

The role of the threshold is actualised during festivities, with man being born, christened, during wedding, funeral, moving to another dwelling place. Of course, the semiotic status of the threshold was higher in the ancient times. In the course of time its significance in man's mind and practical life is rather lost.

Yet the mythological notion *sliexnis* ('the threshold') is alive and developing also nowadays, e.g., the idiom *pārkāpt gāda sliexnim* ('to step over the threshold of a year') with meaning of a new calendar year.

## ATTITUDES AND FOLK BELIEF ABOUT WOLVES IN SWEDISH TRADITION

Per Peterson. Uppsala, Sweden

On the 29th of July 1985 one of the few wolves, which at that time lived in the forests of Värmland in the middle of Sweden, was shot. On that occasion there was a rumour circulating, which said that it could be proved that this wolf had not been a wild animal, but let out in the forest by order of the Swedish Society of Nature Protection. The so-called proof consisted of a tooth, which was said came from a human being, and which was found in the wolf's leg. The explanation was that the wolf should have been born in captivity and was bitten by a kid, which lost one of its teeth.

When the wolf was examined post-mortem, it became obvious that the tooth originated from a puppy. It also became clear that the wolf had had whelps two or three times in earlier years, which contradicted all statements of a tame wolf. In spite of this, rumours and stories were circulating for a considerable time.

Similar motifs that have been attracted to rumours and legends deal with finds of empty wolf-cages in the forests or earmarks from zoological gardens on dead wolves or the presence of placed out meat in the forests. The latter should proceed from authorities, which provide wolves with flesh, as they lack hunting training.

This kind of rumours and legends are based upon two main factors: 1) A tradition from old times, in which wolves have been attributed with extreme cruelty and danger, 2) The debate and discussions mainly in the 1970's, which focused on the question how wolves could be brought back in a wild state in the pine-forest region of Sweden.

To unfold this, I have to return to the 18th and 19th century conditions. Already in the provincial laws from Medieval times there are regulations about

wolf-hunting in Sweden. During the 16th century wolves seem to have been quite common, but during the 17th century the strain was reduced, so that the animals became quite rare in the beginning of the 18th century.

In the beginning of the 19th century there is an increasing number of wolves with a peak in about 1830. This probably depends on the fact that big-game hunting became free in 1789 and that the hunting of especially moose, reindeer and roedeer made wolf-hunting less attractive. Meanwhile the number of wolves grew and became a threat against the domestic animals - and sometimes even against human beings. Probably this brought an increasing number of stories, which for example dealt with motifs concerning man meeting wolves.

This does not mean that stories of this kind were uncommon earlier. During Medieval times when diseases like plague ravaged, it is supposed that competition and conflict between man and wolf accelerated. The facilities for armed defence were at that time also rather poor.

From the 19th century there are excellent statistic sources concerning wolf-hunting. The great firing off took place between 1830-1850 and about 1870 the wolf-stock was almost exterminated in southern and middle Sweden. This depended probably on several factors like better weapons, the cutting down of forests, the building of railroads and so on.

After having disappeared, or almost disappeared, during the 20th century, in 1965 the wolf was placed under protection by law, but until then very high prices were paid for every rare shot wolf - in the first half of the 1960's the payment was 4.000 Sw. crowns (about 800 US \$). In 1971 a project was started with the purpose of protecting the presence of wolves in Sweden. At that time only a few single animals still lived in the northern part of the country.

At the beginning of the project there were discussions about different methods of how to bring back the wild wolf-stock. One of the possibilities discussed was to let out wolves born in captivity - *if* - and that's important - no other methods were successful. Those plans were soon given up because of various problems in the process of letting an animal that has been born and grown up in captivity go free, as the animal has limited knowledge in hunting and also an exceptional relation to human beings.

Anyway those discussed plans became an important factor to what happened concerning rumours and stories in the 1980's. During this decade the wolf-stock was growing. Having been only a few animals in the beginning, there were more than 10 wolves in the country at the end of the 80's. This increasing number depended mainly on migrations, especially from Norway and on the fact that whelps were born in Sweden in several turns. Some of these few wolves have been extremely exploited in massmedia, especially those which have come close to humans or domestic animals. The interest has focused on

the killing of sheep and other animals by the wolves, as well as other facts that are understood as a threat against human beings. In a few remarkable cases wolves have been killed either legally by the police or illegally.

Why then have those few wolves caused such interest, fear and anger? Maybe one factor is, that they are so rare. But when examining the folklore sources from the 19th century, we can add some more information to make this modern phenomenon comprehensible.

Numerous excerpts from the archive materials deal with the wolves' behaviour and other characteristics and also with the consequences of meetings with wolves, especially such ones which do not deal with attacks - and of course different ways of protection, often magical methods.

An investigation of epics, legends as well as memorats, tells us about events of more supposed reality. A great number of them - and there's a domination of memorats - deal with attacks against domestic animals. Focus is frequently placed on the wolf's ability and qualification as hunter, and on his cruelty and thirst for blood. But there are also stories about how the attacked animals defend themselves very successfully. A less frequent number of stories - almost only legends - deal with attacks and killing of human beings. Some of them contain internationally wide-spread motifs. We have for example the stories about a man who is on his way across the frozen lake with a transport of coal or some kind of food on his wagon. He is attacked by a pack of wolves, but is saved by turning his barrel upside down and hiding in it. From this position he cuts off the wolves' paws.

Another story deals with the soldier who successfully defends himself, when he is attacked on his lonely way back home in the cold winter. But when he puts his sword back it freezes in the sheath, and he is killed when the wolves renew their attack.

Another time there is a whole family riding on horse sleigh and when the wolves come, they are at last forced to throw the youngest kid or baby to them in order to save the rest of the family.

Some stories deal with kidnappings close to the house. A girl goes out in the evening carrying a lamp, while her mother is still in the kitchen. After a while the mother hears a scream and when running out she forgets her baby, who is just sitting in a bath-tub. She tries to save her elder daughter, but the wolf has already carried her away - and when the mother comes back into the house, she finds her baby drowned in the bath.

Stories with a positive view of the wolf hardly ever occur in the materials. This kind of negative motifs and attitudes towards the wolf characterise the whole tradition from older times and these stories are still communicated in the beginning of the 20th century. This tradition can of course also be associated

with the werewolf tradition in Sweden, about which there is abundant material from the 19th century, mainly from Middle and North Sweden.

If we compare the supposed killings of man in folklore with official sources, such as the church registers, it becomes quite clear that just a very limited number can be verified. In some cases, however, there are indications that children really have been kidnapped and killed by wolves. However, most of the supposed killings, often told in local tradition, can not be verified and are probably just good folklore.

As demonstrated, the hateful attitude towards a wolf can be followed from the old agrarian to the modern society. But there are also some differences worth to notice:

The fear for the wolves in the agrarian society had a real economic base. The killings of domestic cattle could lead to ruin or at least serious damage for a farmyard. Even if there are a substantial material about attacks on humans, the dominating material, especially from memorat and folk-belief, deals with threats against the domestic animals.

The knowledge of the wolves and their behaviour as well as experiences from seeing a wolf were in older times much deeper. This was the case during most of the 19th century.

Today, on the other hand, the knowledge is rare, except among the specialists and other limited groups. The fear is not mainly economically based, but focuses on supposed threats against human lives. It could be compared to other dangers in the urban society.

In old times the folklore was attached to the wolf itself, today it deals to a high degree with those who defend the wolves' existence in the Swedish forests. The focus of the danger has shifted from the wolf to its defenders, the man himself.

## **VITAL ENERGY, SPIRITS AND GODS IN MARI FOLK MEDICINE**

Valeri Petrov. Yoshkar-Ola, Mari

Traditional medicine of the Maris is based on the theory of the omnipotent power of energy *yu*. They believe that only the knowledge of such energy gives a person the possibility to cure, to practise witchcraft, clairvoyance and