

## MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGE OF ALARVADY (ALBASTY) IN THE AZERBAIJAN BIRTH RITES

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There are many ideas associated with the mythological creature of Alarvady among the Azerbaijan birth rite traditions. Being connected with animistic, totemic, anthropomorphic, cosmogonic ideas, the goddess of birth and guardian of prospering Alarvady became later a symbol of evil. Moreover, there was a belief that when a female infant was born, Alarvady at once appeared before the woman-in-childbirth and the latter fainted away. Then Alarvady took out her liver, put it into the water and thus became her holder.

Azerbaijanians call this mythological image Alarvady (Halarvady, Alanasy, Halanasy, Algarysy). Although among some Turkic-speaking peoples this mythological creature is called *Albys*, *Almys*, *Albas*, *Almis*, *Alas*, *Albassy*, *Albarsty*, *Albasty*, in the academic world it is more known under the name *Albasty*. This image is also known to non-Turkic-speaking peoples. Afghans call him *Madari al*, *Madari yal*, *Madari hal*, *Madari ol*, Tajiks - *Almasti*, Georgians - *Ali*, Lezghins - *Alpab*, Inghushes and Chechens - *Almazy*, Mongolian-speaking peoples - *Al-maz*, Tats - *Ol*,<sup>1</sup> etc. In different studies the *basty* component is interpreted as a derivative of the word known to all Turkish-language peoples, *basmaq*, meaning *to press*, *to trample down*. As for the *Al*-component, there are different opinions. E. Benvenist and M. Andreyev separated the *Al*-component from the *basty*-component and considered *Al* to be an original demoniac creature of Indo-European origin.<sup>2</sup> In their turn, N. Ashmarin, K. Menges and S. Malov argued that *Al* is connected with the word *Alp*, i.e. *Hercules*, *hero*.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that O. Adjipayamly, parallel with some meanings of *Al* known in Turkey as *Al*, *Albasty*, *Al anasy* ('Al's mother'), *Al gyzy* ('Al girl'), points to its connection with *Alp* as well.<sup>4</sup> B. Albarov is inclined to think that the *Al*-component is of Caucasian origin.<sup>5</sup> In G. Klimov's and D. Edelman's opinion, *Albasty* is a distorted form of *Lamastu/Lamashtu* - the goddess in South West Asia, ancient Akkad.<sup>6</sup>

We must note that in Hintz' opinion there was the goddess Lamastu as a guardian of women in the pantheon of gods of Elam - an ancient state in South West Asia.<sup>7</sup> However, the problem is that collisions and hostile relations between Elam and Akkad influenced equally their religious and cultural views, and that is why Lamastu is known to Akkadians not as a guardian of women but as an unkind, evil creature. In fact, monuments of that epoch written in the Akkadian language depict Lamastu as 'one of the most terrible ghosts'.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting that calling Lamastu an *Elamite woman*, G. Klimov and

D. Edelman point out that she is unfamiliar to the Akkadian culture. At the same time they urgently insist on Albasty's Akkadian origin. But these authors do not bear in mind such an elementary moment as the impossibility of Lamastu's transition to Albasty from the point of view of phonetic peculiarities of Turkic languages. A definite regularity is revealed in the process of turning Turkic-language Albasty into Lamastu in the Akkadian language that belongs to the Semitic group. Turkic words beginning with 'al', while passing on to Semitic languages and being homophonic with the definite article - (*al*), are either omitted or undergo in some cases a metathesis. For example, *altun* in Yakut means *copper*; *al-latun* in Arabian - *yellow copper*; *albis* in Yakut - *war deity*; *iblis* in Arabian - *devil*. It testifies to older origin of Albasty version in comparison with Lamastu.<sup>9</sup>

We have already noted that not only in Azerbaijan but in some other languages Albasty is marked as *Al arvady*/*Hal arvady*; *Al anasy*/*Hal anasy*, *Maderi al*, *Al garysy*, *Ala jen*, *Al pab*. It would be absurd to assert that a second component in all these words and word combinations means *woman*. The word *Al* in Azerbaijan is polysemantic. Specialists argue that *Al* is used here as a root to form more than 500 words.<sup>10</sup>

We are interested in the fact that the word *Al*, parallel with some meanings in the vocabularies, has also such meanings as *high*, *the highest*, *vast*, *prominent*, *outstanding*. In the Caucasian languages the word *ala/elu/alalu* is used in the sense *high*; the word *al* has the same meaning; in the Urartian and even Akkadian language the word *elu* has a meaning *sky, god*. In Turkic languages words *al/ala* and *ag* are used in the meaning *high*. It is known that *Alataul/Altai* means *high mountain*, the verb *ag* means *to climb a mountain, to climb an eminence*. In *Kitabi Dede Korkut* we meet the expression *ala seyvanly agban evler* ('high houses with big balconies').<sup>11</sup>

From the above side we make a conclusion that the mythological image that we deal with means in fact *high, stalwart, conspicuous woman in white clothes*. In the Azerbaijan folklore examples Albasty is depicted as yellow-haired, large-footed, big-bosomed, with a thunderous voice, in white clothes and the tallest woman who usually resides at ruins, in caves, on river banks and lakes, near springs. Albasty was considered to be the anthropomorphic figure of the Sun, hence the idea of her as a tall woman with yellow hair. In particular, in folklore of some peoples this woman is a personified image of Al as the god of fire and flame while there is an undeniable connection between fire and the Sun. When a pregnant woman gives birth, they surround the head of her bed with a rope of goat wool and hammer its endings into the ground. 'Goat wool' is due as Albasty is in the form of a goat. This idea is spread in the folklore of the Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Bashkirs. Tuve Urkhans believed that Albasty was born

to a maid and bleated like a goat.<sup>12</sup> A connection between a goat and the myth becomes evident from the following facts. For example, in the *Korogly* epic of Turkmens a baby, i.e. Korogly is suckled by a she-goat. Kachins, a Turkic-speaking people, cover the bottom of a new-born child's cradle with a goat skin to keep him from evil powers; Altaians hang up a goat bone over child's cradle.<sup>13</sup> Linking Albasty with a goat is quite natural, for a goat, according to old beliefs, was also a symbol of spring and prospering. The aforesaid facts help to answer the question why the bed of a woman in childbirth was tied by a rope made of goat-skin. Thus, this is really a symbol of Albasty, guardian and patroness of child-bearing. In some ancient Azerbaijan rites there was a goat by the name *Kosa-kosa* as a symbol of spring. Singing songs *Al/hal* with the help of *nagara* ('drum') covered, on the one end with wolf skin and on the other end with goat skin, covering new born child with goat skin to keep him from catching a chill, etc., prove the goat to be a symbol of Albasty.

Parallel with patroness of birth and increase, Albasty was considered to be a creature protecting a new-born from diseases. In some regions of Azerbaijan they make a hole in magic bones, draw a long rope through it and tie it. This is called *Alarvadyn dishy* ('Alarvady's tooth') or *Alarvadyn dabany* ('Alarvady's heel'). People thought that with the help of this rope, with magic bones an infant might be cured from different diseases.<sup>14</sup>

Ancient Slavs, particularly Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats, worshipped a mythical creature, Patroness Orisnitsa by name, who was quite identical with Albasty. Appearing before delivery in the shape of a woman, Orisnitsa keeps a child from evil powers, endowing him with health and happiness.<sup>15</sup> We have shown that Albasty's body was well fed and nourished. Sources report that during delivery an expectant mother of the Siberian peoples smears her face and hands in honour of the goddess of child-bearing – Stork. She puts a vessel filled with grease near herself, then throws it into the fire. After the child's birth people performed a rite in honour of Stork: they burned smeared figures and sang songs.<sup>16</sup> In Central Asia they gave a piece of grease to a new born child before his first suckling.<sup>17</sup>

We think it important to express one more consideration. Among rites in honour of Armayit - goddess of land, there is a smearing of oxen horns and neck while their yoking. Azerbaijan song *kholovar* preserved this feature:

*I smear the ox' neck  
Burn out enemy's eye by red-hot iron,  
Dig deeper a furrow,  
And tie a sheaf of clover.*<sup>18</sup>

Hence follows a connection and similarity between Albasty and Nahida. According to sources, it is clear that the ox has always been under the patron-

age of goddess Nahida. People believed that the strength and power of Albasty were in her hair and plaits. This was also associated with the Sun. However, when there spread the belief of taking away power from evil, malicious forces by cutting off their hair, this custom artificially extended to Alabasty as well. When Alabasty's cut-off plait was brought to infant's birth place, they believed that Albasty would never come here any more. He who cut off a plait was nicknamed Alchy, and they subscribed to the idea that Albasty would not disturb seven generations of an Alchy.

Causes of hard delivery were also associated with Albasty. For that reason people made a great noise over the head of woman in childbirth seeking to drive away evil powers. Scientific, cognitive and typological value of the question under consideration is that in the ancient times, more exactly, in the period of belief in magic and witchcraft, people perceived solar and lunar eclipses as an activity of evil powers, so they made a great noise with the help of copper vessels or other metallic things, thinking that thereby they would manage to frighten evil spirits and drive them away.

If during delivery a woman lost her consciousness, her people thought that it was Albasty who took out her liver and carried it away. So they imperatively, in high tone said the following in singing voice:

*Halloo, heartless Albasty!  
Put the liver at its place.  
Give the poor thing her soul.  
If you disobey me,  
If you don't comply with me,  
I'll put out your eyes.*<sup>19</sup>

Simultaneously people made a great noise on the roofs of their houses, on the shores of reservoirs, cleaved water surface by daggers and swords, in later periods fired rifle-shots thinking that by these actions they would manage to frighten Albasty and not to let her draw the liver of the woman in childbirth down the water.

Folklore sources report that Albasty was very fond of mounting a horse. People greased a horse's back with sticky asphalt and caught her. They drove a needle into her collar so that Albasty could not run away.

The Azerbaijanian phrase *Al dili* emerged in connection with the word Albasty; as a matter of fact, *Al dili* is used in Azerbaijan in the meaning *to tell a lie, to deceive, cunning, rude*, because they believed that after Albasty's capture people began telling lies about their affairs. But to do so, it was necessary to know her language, for Albasty always did contrary to what people asked her to. For example, when she was asked to do work fast, she did it slowly and vice versa. Unlike people, Albasty went back to front, therefore knowing about

it people asked her to act contrary to their desires to achieve their aims.

Sometimes Albasty herself has managed to deceive people. After a woman had extracted a needle from Albasty's collar and she ran away, people saw what evil she was able to do. Some sources tell us what Albasty was saying when she ran away from people:

*You told her  
To bring firewood,  
She brought ashes.  
You told her  
To bring water,  
She brought urine.  
But you never say  
To bring money.<sup>20</sup>*

When at last Albasty ran away all her deeds went upside-down. As for Albasty, they usually tell about the harm she may do to woman-in-childbirth. The same is true with respect to a snake and a wolf. When it is said that both snake and wolf are totems, hence it becomes evident where the problem of Albasty originates from.

In connection with Albasty, such phrases are used as *my grandfather told, grandmother's tales, my father was told*, etc. But we never meet phrases like *I witnessed myself, I saw it myself*. Thus, the idea of Albasty, originally a positive figure, was later transformed into its own opposite, negative image.

### Literature

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<sup>2</sup>Op cit, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>Albarov, B. *Ingushskoe "Golyerdi" i ossetinskoe "Alardy" (k voprosu ob ossetino-ingushskikh kulturnykh vzaimootnosheniyakh)*. Izvestiya Ingushskogo nauchno - issledovatel'skogo instituta kraevedeniya. Vladikavkaz, 1928, Vol. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Adjipayamly, O. *Turkijede dog'umla ilkili adzht ve inamlarön etimolozi etudu*. Erzerum, 1961.

<sup>5</sup>See, Note 4, p.74.

<sup>6</sup>Klimov, G., Edelman, D. K etimologi Albasty/Almastu. In: *Sovetskaya turkologiya*. 1979, No. 2, pp. 57-63.

<sup>7</sup>Hintz, V. *Gosudarstvo Elam*. Moscow, 1977, pp. 61-62.

<sup>8</sup>Op cit, pp. 241-242.

<sup>9</sup>Achalom, A., Novruzov, M. "Al" tapynyshy ve onun izleri. In: *Azerbaijan filolokija meseleri*. Baky, Elm, 1983.

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<sup>11</sup>Voroshil, G. Azerbaijan dilinin teshekkul tarihine dair gejdler. In: *Azerbaijan filolokiya meseleri*. Baku, 1, 1983, p 43.

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<sup>13</sup>Seyidinov, M. *Gyzyl deyushchunun taleyi*. Baku, Kenchlik, 1984.

<sup>14</sup>Burtsev, I. Alarvady: bu efsanedir, ja hegigy. In: *Tahychly gezeti*. 12. 09. 1972.

<sup>15</sup>Kravtsov, N. *Slavyansky folklor*. Moscow, 1976, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup>See, Note 4, pp. 72-73.

<sup>17</sup>Firshtein, L. O nekotorykh obychayakh i poveriyakh, svyazannykh s rozhdeniem i vospitaniem rebyonka u uzbekov Yuzhnogo Horezma. In: *Semya i semeinye obryady u narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana*. Moscow, 1978, p. 193.

<sup>18</sup>*Azerbaijan folkloru antologijasy*. Baku, 1968, 1 kitab, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup>Azerbaijan klassik edebijjati kitabhanasy 20 chillde. In: *Halq edebijjaty*. Baku, 1982, 1, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>From the collection of the author.

## **DEADSEERS (SOULSEERS) IN THE HUNGARIAN VILLAGE TODAY**

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In my lecture given at the 7th Finno-Ugric Congress in Debrecen ('The Hungarian Soulseer *halottlátó* and The Historic Roots of Soulseeing') I tried to give an outline of the historical origin and the constituents of dead seeing and dead seers. This time I am concentrating on the living belief, the dead seeing (soulseeing) and dead seers (soulseers) of the recent past and of today. I have tried to find the mental needs producing and preserving the belief in dead seeing, to reveal the psychic needs making people see dead seers, and finally, to examine the role played by dead seers in the communities they belong to, primarily in Hungarian rural society.

Dead seeing and dead seers are not completely parts of the historical past, since the best known and most famous dead seers were living at the turn of the century and later, and there are a few living even today. A film was also made in the 1980s (directed by Domokos Moldován) about Jolán Vécsey, the most famous living dead seer, who lives in Putnok, a small town in the North of Hungary. (Unfortunately, although the film recorded several interesting details,