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SAINT WORSHIP AND ITS TRANSFORMATION IN THE SLAVIC FOLK CULTURE

Svetlana Tolstaya. Moscow, Russia

One of the main ideological bases of the archaic Slavic spiritual culture lies in the concept of sainthood. Despite the opposition between the so-called written (or literary) and oral (or folk) cultural patterns, this concept can serve as a

common axis which unites them, even if the content of sainthood and the forms of worship are different in the two traditions.

The Slavic cultural heritage in its both literary and folk forms has preserved several traces of the original idea of sainthood as this idea was formed within the Pre-Christian system of sacral notions. The etymological analysis of the Slavic word-family **svet* ('saint') and its counterparts in other languages made it possible to establish that the original pre-Christian meaning of this word has been rather connected with the material notion of swelling, growth and fertility, and only later did it become abstract, was transferred into the spiritual domain and sacralised. This semantic 'elevation' has determined the further evolution of the word and the appearance of new connotations for 'righteousness', 'purity', 'virtuousness' (Toporov 1987).

In both cultural contexts the notion of sainthood proved able to express not only the highest spiritual standard, but also the corresponding moral aspiration, while the worshipping of saints became both substantial and the structural basis for the organisation of church and everyday life of the society in accordance with the calendar saint's days.

But let us see why the saints were esteemed and worshipped, which events of their life could deserve the highest mark on the scale of sanctity? It appears that the decisive importance was given not to their exploits, not to their virtuousness and selfless service, but to a mortal deed, to the crown of martyrdom, to the self-sacrifice for the sake of faith – that is, to the reproduction of the prototype of the Gospel and of Jesus' martyrdom in one's individual life and destiny. It is clearly evidenced by the Old Slavonic hagiographic literature, as well as by the whole popular practice of worshipping and the accompanying legends in the folklore. When the biographies of saints mention their good deeds, clemency, asceticism, etc., these elements do not appear to be obligatory and often make up only the background of those events that are really relevant – that is, their sufferings, privations, their wonders and other signs of righteousness and of the highest destination. We might as well suppose that these non-obligatory elements are secondary and to a certain extent 'reconstructed' by the hagiographers for the sake of morality. The central and determining event of a biography is always the death of a martyr, even if the person (as it was with the Russian saints Boris and Gleb) died by accident or almost voluntarily rather than for the sake of their faith. The spiritual tension, the divine aspiration, concentration, asceticism, a gentle spirit – these qualities appear to be more advantageous than doing mundane good deeds to one's neighbour, than benefaction in the literary sense of the word. It would be even more exact to say that it is these spiritual properties that make up the virtuousness and righteousness as an example for imitation.

In the course of times those deeds that have determined the canonisation of a saint, the circumstances of his or her life and the mortal exploits remain only in the hagiographic and other similar texts. Reflected in the folk calendar and in several popular plots of legends and songs, they cease to be important for the oral culture and disappear from people's memories, while the saints themselves quite often become degraded to the level of mythological, half-demonic or completely demonic figures – just like the sacral prayer texts quite often are degraded to the level of primitive magic charms, get intermingled with them and dissolved into them.

That kind of combining, intermingling and redistribution of Christian and pagan concepts, symbols and forms, which is quite typical for the Slavic folk culture (and has also affected, to a smaller extent, the higher level of literary and ecclesiastical culture) is known under the name *double faith*. The transformed worship of Christian saints, reminiscent of pagan polytheism, is an integral part of the double faith. It has been indicated more than once and in many details that in the people's mentality Christian saints replaced the pagan gods, having inherited their functions and their place in the pantheon: St. Elijah took the place of Perun the Thunderer, St. Nicholas that of Veles (Volos) the protector of cattle, St. Paraskeva that of the goddess Mokosh, and so on. The possibility of such substitution was a way of compensation for the abandoned polytheism and smoothed the transition from the pagan cultural pattern to the Christian one. Later all main Christian saints found themselves more or less included into the system of folk rituals, 'appropriated' and adopted by this system. During the process of adoption their images made a long way aside of those images which can be found in the hagiographic biographies or in other apocryphal texts. To a certain extent this process affected even the images of Jesus, the Holy Virgin and other gospel heroes, which underwent a serious change in 'folk Christianity'.

The main direction of these changes and transformations consisted in the 'mythologisation' of the saints, attributing to them supernatural magic properties and the power over natural phenomena and human life. In accordance with the pagan scheme, the saints underwent a specialisation: each of them was assigned to a specific domain of natural phenomena or human activities (like rain, hail, wind, animals and birds, cattle-breeding and agriculture, bee-keeping, spinning and weaving, folk medicine, etc.). It was accompanied by an utter desacralisation of the saints, their withdrawal from the highest domain of divinity, their merging with ancestors and dead relatives which, according to the archaic world-view of the ancient Slavonians, were worshipped as the real rulers of the terrestrial life. That the saints appertain to the 'other world', becomes the dominant factor in their perception, and it equalises them both with the

worshipped ancestors and the demonic creatures of 'the other world' (with the so-called lower mythological figures). At the same time the vertical correlation of sacral and profane, in which the saints originally were naturally connected with the upper pole of the *sacrum*, becomes weaker. The saints descend to the earth, they walk along the roads, come into houses, punish those who ignore the traditions or break the bans. (For example, at nights St. Paraskeva of Friday spins on an idly standing spinning-wheel; or she tangles the threads or breaks the wheel, if a woman is spinning or weaving in an inappropriate time, e.g. on Friday or on a holiday). On every occasion people ask the saints for help, address them with prayers, charms or vows, bring them sacrifices and gifts, feel offended with them if a certain request has not been favoured and even punish them by pricking out the eyes of a saint on an icon, or by turning the icon with its face to the wall, or by breaking it or throwing it into water. Such forms of communication with saints hardly differ from the manner of conduct towards a house, forest or water spirit.

A relationship like that does not suggest any selflessness from the side of a mortal person, nor from the saint. Very often people conclude an agreement with the saints on the exchange of benefactions, and this mutually beneficial type of relationship with the saints is well reflected in the Slavic rituals and folklore tradition. Thus, when the reaping was over, people used to leave in the field a portion of ears, referred to as the beard of Jesus; or of Volos, or Elijah, Nicholas, Cosma and Damian. There were wide-spread offerings of hens, swine, rams, and other animals, making a part of family and calendar rites. During the supper on the Christmas Eve the housekeeper used to utter a special ritual and magical invitation to supper, addressed to one or several mythological figures – to the personified natural forces (the frost, the wind, the hail), to animals and birds, to the dead ancestors, etc. But on a line with them the invitation could be addressed to the saints – to St. Herman, St. Nicholas; to All Saints, angels and even to Jesus and the Holy Virgin – while the opposite pole could be represented by the witch, the house spirit, the devil, the demonic creatures, the rulers of clouds, etc. The verbal invitations were accompanied by bringing a tray with festive dishes or a spoon with Christmas *kutya* (a special ritual dish) out of the house and lifting it up, that is, by outward gestures of feeding. All these actions had the aim of ensuring the friendly help of the invited personages in the future (during the coming year) and to prevent any unfavourable interventions on their part.

Thus, within this type of folk culture, defined as the double faith, the perception of the Christian saints shows no trace of admiring the original signs of sainthood, either in its religious or in its moral sense. However, such transformation in the saint worship, its lowering and desacralisation (with the elimina-

tion of the ideal sainthood itself), is possible just under the conditions of the double faith, when on the opposite pole, occupied by the literary, ecclesiastic, religious culture, the notion of ideal sainthood was not only preserved, but also further developed as the highest moral standard. In fact, selflessness, self-oblivion in the literary sense of the word, commending oneself to the hands of an upper divine force, which constitute the basis of the Christian consciousness, preserve in a different form the pre-Christian feeling of a personality as an integral part of nature. In the course of their further evolution, however, they dissociate themselves from this feeling and, combining selflessness with the service within a single spiritual and moral ideal standard, bring this standard to a principally new level, regardless of whether it is the God or the human world that is conceived as the object of service.

WEATHER-PROPHESIER AND HEALER IN SOLÖR-VÄRMLAND FINNFOREST.

Per Martin Tvengsberg. Hamar, Norway

Traditional folk belief in the Finnforest today is mostly based on the old burn-beating traditions and developed from this complex procedure. Therefore it is necessary first to describe the sophisticated system of burn-beating cultivation that has developed through the times and turned to account the different kinds of cereals, forests, climate and topography.

The great complexity of burn-beating required a certain organisation of specialised people in each tribe. Collaboration between practitioners of different crafts was much more necessary here than in arable cultivation methods. The collaboration system in burn-beating is the cycle of human activity that creates the Finnish culture and also other cultures. These cultures are strongly related to runic poetry, music, sauna, and timber constructions. These cultures are different from the younger arable stationary farming cultures.

The Finns that came to Solör-Värmland between 1570-1670 practised *huuhta*: cultivation of rye (*jureinen*) on burnt spruce forest land (*vuoma*). Long-stalked Sangaste winter rye seems to be related to *jureinen*, according to Tanel Moora at the Agricultural Museum in Tartu. This cultivation method required a four-year cycle from the felling of the forest in April until harvest. The Finns moved whenever means of subsistence was reduced, when compared with other