

⁹The prayer sites had to be pure – i.e. no domestic animals should enter the area.

Commentaries by Aado Lintrop

IN THE RANGE OF DEMONOLOGICAL BELIEFS

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In the Carpathian villages where research has been done¹ people have believed such in supernatural beings as the nymph, the changeling, the souls of the deceased and the miscarried child, the noon-ghost, the nightmare, the ghoul, the water-spirit, a will-o'-the-wisp, the air-spirit, the devil and the witch.

Some of them have survived in folk tradition till modern times – in more or less modified forms – becoming the evidence of a bygone period. One of the reasons for it was the adaptation of the contents of beliefs into Christian religion, which facilitated the presentation of the supernatural beings in a different light. This became possible through the introduction of religious elements into magic practices. Apart from this, supernatural beings have survived in traditions through their identification with the source of evil, condemned by the Church. As a result of this, these beings have become the personifications of the negatively evaluated human behaviour.

Among the most significant moments in one's religious life was baptism. According to the beliefs of the inhabitants of the Carpathian villages under study, the period between birth and baptism was particularly dangerous for a child. It was a consequence of the fact that the child had come into the world in the biological, and not ritual, sense. The latter was accomplished through baptism, whose function was both religious and magical. It introduced the child into the Christian world and committed it to God's care. At the same time it protected the child from all evil powers, which might be a threat to it.

Above all, a lying-in woman should have complied with some orders which the traditional system of folk beliefs contained and which were connected with the main Christian ceremonies. Among other things, she was expected to have her child baptised as soon as possible. A delay in baptising the baby brought the risk of it being kidnapped by a nymph (*boginka*), who left her own child in its place. The changeling (*odmieniec*) was easily recognised, as it was ugly, often crippled, and cried a lot. Besides, it possessed traits which had never

been characteristic of a human baby: right from its birth it could walk, talk and eat very much. A nymph could also effect the death of a child if she was prevented from changing it for her own. And even if she returned the human baby, it would often die afterwards. There was, however, a general consensus that a nymph had no claim whatsoever on a baptised child.

This supernatural being, which only a lying-in woman was able to see, has been imagined as an ugly woman with a long, drooping bosom, exceptionally vicious. Sometimes the nymph changed her appearance and looked like a human baby. In such a guise she sucked a nursing woman.

As the mother and her child were exposed to the influence of evil forces, some magic practices using religious attributes were carried out against the nymph. For example, a woman who had left her unchristened child alone because of her household chores, very often put a rosary under the baby's pillow; a lying-in woman and her child were sprinkled with holy water; sometimes a circle was drawn round the cradle with blessed chalk and also the prayers or calling God's or a saint's name was to protect mother and child against this evil creature.

The importance attached to the ritual of baptism as a religious-magical protection against the supernatural beings can be attested by two other complexes of beliefs: those concerning the souls of the deceased or of miscarried children (*porońce*), and water-spirits (*utopce*).

If a child died from natural causes before baptism, its soul could find no peace. It would wonder about showing signs of its presence, so as to make people baptise it. Thus a child's footprints would be seen, or people would hear a child crying. People called them 'unbaptised ones' (*niechrzczenie*).

Also in the case when a woman induced miscarriage of her child, its soul would do penance and its mother herself would see, at the moment of her own death, the child she had murdered. It was said that she ought to sew a baby's shimmy, then throw it on the baby that made its appearance and baptise it. After that the child would disappear forever and the woman could die in peace.

People believed that such a child, called a 'miscarried one' would bring calamities upon the village. Until the corpse was exhumed, the place where it had been buried would attract rain and lightning, or strong wind, which would overturn the tree, under the roots of which the body of a child had been concealed from people.

Thus the transgression was associated not only with the signs from the dead child's soul, but also with atmospheric phenomena. This is a relatively widespread interpretation. According to folk beliefs, this supernatural being needed a christening and therefore a priest was asked to baptise places where the crying of a child was heard. Sometimes people sprinkled such places with

holy water and said the following words: 'If you are a girl you will be an Ann, if you are a boy, you will be a John, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen.' (informant born in 1922). Frequently offerings were given or a Mass said for the souls in purgatory or those peregrinating the world in various forms.

Another group of beliefs was connected with an unborn child, that is, one who had perished together with the pregnant mother, who had committed suicide by drowning herself. After its death, such a child would become a water-spirit. It was a kind of penance to which the unborn child was subjected, but also – according to the informants – an overt sign of sin. This interpretation is supported by the earlier versions of the same motif as well as the fact that the evil being was pictured as a child.

The water-spirits' demonic ancestry was emphasised by their body colour (black or dark face – in isolated cases), short stature, long hair, animal legs, the capacity to disappear and to assume zoomorphic, anthropomorphic or amorphous shapes, extraordinary power and also a fear of lightning and an inclination for moonlight.

Against this being who used to lure people into the water to drown them, one could use – among other things – holy water. Rivers – the alleged dwelling places of water-spirits – were sprinkled with holy water. Also the sign of the cross made over a person protected him against this demon.

The above-listed examples concern situations when the act of baptism had not taken place. There existed also other beliefs connected with an incomplete baptism.

Every man was believed to have two souls (or spirits). If a child received at baptism only one name, only one of its souls was baptised, and so the other, disunited from God, would turn evil. On one interpretation, quite widespread among the people, such a soul might become a nightmare (*zmora*) while the man was still alive, and after his death – a ghoul (*strzygón*).

Thus the soul called nightmare, untamed by baptism, would leave the body at night and wander about on its own, pestering people. It would suffocate a sleeping man, sitting on his chest, hence the burden allegedly felt by the sleeper. Sometimes it was believed that it would drink a man's blood or saliva, or often assuming the shape of a baby, this being would suck the milk of a nursing woman. A nightmare was invisible, but when somebody caught it in the night, this being would appear to be an animal, for example a cat, or a stalk of straw.

According to the informants, such a nightmare harassed many people and was quite difficult to get rid of. Some of the religious attributes could be used for protection against this being, e.g. a cross, a scapular, pictures of Saints, bunches of herbs, blessed on the day of the Holy Virgin of the Herbs or on

Corpus Christi Day. The latter were kept under a pillow. Sometimes a circle was drawn around one's bed with a blessed chalk.

In the case of a ghoul, the unbaptised soul of a dead man could animate the body lying in the grave, in order to attack people at night. This being, as people believed, drank human blood.

The way to get rid of such a creature was drastic, but reportedly effective. The body of the person suspected of being a ghoul had to be dug up, decapitated and dismembered, the cut-off limbs had to be interchanged or just tied up, and the corpse would sometimes be turned face down. Sometimes the priest was asked to perform such activities. His authority and participation in the half-magic, half-religious ritual coerced the ghoul to remain in the grave forever, as it was believed. In one of the villages – Brenna (Šlaski region) – it was said that this kind of magical practices had taken place before World War I.

The blessed herbs were also used in magical activities against the ghoul. They were sewn into a little sack and placed on a person's chest.

Another important ceremony originating from a religious ritual was that of churching.² Just as baptism was important for a new-born baby, so was churching for the mother after childbirth.

Until the ceremony was completed, she remained vulnerable to the destructive action of evil powers. Thus she herself could become the victim of a nymph who would try to entice her from home in order to take the baby. On the other hand, if certain norms prescribing her isolation were violated, for instance, if she went out of her house or stood on an arable field, she would bring misfortunes (hail, thunderbolts or bad crops) upon the whole village.

A different kind of transgression against religious norms comprises life-style-related types of behaviour, conflicting with the patterns prescribed by the Church. Generally speaking, these are patterns governing one's religious life in accordance with the precepts of Christianity: daily prayer in the morning and in the evening, participation in the Mass, etc. It was believed that a person forgetful of the Commandments of the Church could face an encounter with a noon-ghost (*pohudnica*), with the devil (*diabel*) or with other unspecified ghosts.

A particular kind of religious offence was the failure to say the Angelus at noon. People believed that whoever went on working at that time instead of saying the prayer would be liable to encounter a noon-ghost. The noon, like midnight, is believed to be an hour of particularly great activity of ghosts. Therefore one who does not say the prayer at that time is deprived of God's protection and so may be afflicted by the evil spirits, the noon-ghosts.

The noon-ghost was one of those supernatural beings that aroused aversion and was presented as an old, ugly, carelessly dressed woman with long, lice-infested, dishevelled hair. Some of the oldest descriptions claim that this

creature also had a sallow complexion, a long face and long yellow teeth. Its appearance could bring unpleasant effects upon a person, usually in the form of bodily ailments – head-aches or rheumatic pains.

The devil described in folk beliefs generally looked like a classical Christian representation of the evil one. But in the Carpathian villages very often informants presented this demon as a man, sometimes looking like one's acquaintance, or in zoomorphic shapes like a black dog or a black ram.

The devil would make its presence felt only to evil, sinful people. Very often he could be summoned by uttering an imprecation, as it was believed. The function of the devil was to make a person realise that he or she led a sinful life – to remind one that it was high time to reflect and mend one's way. This supernatural being tempted people, frightened them, and played different pranks on them. The prayers *Ave Maria* and *Credo*, calling God's or the saints' names, and holy water were supposed to protect people against the aggression of the devil.

Some religious attributes were also used against the witch (*czarownica*) to protect the cattle. For instance, the cows were fumigated with the smoke of blessed herbs, pieces of a blessed Easter Palm were added to the cow's fodder, or the sign of the cross was drawn on the cow-shed's door.

Another example is not connected exactly with Christian ceremonies like baptism or churching, but it also involves religious attributes used during the magical practices. It refers to beliefs in the air-spirit (*planetnik*).

The air-spirit was a kind of ghost living in the clouds and protecting the fields against calamities. In a new version, it was a man born with a caul on his head and therefore, it was believed, he had a special power. His function was the same as that of the ghost. People undertook some magical activities in order to help him in his work. These activities consisted in fumigating the house with smouldering blessed herbs. As it was believed, the smoke was the air-spirit's food. In the oldest versions of this myth people burned wheat on a bread shovel.

Nowadays blessed herbs are also burned, often on a pot lid, and the smoke they give off fumigates the whole house. The people also used other accessories such as holy water blessed on the St. Agatha's Day (5 February), or blessed candles. Today these practices, which are still widespread, have survived as traces of the belief in the air-spirit.

Apart from the beings and ghosts connected with the transgression of norms in one's religious life, there were also ghosts or spirits that personified other kinds of deeds which could be censured on the grounds of the law and habits. These included downright violations of legal norms and also acts disapproved of by the local community, which followed its own criteria of judgement.

Ghosts can be subdivided into three groups according to the type of misdeed they represent. In the first group there are those that suffer through their own fault, for an offence such as theft, witchcraft, failure to do some work for which one has received payment, injustice, and suicide.

The phantoms associated with these misdeeds, except two of them, were usually imagined as invisible ghosts who made their presence felt by means of different noises, for example, a rustle, human voices, or by causing things to move on their own, and so on. The kind of offence would be revealed by the ghost itself in the place where this offence was committed.

Sometimes such phantoms could take on an anthropomorphic appearance or they could be seen as a light.

The first type of supernatural beings comprised penitent spirits of people who had practised witchcraft in their lifetime. They would usually appear at midnight to demonstrate what sort of punishment they had to suffer for their transgressions and so warn people not to do the same. This was described, for instance, as follows: a woman was sitting on the kitchen stove and the devil was pouring a big pailful of boiling milk into her mouth. It was a kind of punishment for her sorcery and taking the milk away from cows.

Another type within this group was made up by the ghosts suffering because of their injustice: 'If one measured and divided land in a venal way, then after his death a light would be seen wandering along the balks between fields – that's his soul, a will-o'-the-wisp (*bledny ognik*). People would say that it was a surveyor doing his penance' (informant born in 1901).

The second group comprises those spirits that are suffering through someone else's fault, such as the ghost of a murdered person. They could come in a dream to speak about how they were killed or they would make their appearance in the place where somebody murdered a man.

The ghost whose appearance was evoked by somebody's drunkenness, fear of punishment for an offence, remorse or unfulfilled promise, belonged to the third group. The functions ascribed to these ghosts were of moral and social character. Some of them made their appearance in order to frighten a drunk or tipsy man, others could be called up by the fear of punishment for theft.

In the first case, the ghost symbolises the deed; in the second, it stands for remorse. This is also the case with breaking a promise given to a dying man. The breach, together with the remorse it caused, produced a vision which reflected the dead man's unfulfilled request.

One can easily notice the greater diversity of phantoms and ghosts that are connected with a particular moral attitude. This is explained by the fact that something that could not be enforced or stoned for by legal means, would enter a different dimension of justice. This kind of justice, people believed, could not

be escaped, although it became operative only after the culprit's death. Such reckoning done without human intervention and without recourses to the law was connected with the belief in God's justice, and consequently, with the religious aspect of life.

The world of beliefs is hardly compatible with the model of life advocated by the Church; nevertheless, it exists and in a sense stands guard to the special order, including morals. In fact, the interdependent and mutually related co-existence of these two worlds is typical of the whole spiritual culture. This syncretism of Christianity and magic allows different and seemingly conflicting phenomena to form a unified whole and offers an explanation of phenomena which could not be accounted for by a single type of faith.

Notes

¹The article is based on the materials that the author collected on her folklore-collecting field trips in three Carpathian regions (Śląski, Sądecki, Żywiecki) between 1976-1981 and 1984-1987. The collections, stored in the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences are catalogued 1512, 1555, 1575, 1596, 1610 (Sadecki region); 1556, 1563, 1586, 1597 (Śląski region); 1627, 1647, 1673, 1674 (Żywiecki region). (*Author*)

²Churching used to be a religious ceremony, observed usually 40 days after the birth of the child. It ended the lying-in period and at the same time the so-called period of *impurity*. Nowadays it has features of a lay ceremony and is of purificatory character. However, owing to its magical contents consisting in the belief in the purposeful character of this ritual - its function being protective, rather than receptive - churching acquires magical and religious overtones.

PAGAN SACRIFICING PROCEDURES OF THE UDMURTS

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The present paper is based on the praying and sacrifice feast marking the end of the spring agricultural cycle known today by the common name *gershyd*. The feast has been observed by myself in the Varklet-Bodia village (the Tatar Republic, Agryzh region') in 1988 and 1989. If one includes in the *gershyd*-feast also the family prayer *vösh nerge* (Udm. 'praying custom'), which is conducted without a sacrifice, the feast lasts for nine days. Together with pauses,