica*), which is localised in the blood or bones, and makes itself felt through different pains (Biegeleisen 1929: 263–271, Marczewska 2012: 115).

Such an understanding of the phenomenon as a pathological manifestation (eruption) of vital potency and forces inherent in human beings is confirmed by contemporary records from the beginning of the century when uncleanness or self-neglect are not factors to be considered. It is essential that *Plica Polonica*, perceived as a human counterpart, is therefore described in human terms. However, it bears the opposite sign and is perceived as a dead being, called *nezhtys* ('lifeless', 'dead'):

- *Sometimes you want to eat something, and you don't, then there is kautun and tuberculosis. I remember I was in Loyev with my late mother, and there was a man selling honey. "Mommy, I want some honey! Mommy, buy me a glass of honey." And for what could that mother buy it? And she bought it, and I ate it right there. So I needed it. So the nezhtys' troubles the man. The man has something that requires it, to eat and to drink, and everything.*

Notably, the Polish plait in a person could cause a desire for food, or, conversely, a ‘protest’ against certain food products. There are many records of *Plica Polonica* accompanied by food abnormalities, when certain foods aggravate the disease and others, on the contrary, alleviate its symptoms.

- *Whoever has kautun – what kind of food he likes or dislikes, it is not him but kautun that would not take it.*

Яна захацела чаго-та зьесьці і не зьелі таго. Есці чалавек захацё што-та... Ён у кождага чалавека ёсь, калтун. Толькі не ва ёсці ён вывучваецца. Паміраецца, не ва ёсці. Есці чалавек што-та захацё, нада хоць раз у рот укаля, хлібнуюць, і то ёсць будзець нормальным. Вot... А тая жышчына... У яе такі вырас калтун, хаі Бог мілець. Нада прасяць, каб вышаў: Калтун, калтуночак, родненькі браточак, выхадзіць, калтун, на пакі, на каменье, на сухое каренье. Тут тэб я быць, не хадзіць, (ім'я) рэчывага сэрца не знаціць. Не сам як сабою, Госпадам Богам, Пряцістан Матушка на помаш. Вот так трэ ба зда прагуварыў.
In contemporary context, there exist numerous explanations of the phenomenon – This is a nezhyts’
nezhyts’, you now say “nerves” and it’s a nezhyts’. The nezhyts’, it is something in your stomach. Załatnik-nezhyts’ goes to the chest. Kautun comes out of your head. It’s also because of the nervous system. This is all, you should be quiet, only not to cry, or then you worry your head and kill your heart.

And that nezhyts’ is in every person?

In every person, in everyone.
Many texts are based on addressing the disease as a character, often with a clear desire to calm, please or persuade it: “Kaўтун, каўтунячак, мой милі дружочак, а ты ў гэтай галовачцы не сядзі, не ляжа...”, (“Kautun, little kautun, my dear little friend, do not be in this little head, do not sit and do not lie...”). Kautun (he-kautun) and kautunitsa (she-kautun) are sometimes treated as brother and sister, or as a young couple: “Kautun, kautunitsa, boy and girl, you are not many, only two” (Барташэвіч 1992: 246).

Another interesting fact is that Plica Polonica in the popular imagination is endowed with the capacity for independent living, even outside the human body.

Przykładźla dźdżińca, дык яна казала, што сёй звяйлі ды на вобрамі. Дык нада браць хустачку сьвежу, з маталіна мацирала ёні хустачку-высманачку, звязаіца яна і на гару занесла і дзе дзверы адчыніца ён сенцах там з крохвініі. І там пашло сколькі ўрэмя, нешта сёй зажалала, яны палесла. Аж ён вырасс, ажно ёні хусту не ляжы. Сам па сабе. Патаму што не дарос тут. І а ёны бяны абрезалі неправільна, магла б памерці ці паралізаваць. І яно адына баба, у яе дзвёры яны абрезалі ён перавідзе, але дзвёры адчыніца ён касы свае и паложыла ён шухляду і кажа: “Мае красавіцы, аддыхайця і мае галава хоць аддыхне”. Ну і тады прашло сколькі ўрэмя, нешта ей задумалася, яна палесла. Ян караўся, ажно ёні хусту ён ляжыць. Сам па сабе. Патаму што не дарос тут. І ёны абрезалі ён неправільна, магла б памерці ці паралізаваць. І яно адына баба, у яе дзвёры яны абрезалі ён перавідзе, але дзвёры адчыніца ён касы свае и паложыла ён шухляду і кажа: “Мае красавіцы, аддыхайця і мае галава хоць аддыхне”.

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Perception of Plica Polonica in terms of human categories is to some extent influenced by the gender differences in types of kautuns although it is the shape of entangled hair that serves as a visual motivation to determine whether it is male or female, a kautun or kautunitsa: “Эсля самка – усю голову круціць, сслі самец – можа і да пола атрасьці”, (“If it’s female, all your head is twisted, if a male it may grow to the floor.”), “Каўтуніца звяйвае ўсё валасы. Усі, саб’ё ва так ва, да лаба. А каўтун атдзельна. Ён робіцца атдзельна, во так ва валаса”, (“Kautunitsa entangles all your hair. All of it; mats it like this, up to your forehead. And kautun is apart. It is separated, such a band.”)

The identification of the Plica as a part or substance of the body, which is present in each person and which for some reason receives outward manifestation and causes a morbid condition, underlies the ritual practices and incantation motives aimed at establishing equal relationships with the disease.

ARTIFICIAL FORMATION OF Plica Polonica

Ethnographers, although not doctors, drew attention to the fact that kautun is not always a disease: “this felted hair was not matted by itself from some poison, germs or dirt, but is the creation of human hands” (Грынблат 1928: 134).

A special mat of hair can be used as a remedy for a number of vaguely defined diseases that do not have names in the folk nomenclature and cannot be treated with home remedies. The emergence of a mat of hair can often be seen as a good sign and was not removed at once in order to get rid of internal diseases. Others purposefully attempted to plait a mat so that the disease became external, came out of the person’s body and thus eased his or her pain:

У чалавека, прымерна вот у жэншчыны, ломіць цела, галава баліць, усе суставы баліць. Нада запусціць галаву і не часыць. Мая падруга запусціла галаву, ён і звіўся такі, як рэшты. Яна і гэта насіла. Ён атышоў, нескалькі валасоў толькі дзяржалася. Перад Пасхай атрасьці тьва валасы.

A man, for example a woman says her body’s aching, her head aching, all joints aching. You need to neglect your hair and stop brushing it. A friend of mine stopped brushing her hair, and it grew as big as a sreve. She wore it for a year. It was then separated, only a few hairs remained.

Before Easter they cut that hair off.
The Plica should be first of all looked after, worn for a certain time, whispered to with special spells and then removed. Thus, the folk medicine complex is characterised by a differentiation between the external kautun and the internal kautun. Moreover, the entangled hair on the head in some cases was understood as forcing the disease outside and was accompanied by a set of specific magical procedures.

HEALING RITUALS AND INCANTATIONS

A wide range of ways to cure Plica Polonica exist including such traditional means as fumigation or pouring wax over the patient’s head (Демидович 1896: 126), which is also widely known in the treatment of other diseases. However, the Plica should be removed under strict spatio-temporal conditions. The actor (performer) of the rite is a charmer, a wise woman, or in relation to a child, his mother, or a person vested in popular beliefs with ritual purity and as the external performer of the rite is a charmer, a wise woman, or in relation to a child, his mother, or a person vested in popular beliefs with ritual purity and as

The Plica is strictly prohibited, either on purpose or outside a ritual, as it may result in serious consequences, including the death of the patient.

It is curious that one of the earliest reports of Plica Polonica indicates that neglecting one’s hair is not a disease in the strict sense, but the cure. A letter written by Staringelius, the rector of the Zamojski Academy, to professors of Padua in 1599 says that, “common people are treated by neglecting a mat, which after removal relieves the patient from his infirmity” (Biegeleisen 1929: 256).

A number of ritual practices are aimed at externalising the internal or ‘hidden’ Plica Polonica. In order to form a mat, the patient’s hair was greased with sticky substances – resin, honey and even “mouse fat”, or a piece of wool from a llama sheared for the first time was placed inside (Federowski 1897: 390). Objects and plants associated with the idea of spinning or rotation, including lines used to weave fences, could be used, or the hair could be washed with hemp nettle and vincia (Vincia minor, L.). Items with a high sacred status were also widely used: threads that tied the wedding loaf, or gimp yarn from church vestments.

Removing the Plica was strictly prohibited, either on purpose or outside a ritual, as it may result in serious consequences, including the death of the patient.

It is curious that one of the earliest reports of Plica Polonica indicates that neglecting one’s hair is not a disease in the strict sense, but the cure. A letter written by Staringelius, the rector of the Zamojski Academy, to professors of Padua in 1599 says that, “common people are treated by neglecting a mat, which after removal relieves the patient from his infirmity” (Biegeleisen 1929: 256).

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Removing the Plica was strictly prohibited, either on purpose or outside a ritual, as it may result in serious consequences, including the death of the patient.
Our mother used to treat and remove it, treat and remove, and then she would pound those braids with a stone, cut it with a wild stone. She would cut them, put them on the stove and burn them, she never took them to the water.

Teeth are included in the category of the “natural” as well:

If a child has kautun, then his mother should bite it off with her teeth. When she bites it off, do not touch it – but only spit it out. Then kautun dies.30

Such tools as scissors or even a simple knife are not represented in healing practices; they appear only as a result of forgetting tradition. In any case, the ban on using an ordinary knife to cut kautun is consistently maintained.

The removed Plica should be properly disposed of or destroyed. The burning of the mat was a ritual action: “яго нада занесці спаліць на ростанькі” (30) (“It should be taken to a crossroads and burnt”); “закапаць у мурашнік” (“bury it in an ant hill”): “A woman cut kautun off on Maundy Thursday and burned it in the oven: ‘Let it leave not with the fire, but with the smoke’. She washed her hair with clean holy water and, thank God, all was gone”). Apart from burning, the prescription to send the cut hair downstream on flowing water or to bury it was also popular: they take it to a crossroads and bury it, “закапаць у мурашнік” (bury it in an ant hill):

The location of the removed kautun in the house is fixed at opposite ends of the home’s vertical axis, meaning that it was either carried to the attic, plugged under the top edge of the door, in order to walk under it, or buried under the soil, otherwise “the matted hair will come again”. Equally illustrative are recommendations to bury the matted hair under an aspen tree33 or “under the crane”, the place where the pole falls from the well34.

Especially important is an instruction to bury the removed Plica deep in dry soil, otherwise “the matted hair will come again”. Equally illustrative are recommendations to bury the matted hair under an aspen tree33 or “under the crane”, the place where the pole falls from the well34.

Sending the Plica downriver water, burying or burning it are semantically equal in the intention to send it to the other world and thus to prevent a relapse. The semantics of leaving the Plica in the otherworldly space are suggested by such conditions of the ritual as a prohibition on looking back:

– Have you heard about kautun?
  – Daughter, I myself wore one.
  – And why does it appear?
  – Because of fright, because of nerves. It should be spelled. A wise woman put a book on my head, whispered a bit, and then she wove a plait in the middle of the head, a small pigtail, and then it began to grow and became like a hat. I wore it, walked with it. She cut it off and told me, “You bring it home, burn it,” she says, “in a bucket,” and then, she says, in a linen cloth, not in a cloth from the shop, but in a homemade, neat cloth and dig it at the end of the field, at sunset. Those ashes. That’s what I did.34

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Interestingly, the beliefs regarding *Plica Polonica* have striking west-east Slavic parallels, including on the very border of the *Plica* area. In particular, in a small area in eastern Belarus the word *kautun* is used to name all sorts of wounds, furunculi and purulent rashes. The Czechs call such skin diseases *koltin mokrý*, while the Poles believe that the *Plica* can manifest itself as a rash and blotches (Marezewska 2012: 115). Both traditions indicate wounds that take a long time to heal and require magic treatment:

Мокра на галаве, такой коричневый забіраєцца, апыця кісьцець. Хто чаго захацеў...

Вот я захацела яблыка, а мне не прішлося зьесь, вот і калтуны. А есці зьвісці, то ён быстра складзі.

*It’s set on the head, it’s covered with such a crust, fester again. It depends on what you want... Me, I wanted an apple, and I did not get it, so I had kautun. And if you eat it, then it came off quickly.*

– А каўтун – бываець на галаве, дзе ўгодна адкладваецца, эта проста мякнець, эта такія болькі. Есці не залюбіў. Захацеў чаго-та калавек, давусымі, захацела я сахару, а яць не было, вот мне і прікінулас.

– Дык гэты каўтун жывець у чалавеку?

– Жывець, жывець. Вот ву жачна не ўглядзіш, і ён начынаецца сваю тую рэакцыю. І тады так як чыніш галаву і гавораш: “Было на галаве дзьвінаццаць калтун і, стала адзінаццаць, стала дзесяць.”

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– Дык гэты каўтун жывець у чалавеку?
The ritual magical healing and removal of the *Plica* are generally in line with the general idea of sending the hostile substance (disease) to the otherworldly loci and the restoration of disturbed bodily harmony.

CONCLUSIONS

The folk beliefs and narratives concerning *Plica Polonica* in Belarus is a logical continuation of the 'classical' European tradition. However, the Belarusian material recorded over the past 20 years enables the researcher to shift the emphasis from the external to the internal causes of the disease. The etiology of the disease is dominated the body’s response to the influence of demonological intervention or, more often, disharmony inside the body itself.

The cultural complex of *Plica Polonica* represents a friend – foe dichotomy, which can be displayed on two axes: man – external world (*kaution* as a result of demonic interventions), and man – internal world (*kaution* as part of the human body). In terms of folk anatomy and folk medicine, friends and foes surround a person outside and complement the human being inside. However, the two elements are not opposed within the body, but, by complementing each other, appear as parts of the whole, as the two ends of a single semantic axis with numerous transitional and mutually neutralising zones. Perceptions of *kaution* illustrate the idea that the internal otherworldliness is a necessary part of the microcosm. It is not the negatively marked element, the removal of which people should crave, but a necessary and organically inherent inner ‘strange’ world, which requires specific regulations and harmony.

Translated from Belarusian by Kanstantsin Staradubets.

NOTES

3 *Zalom* is a sheaf of twisted, broken or knotted rye (or other corn) in a field made by malevolent people in order to bring disease or even death to the owner of the field.
4 2001, Dashkaakia village, Mahiloŭ district, Mahiloŭ region (H.H., b. 1919).
5 2010, Yatchava village, Sluck district, Minsk region (S.S., b. 1926).
6 2007, Balandzitchy village, Ivanava district, Brest region (K.F., b. 1923).
7 Malyia Auciuki village, Kalinkavitchy district, Homiel region. AP.
8 2011, Usochskaia Buda village, Dobrush district, Homiel region (A.M., b. 1935).
9 2011, Vialikaia Leshchanka village, Macislaŭ district, Mahiloŭ region (P.T., b. 1926).
10 2007, Bui village, Dokshytsy district, Viciebsk region (C.V., b. 1922).
11 2010, Falitchy village, Staryia Darogi district, Minsk region (U.T., b. 1932).
12 2010, Lavy village, Staryia Darogi district, Minsk region (L.M., b. 1939).
13 2011, Mohava village, Loyeŭ district, Homiel region (A.M., b. 1933).
14 2007, Hadziïla village Lepel district, Viciebsk region (Y.E, b. 1937).
15 2012, Trascino village, Chocimsk district, Mahiloŭ region (A.M., b. 1927).
16 2011, Mohava village, Loyeŭ district, Homiel region (A.M., b. 1933).
17 1999, Yushki village, Lepel district, Viciebsk region (M.M, b. 1935).
18 1985, Lapacin village, Pinsk district, Brest region (S.S., b. 1911). AP.
19 2010, Shtychytkaivtchy village, Staryia Darogi district, Minsk region (S.F., b. 1924).
20 2013, Virkaak village, Klitchaŭ district, Mahiloŭ region (K.N., b. 1937).
21 2010, Prusy village, Staryia Darogi district, Minsk region (S.V., b. 1934).
22 2010, Kryvanosy village, Staryia Darogi district, Minsk region (P.Y., b. 1926).
23 2008, Novaia Hrebla village, Brahin district, Homiel region (P.B., b. 1927).
24 2011, Malinaŭka village, Loyeŭ district, Homiel region (G.F., 1934).
25 2006, Bayary village, Dokshytsy district, Viciebsk region (H.M., b. 1926).
26 Sviadzica village, Lepel district, Viciebsk region (P.V., b. 1912). AP.
27 2007, Strelna village Ivanava district, Brest region (L.K, b. 1929).
29 2007, Peyahtcha village, Ivanava district, Brest region (M.K., b. 1932).
30 2004, Slałaba, Lepel district, Viciebsk region (T.A.Y., b. 1924)
31 2004, Zabuzhki village, Kobryn district, Brest region (I.T., b. 1920).
32 Radcheyck village, Stolin district, Brest region (D.N., b. 1914). AP.
33 2001, Okana village, Lepel district, Viciebsk region (K.V., b. 1921).
34 2006, Skhlancy village, Dokshytsy district, Viciebsk region (K.K., b. 1915).
35 Zhachitsa village, Pinsk district, Brest region. AP.
References


About the author

Tatsiana Valodzina, Ph.D., is head of the department of folklore and culture of the Slavs at the Research Center of Belarusian Culture, Language, and Literature in the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Her sphere of scientific activity is connected with the representation of the body and the traditional medicine of the Belarusians, folklore narratives, and the traditional agricultural calendar. She is the sole, or co-author, of 7 books, including *Human body: Words, Myth, Ritual* (2009) and *Folk medicine: ritual and magic practice* (2007).
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INTRODUCTION

The fourth issue of the journal *Incantatio* continues publication of the research articles based on the presentations at the Charms Symposium of the 16th Congress of the ISFNR (in Vilnius, June 25–30, 2013), supplementing them with other research articles. The main topics of the current issue include oral and written charming tradition, transmission of charms and their social functioning, as well as social and ethno-medical aspects of charms. The issue starts with papers dealing with the Baltic region and analyzing materials from Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. In her article, Åsa Ljungström discusses charms’ manuscripts compiled in Sandvik Manor, Sweden, during the eighteenth century; the article reveals the biographical and social background to the written charms. The article by Daiva Vaitkevičienė is focused on the social functioning of verbal healing charms and presents the results of the fieldwork carried out by the author in 2010–2012 in the Lithuanian community of Gervėčiai, Belarus. The regional problematic is further dealt with by Tatsiana Volodzina, who has, upon special request from *Incantatio*, submitted a paper on the unique disease kautun (*Plica Polonica*), which is well-known across the cultural area comprising Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland. The article is amply illustrated by authentic narratives recorded by the author during her fieldwork and which describe the curing of this disease by charming practice in contemporary Belarus. Aigars Lielbārdis in his turn introduces two sides of the Latvian charming tradition: the oral and the written, giving special attention to the written books of the Latvian charms *Debesu grāmatas* (“Books of Heaven”) and tracing the route of their spread in Latvia. Continuing the theme of written charms, Laura Jiga Iliescu introduces the Central European analogue of the Latvian ‘Books of Heaven’ as they exist in Romania; her article focuses on the apocryphal “Legend of Sunday”, also known as “The Epistle Fallen from Heaven”, one copy of which was carried along by a soldier during the First World War. Last but not least among the research publications of this issue is a broad and exhaustive study by Haralampos Passalis dealing with “The Sisinnios Prayer” and discussing oral and written aspects of this interesting narrative in the Greek tradition with special attention paid to the oral tradition.