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SYMBOLIC HEALING IN HUNGARIAN ETHNOMEDICINE

Mihály Hoppál. Budapest, Hungary

To understand the attitude of traditional folk medicine it is necessary for us to review the main types of the methods of healing. In the literature we find two approaches. One holds that, at a specified historical moment, the empirically based knowledge receives ritual reinforcement; while according to the other view, only about a quarter of the herbs used in folk medicine possessed any real curative property; the real effect was exerted by the process of healing, by the rite itself, the power of psychic influence. It must be clearly seen, however, that traditional folk medicine is an area of culture where methods of healing based on the accumulated experience of generations and the apparently irrational flats and notions dictated by beliefs blend in almost equal proportion. Only when looked at from outside does the belief system, with its own inner dynamics, appear incomprehensible; the internal connections organise the elements into a pattern, and, once the connections are understood, the elements

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seem evident - especially in the eyes of the users. Ethnographic research is interested in the system as a whole, and so it views folk medicine too as a part of the system of culture - a part that is a characteristic blond of rational and symbolic elements.

Analogic Thinking in Ethnomedicine

Hungarian people applied magic or symbolic 'medical' treatment mostly to curing diseases whose causes were unknown or were not directly identified. In the material so far collected the informants have named several causes of illness, but unfortunately that rich material has not yet received systematic analysis. The most frequent causes of illness are the following: God, the 'evil ones', who can be supernatural (unknown) beings or humans possessing supernatural power. This latter group is made up of *boszorkányok* ('witches'), *bábák* ('midwives'), wise men, *bübájosok* ('magicians'), *javasok* ('medicine women'), *kuruzslók* ('healers'); while the former group includes the *lidérc* ('incubus') that causes an oppressive sensation at night, and the invisible *szépasszony* ('beautiful lady'), with her 'bowl', which makes anyone stepping into it come out in a rash[1].

Among the causes of disease the so-called sickness-demons (such as the *csúz* ('joint gout'), *íz* (roughly the same), *süly* ('scurvy'), *guta* ('apoplexy'), *nyavalya* ('falling sickness'), etc.) used to be regarded as dominant, but probably more important than these elusive 'beings' are the many kinds of bewitchment. Thus, in the old days, bewitching was known as something done through some action or with the help of some objects; moreover, by looking (*igézés* - *igizis*) or by word or curse. A common form of bewitching was, for example, pouring: they made a brew from nine kinds of cereals and poured it out or sprinkled it on the ground at a busy cross-roads or outside the house of the person they wanted to bewitch. Whoever entered the bewitching fell ill, coming out in boils or nasty pimples.[2] That, incidentally, was also one of the ways of getting rid of the disease.

> *According to Mrs. Sándor Hegyi, 77, of Mezötur, small sticks were bound with rags at one end and with them they rubbed the wounds of patients suffering from bad wounds. Having rubbed them in, they threw these small bound sticks onto the cross-roads, and if someone stepped on them he caught the disease and carried it away.*[3]

The making of such *rontóbábu* ('bewitching dolls') was known all over the country, thus these simple healing instruments - after all, they served both purposes - can be found in the ethnographic collections of several museums in Hungary. During a field trip to Tiszalgar, Vilmos Diószegi collected nine such

dolls, which he placed in the Ethnographic Museum of Budapest. We quote from his notes:

> *They cut nine identical pieces of branches and then they tear two pieces of rag. One of these they fold in two for the head, placing the other one on it. When all nine are ready they make hands for them. They make a circle over the boil with the head of each doll and then they throw them into the basket. At the cross-roads they throw the dolls away with their left hand over their left shoulder.*[4]

The collector also added that the discarding had to be done at midnight or at dawn; no doubt, the practice of bewitchery was, in most cases, strictly secret, as against the generally public character of healing magic or magic with a positive purpose.[5]

Similar disease-averting dolls were made when a child had lip sores;

> *The child slavers and they take him when the herd of pigs is returning from the fields. Then he stands by the roadside, turning those dolls, twelve of them, in his mouth. He turns them in his mouth ... then he throws them away ... behind his back ... then he says, 'sores go away, herd come, sores go away, herd come!*[6]

The example shows that the essence of the healing is to remove the sickness - that is to say, after touching, it the object that has been infected with it must be discarded. In other words, what happened was a symbolic removal. The purpose of throwing into water is clear in the following example:

> *In Göcsej (district in south-western Hungary, in the county Zala) a woman suffering from whites (leucorrhea) makes nine small dolls from nine pieces of white cloth, hides them under her skirt, goes to a river, and there slipping each doll into the water, says the following: Only then let this malady come back when I take these dolls out of the water!*[7]

In the above texts and healing procedures there is a common basic principle of magic healing - namely, that if I perform a certain action, that is, I remove an object that has been in contact with the patient, it analogically implies that I have also removed the malady. The custom of throwing into water was practised in connection with a variety of diseases (e.g. freckles were washed is a stream at dawn on Good Friday).

A kind of symbolic throwing into water was the throwing of sty (*hordeolum*) into a well[8]; but generally all magic healing methods which contain the gesture of washing can be regarded as an analogical throwing into water (thus, for instance, in the Zemplén region, a child *aki nézésben van* (who was under the influence of an evil eye) was washed in water mixed with hot charcoal - the author's collection). Then the bath water was poured out in a place where peo-

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ple were unlikely to step into it. The pouring out symbolises the removal of the malady.

Imitative magic based on analogy is even better illustrated by the symbolic reaping of sty (*hordeolum*) with the bent index finger. (The popular name of hordeolum in Hungarian is *árpa* ('barley'), which suggests a linguistic transfer of the symbolic healing power.) This 'therapy' was practised in the Zemplén region in the early 1960s. Coming still nearer to reality is the action of the *csángós* of Moldavia, who used incantation to reinforce the power of healing:

> *He took a sickle in his left hand and went up to the person who had sty in his eye, and with his left hand he pressed it nine times with the sickle and cut nine times with the sickle, saying: 'Sty, sty (barley), I show you and I reap you, I take you home, I thrash you, winnow you, grind you, knead you, bake bread from you and eat you.*[9]

Here the accompanying text, too, talks about the methods of the multiple annihilation, the repetition of removal; and it does so at the level of symbolic action and oral text.

Commonly known in the Hungarian tradition of ethnomedicine is the hanging on trees or bushes of the items of clothing that have been in contact with the patient. Underlying the motif of giving it to the wind - where the shirt of the person who had the shivers was hung on a rosebush out in the fields for the wind to blow it away - is also the idea that the malady must be removed. A few decades ago this was still a living practice in the Zemplén region, as the custom of leaving small pieces of clothes beside the gouty wells is also probably traceable to the same belief.[10] It is worth mentioning here that, whereas in the early 60's one could still take pictures of small rags fluttering in the wind, by the early 80s this custom had disappeared (Abaújszántó, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén district).

In ethnomedicine a magic healing custom resting on analogy was the slipping-through. The sick child (suffering from heart disease, for example) was slipped through a cleft tree with its parts drawn apart or through a naturally formed hole in a tree trunk. The same purpose was served by one parent handing the baby through the window to the other parent or through the so-called '*frászkarika*', for which flour was borrowed from nine houses (the Janos Arany Museum of Nagykörös has in its possession such a *frászkarika;*[11] a pretzel baked in Abaújdevecser and used for the same purpose can be found in Budapest's Ethnographic Museum, under inventory number 62.59.2 - Vilmos Diószegi collection, 1962). Both kinds of slipping-through were symbolic rebirths according to folk beliefs.

This outlook permeated folk thinking. For example, it is on record in Mezötúr that when a child got a whooping cough (*szamár köhögés* in Hungarian, liter-

ally 'donkey cough') from an evil eye, he was slipped through under a donkey three times.[12] In Moldavia they recall that whooping cough was cured by giving donkey's milk to the child. And if that did not help, the patient was smoked with a flowery branch consecrated on Palm Sunday and with donkey manure[13].

The same way of thinking based on symbolic actions pervaded the analogous therapy in the course of which a small sick child was being 'boiled'. This procedure was known in all parts of country:

> *My godmother had a daughter who was very thin and did not grow. she was about six or seven years old. She remained very small up to the age of twelve. She did not put on weight, nor did she grow; she was like a skeleton. The doctors were unable to help her. Nobody knew what the trouble was. They sent for the wise woman who said to my godmother: 'I tell you what you should do; carry a big kettle in from the kitchen and act as if you were making a fire under it. But there should be no fire burning. Put some wood under it, but do not light it; then make the girl sit in the kettle. 'And so it happened. The wise woman came round to us at night. When my godmother had made the girl sit in the kettle, the wise woman asked her: 'Neighbour, what are you cooking?' 'Some meat onto the bone!' This they repeated twelve times. It happened at midnight. My godmother ran around the house twelve times, with a broom in her hand, and when she came to the kitchen, she made some threatening gestures with the broom. Thereafter the little girl began to develop and put on weight. This girl is still alive.*[14]

Even more illustrative examples of analogical thinking can be found in certain cases where the instruments of healing are chosen according to the external symptoms of the disease, symptoms that also manifest themselves in colours. Thus jaundice, for example - from which, incidentally, there is spontaneous recovery, which takes six weeks - literally attracted the healing methods based on magic colour analogy. In the early 60s, it was known and repeated in many villages in the Zemplén region that, in the old days, jaundice sufferers were 'allowed to drink water off a gold ring' (*arany gyürüröl hagytak vizet innya*). Moreover, plants of yellow colour played a role in curing the disease. For instance, they made a bath from the flower of the plant *sárga nyestike* for the patient to bathe in. In addition, he was made to eat plenty of carrots, egg-yolk and brown (yellow) sugar.

The disease Saint Anthony's fire, known to be characterised by a deep-red inflammation of the skin, was treated by smoke from red or grilled maize; moreover, the patient's face was covered with a red kerchief. When a boil had turned blue, they pulled through it a dark thread; one could go on and on listing

the examples, but even the ones mentioned so far seem sufficient to prove that Hungarian ethnomedicine does bear some traces of a certain folk signature theory, on the basis of which they sought to cure a disease associated with a particular colour by the use of medicinal herbs or substances of a similar colour.

A peculiar form of manifestation of ethnomedicine's view based on analogy is the faith in the power of reverse actions. Thus, for instance, the child, after it was bathed in a 'magic' bath made from nine herbs, was dried with the reverse side of an undershirt (Abaújkér[15]). In case of an evil eye, the child must be washed in water mixed with hot charcoal with the back of the left hand, and the remaining water must be poured out from below upwards, against the backside of the door. The use of the left hand or incantations involving counting backwards seek to achieve the desired effect through inversion; they symbolically restore the life order upended by the disease.

Finally, mention must be made of casting, a procedure supposed to cure children suffering from fright, evil eye or some other malady of unidentifiable origin. The procedure is based in the principle of analogy of shape, which can be summarised as follows: nine different objects, including a plate with water in it, were placed in a sieve; then they melted wax (or occasionally tin) and poured it into the cold water in the plate. According to ancient belief, the forms of the suddenly solidifying material showed or assumed the shape of the thing or person that had put a spell on the patient. (This method of healing was recorded in several photos, based on reconstruction.[16])

The principle that the listed healing procedures share is the idea of 'like can be cured with like', whose functioning we have seen. In our last example, casting had not only a diagnostic function, but also a therapeutic one, which is reinforced by the use of the sieve as an instrument replacing the ancient drums. In casting - similarly to water mixed with hot charcoal - there is a meeting of fire (a hot substance) and cold water, both possessing special power according to popular belief.[17] It is understandable therefore that a casting woman from the Zselic region said: 'Casting is prayer, it has great power!'[18] And indeed, in ethnomedicine action is a prayer that has the power to cure and the word uttered becomes a healing action.

The Power of the Word in Ethnomedicine

In ethnomedicine, one of the characteristic forms of the symbolic way of thinking was the faith in the magic power of the word. All over the world people have believed, and still believe, in the magic healing power of the spoken word. This was possibly one of the most ancient curative methods of mankind, and one of the easiest to apply as well. Since it requires no direct bodily

intervention and thus it inflicts no pain, either, its effect is primarily psychic; and, as it has emerged, psychological conditioning is one of the most active forces in modern healing.

Looking at the Hungarian material, we may say that it has survived almost to our own days in the memory of the older generation - and in some regions, in practice as well (r.h. in some remote villages in the Zemplén region; for instance, in Fony, a film was made as late as 1970 about an old woman using incantations to cure thrush). The first historical data, the first Hungarian-language records come from the 15th-16th centuries.[19] (As there is a detailed discussion of incantations and prayers in two chapters of the other folklore volume of *A Magyarság Néprajza* [The Ethnography of the Hungarians], here we only give a brief outline.) The records of the witchcraft trials and subsequently the 20th century collections show that this healing practice has continuously weathered the social changes of the past centuries. This is probably related to the fact that the incantation was always or in most cases known only to the healing specialists. A knowledge of the texts, therefore, was part of the secret knowledge - if only because, according to the beliefs, the incantation loses its power if it is told to someone else. It was a rule that the text could only be uttered on the occasion of healing, and the chanting of the formula was itself equivalent to performing the healing; hence incantation is a genuine speech-act.

Naturally, verbal texts were, in most cases, accompanied by gestures (e.g. laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, encircling, etc.), by the application of objects (e.g. serpentine or), and possibly the use of medicinal herbs.

Incantation is a type of magical healing in which the text, the spoken word, the uttering itself (Hung. *ráolvasás*, *ráimádkozás*) was the most important element. The multiplicity of texts, the incredible wealth of textual variants hardly allows a uniform classification of types,[20] for this remedial process was used in a wide variety of diseases (most frequently in the case of evil eye, *szemölcs* ('wart'), fright, sty, *kelés* ('boil'), sore throat, etc.); for this reason any classification or typologising according to function also runs into difficulty.

Nonetheless, there are some general principles that are present in incantation formulas: in the text, the process of the disappearance of the disease is likened to something (e.g. to the waning moon); a constant element is the threatening of the illness ('... if I find you here, I will dirty you!') or its dismissal:

Elindult a Boldogságos Szüz Mária
az ö áldott szent fiavál.
Találkozott hetvenhittéle gonosz igézetvel.
Hová mész, te gonosz igézet?
Én megyek ennek az Erzsinek,

piros vérit megiszom, szállkás husát hasogatni.
Nem engedem, hogy a piros vérét megigyad,
szállkás husát hasogajjad.
Te menny ei oda ahol a fekte kutyák
nem ugatnak, a fekete lovak nem nyerítnek,
a szent harangok nem szólnak
kovászosa kenyérrel nem élnek.
Manny el fekete földnek szinnyére
köszíklák gyomrába.
Én ezt a szenet azzal vetem bele,
ezer angyal járjon vigasztalására.
('The Blessed Virgin Mary set off
with her blessed son.
She met seventy-seven kinds of evil charm.
Where are you going, you evil charm?
I am on my way to drink
the red blood of this Liz, to send pains in her stringy flesh.
I will not let you drink her red blood,
send pains in her stringy flesh.
You had better go to some place where there are
no black dogs barking, no black horses neighing,
where the sacred bells do not ring,
and they do not eat leavened bread.
Go to where the earth is black,
into the bowels of rocks.
I throw this piece of coal into her with the wish
that a thousand angels may come to comfort her.')[21]

The Time and Place of Healing

According to folk belief, it was not at all indifferent when and where the magic actions of curative power were performed. Naturally, there were injuries requiring immediate attention (such as open wounds, burns, scalds), but in most cases the time and the location were chosen in accordance with tradition.[22]

For example, there was a list of so-called unlucky days, which has come down to us in a 19th century manuscript book. In it we can read the following: '*kik Ezekben a megirt napokban születnek Erötlen Betegesek lesznek és valósággal hijjasok ós elebbeni eggéssógerke Vissza nem hozatnak...*' ('those born on those days here set forth will be feeble and sickly and virtually invalids - they will not be brought back to their former health...')[23]

Moreover, not every day was suitable for healing, particularly not for phle-

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botomy or cupping (we know from as early as the 15th century a blood-letting calendar printed specially for the use in Hungary).[24] Folk medicine has, to a certain extent, preserved this belief, which more generally linked the things of health and illness with the course of the sun and the moon. (It is worth mentioning here that only in our days is modern medicine paying attention again to the link between the patient's condition and meteorological phenomena.)

It is also presumably the functioning of the symbol-creating force of analogous conceptions and of the contrasted lines of antitheses that we can detect in the following pair of opposites: dawn was linked with the notion of purity and beginning, while evening was linked with the notion of mortality and passing. The rising of the *sun* might have a beneficial influence, and the coming up of the *moon* is coupled with the dismissal of the disease. In the course of the healing process, the points of the compass may have had a role too, for in the Zemplén region (in Fony, even as late as 1959) there was a healing woman using incantations to cure jaundice, who, in the evening, made the patient sit facing west, and in the morning, facing east, and, holding his head, she chanted her words to cure the disease (the author's collection[25]).

The role of the celestial bodies seems important,[26] since everyday healing was made to comfort to the rhythm of these, as indeed, seasonal healing must also follow their rhythm. The sun was usually mentioned in the folklore collections as a healing, benignant factor (*áldott napp* - 'blessed sun'[27]). The period of 'evil' causing disease, lasts from after sunset until dawn. At the same time - again on the basic of the principle of resemblance - the efficacy of a remedy or a cure was linked with the changes of the moon. In the early 1700s, Anna Zay wrote the following advice in her book of remedies:

> *Ha Iffiu az Aszszony Embor újságon éllyen az orvossággal, ha hamrintz Esztendón már fejül vágjon hold töltén, ha 40 Esztendö tájban Hold fogján keil élni az orvosságokkat, mert ha erre nem vigyászsz ezzel való élés nem hasznal...*
>
> ('If the man or woman is young, they should take the medicine at new moon; if they are over thirty, they should take it at full moon; if they are around forty, physics should be applied when the moon is on the wane; for if you fail to observe this, the treatment will be of no avail ...')[28]

We should, in this place, mention the symbolic usage of magic numbers in healing, which strengthens the curative effect. In every culture there are so called sacred numbers (e.g. 3, 4, 7, 9). In Hungarian ethnomedicine the number 3 figures most frequently. Normally, the same treatment must be repeated three times: in the morning, at midday, and in the evening (or those are the times at which a medicine must be taken); or at sunset, at midnight and early at dawn;

or perhaps at the same hour on three consecutive days. The number 9 figures as a multiple of 3 (they uttered the incantation nine times to cure sty, they made nine circles round the boil, they prepared nine dolls). In this healing process, number 9 often stands for various objects or qualities (nine kinds of grass, earth from nine graves, flour from nine houses). The repetition ensured by the sacred numbers enhanced the psychological effect of the treatment, as it was in a accord with the expectations of the traditional belief system; at the same time, in the case of medicinal herbs and drugs this is only natural - after all, that is the kind of rhythm we follow in taking our modern medicines today as well.

The scene of the treatment was also significant in the system of folk tradition. Of the parts of the house, the fireplace and the threshold figured as the scene of healing actions. Both, by virtue of their direct contact with the outside world, form a transition between the external and the internal worlds, for which reason they were deemed especially suitable as locales for magic acts. Also belonging in the same category were the cross-roads and the cemetery; it was in these transitional areas that one could get rid of maladies, transfer them to other people, or bewitch others (by pouring out or by dolls cast away).

The places of pilgrimages were the important scenes of healing; in the traditional village lifestyle, they played an important role not only as occasions of spiritual communication, but also as opportunities of widening social contacts. In addition, most places of pilgrimage had hear them some 'sacred well' (Csatka, Vasvár) or medicinal spring on whose basin they washed the sore parts of their body; the water of the well at Bucsuszentlászló is used as an eye lotion.[29] Even in our days, people with a pain in their legs often resort to those places of pilgrimage having medicinal springs (Szentkút, Heves County). In Andocs, the bark of the willows standing in the Franciscans' garden is held to possess curative power.[30] It was a characteristic custom associated with the pilgrimages that some personal object or a small piece of the clothes worn on the body had to be left at that well.[31]

It was in the places of pilgrimage that people acquired the objects to which they subsequently attributed symbolic curative power: primarily the holy water (at the pilgrimage of Gylmesközéplak, in 1968, I myself photographed the healing by holy water), which they took home along with other sacraments,[32] and particularly the offerings cast from wax.[33] In the places of pilgrimage of Transdanubia, even as late as the 40's, '*votive objects*' made of wax were being sold in large quantities. If somebody had a pain in his leg, hand, eyes or ears, they bought wax figures of the appropriate shape; if they had stomach trouble, they bought a wax figure having the shape of a frog;[34] if they had heart trouble, they bought an offering portraying a heart. They left the wax figures at the altar of the church of the place of pilgrimage, offering it up, as it were, for recovery,

sacrificing the wax object symbolising the sick part of the body.

These examples also testify to the plurality of symbolic healing methods used formerly in Hungarian ethnomedicine.

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TRADITIONAL KOMI CONCEPTS ABOUT DISEASE AETIOLOGY

Irina Ilyina. Syktyvkar, Komi

Traditional medical culture has a difficult character, because the accumulation of rational knowledge and experiences progressed simultaneously with the evolution of spiritual ideas, the main part of which was formed by the concepts about supernatural world. And in the traditional Komi medicine positive experience and peculiar achievements in a man's knowledge are indissolubly combined with irrational notions, religious and magical actions and rites. This syncretism clearly shows itself in folk concepts about the course of disease.

In this report the author tries to bring together facts that are able to reveal traditional Komi concepts about disease aetiology. This task is complicated by the process of their rapid disappearance. Even in the 2nd half of the 19th century scholars had noted that population of the Ust-Sysolsk area 'had some knowl-

edge's about the origin of diseases'. But nowadays only a few informants can characterise the traditional concepts about the course of diseases. They mention 'throwing an evil spell on', and 'evil eye' as the chief source of ailment.

At the same time an analysis of ethnographic, folklore and linguistic materials allow us to show different concepts, both elemental materialistic and idealistic about disease aetiology.

The whole set of pathological folk medicine is explained from the elemental materialistic position. Proverbs and sayings, customs and recommendations that ordered to observe cleanliness, rational diet, temperature regime, clearly testify about it. People realise that the infringement of these orders will cause different diseases.

The explanation of traumas caused by physical overstrain, cuts, burns was really rational. To prevent them, one could advise to be careful in everyday life, on domestic and agricultural affairs, etc. Children got acquainted with optimal methods of work from their early years. A proverb says: *Sintö kydz vidzan, as'tö sidz zhö vidz* ('Keep yourself, as you keep an eye').

Usually chills were caused by cold and dampness. It is not mere chance that people warned: *Kuchöm povodd'a, sechöm i pas'köm* ('Dress according the weather').

Many ailments were connected with different infringements in feeding: hunger, malnutrition; monotonous diet, inferior food, alcohol, etc. Good food, as people believed, is one of the main conditions of health: *Omölik s'oyan vylad regyd kystö n'uzhödan* ('You may die if underfed'); *Chyg vis'ömön vis'ny s'ökyd* ('Hunger is worse than disease'); *Olöm abu shan, kor omöl' nyan'* ('Life is bad when bread is bad'). Traditional ration consisted of meat, fish, grain and flour products, milk and milk products. Besides, people used everywhere different wild herbs and fruits that were rich in vitamins, effective as prophylactics and remedies. There was an idea about the most rational system of feeding: one must eat 3-4 times in a day; hot dish, usually soup, was indispensable. At the same time, folk sayings underlined the significance of food moderation: *Vovti vyiön en s'oi; sinmyd berdas* ('Do not use much butter – you may lose your eyesight'); *En termas', m'ed gorshö ves'kalas* ('Do not hurry – you may choke'). To counterbalance wide-spread stereotypes such as 'a fat man is a healthy man', there was a saying: *Kosydinik mortyd oz i pörys'my* ('A lean man does not get old'). The harm of alcohol was clearly realised: *Vinayd eböstö n'ylalö* ('Vodka eats the power'); *Vinatö on pomav, morttö vinayd pomalas* ('Wine does not come to end, but it can kill a man'). Special attention to food of a pregnant woman was connected with the concern for the future baby. She was forbidden to use alcohol, to eat products that were not fresh, to drink unboiled water. Any of her food caprice had to be satisfied.

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In notions about a healthy style of life personal and public hygiene, as well as hygiene of dwelling were of great importance. It is no mere chance that such proverbs were widespread: *Vinatö on pomav, morttö vinayd pomalas (*'Any disease can call at a clean home'); *Med ne vis'ny, kolö söstöma ovny* ('One must live in cleanliness, if one does not want to be ill'). Sauna was considered one of the best prophylactic measures. As a rule, all skin diseases and some gastric-intestinal ones were explained with personal unscrupulousness.

Very important for health was rational interchange of work and rest, and sleeping was the main component of it. Long lasting sleep was always regarded as laziness, but many informants remembered that it was bad for health to wake a man, and especially a child or an adolescent, roughly or by force (except, of course, in extreme cases). It was not done by waking suddenly, by call; it was recommended first to call the name of a sleeper softly, then call loudly, and only after all these measures have failed, to wake actively. Non-fulfilment of these rules plus hard work without enough rest, according to folk concepts, could lead a man to exhaustion, feebleness; a child became sluggish, tearful and restless.

It was well realised that disease could be caused by insult, moral trauma, fright: *Bur s'orni-basniön vek bur, stav ly-s'ömydly, a l'ök s'örni-basniön vek l'ok, vek vis'an* ('Good speech always results in good, from bad speech illness may come'). Special measures for keeping complete rest of a pregnant woman allowed to suppose that relations between psychological state of the woman and the health of her future child were well realised.

Perhaps some diseases were connected with unhealthy heredity, because on match-making both sides were interested to know whether the families of the bride and the bridegroom had had any cases of mental deficiency or paroxysms. If they had such ancestors, marriage could be rejected.

Determination of the correct cause and effect connections did much to promote the formation of effective treatment and prophylactic system: all ailments explained with rational, natural reasons, had to be treated rationally, too. The Komi folk medicine used more than 140 species of plants, various mineral and animal products, remedies of water, heat, different forms of physical therapy.

However, knowledge about man and its surroundings did not allow to explain rationally the causes of a large number of diseases, first of all infectious, mental, chronic ones. Traditional world view connected their appearance with the influence of supernatural forces. Such concepts, formed in different historical epochs, are now losing their context and often are only fragments of archaic beliefs, which become clear from the complex of ethnographic materials belonging to neighbouring peoples.

One may suppose that once the Komi considered diseases as evil spirits, which sometimes were without any body, sometimes had a material, usually

zoomorphic form. In many stories diseases exist as animated beings that man must propitiate or drive away. Informants mentioned that even at the beginning of the 20th century, there was special attitude to such infectious diseases as typhus and smallpox. It was forbidden to make noises (speak loudly, sing, knock), to wash in a house with such a patient. It was not allowed to scold the disease and even to treat the patient. It was considered that in this case the disease 'did not take offence, would visit, and go away'. If the patient and his relatives would have scolded the ailment, begun to treat it, the disease may have 'got furious and taken the patient with it'. People believed that a man could directly speak with the evil spirit:

> *...sometimes before its departure the evil spirit thanks the master and tells where it will be replaced next time. Sometimes, but very rarely, the evil spirit tells how a man can propitiate it*.

Medical practice also had measures which might not only propitiate, but kill the evil spirit-disease. Charms often said:

Vis'öm kerala,	I cut down the disease,
Omöl' kerala,	I cut down the evil spirit.
Bura da shanya kerala	
Vazhs'ys burdzhika, shan'dzhika.	I do it better than before.
Vis'öm suchiödla	I stab the disease,
Omyl suchiödla,	I stab the evil spirit.
Bura da shanya suchiödla	I do it quite well
Vazhs'ys burdzhika, shan'dzhika.	Better than before.

That is to say, an attitude to the disease as to a really existing being, which has no definite face or typical features. In some other cases the disease may have a more concrete image.

According to V. Nalimov's report, Zyrians imagined smallpox as a woman who came to a man in dreams and warned: 'Be ready, I shall come'. She could spoil one's face, if one was not able to please her. It is necessary to point out that such reports are single, and in contrast to, for instance, the neighbouring Russian people, since the anthropomorphisation of diseases is not typical for the Komi.

Concepts about *sheva* – an evil spirit in the image of mouse, lizard, worm, butterfly, grub, hair penetrating into a man's organism and causing different pathologies – are the most interesting. Since a great bulk of literature, both ethnographic and medical, deals with these notions, we shall give only general characteristics of the belief connected with *sheva*. It was considered that a wizard kept a *sheva* in a special birch-bark box (*sheva-chuman*) underground, fed it on his own body and then set it to people. A *sheva* got into a man with food or water or by air, lived there and caused various diseases. Modern informants

usually explain in such a way many chronic diseases, including alcoholism. But traditionally the main signs of a *sheva* were: hysterical attacks, actions and manner of speaking that were unusual for that person, sometimes dissociation of consciousness. According to folk concepts, a *sheva* lived within a man till he died, and only after his death it moved to settle in another person. Traditional medicine was considered non-effective and was used only for easing the pain during attacks.

In connection with folk ideas on the causes of the disease, information about the attitudes of the Komi to lizards is of great interest. Its name – *pezh gag* ('foul insect') – includes negative appreciation of the lizard as a foul being. In folklore it contrasts with sun, guards treasures, understands the language of birds and animals. Paying attention to these features, K. Tsakov assumed that once the lizard used to 'belong to dark divinities'. Materials on folk medicine support this supposition. Even at the beginning of the 20th century the lizard was considered to cause eye and skin diseases: 'A Zyrian is afraid of the lizard and not for the world takes it in his hands. There is the belief that if the lizard has passed over a leg, the leg begins to rot'. According to the beliefs current at the Upper Vychegda, if you had seen the lizard, your eyes became ill. These notions one may compare with the Estonian beliefs, according to which some skin and eye diseases are caused by 'underground' spirits. Such beliefs are recorded among other Balto-Finnic peoples as well and, as some scholars think, have very old origin. Probably, in the past the Komi had similar notions, and traditional attitudes to the lizard were connected with its image as a member of the next world, causing certain ailments.

Among the ideas about supernatural beings, damaging the health of a mother and her baby, beliefs in hobgoblins (*olysia*), sauna spirits (*pyvsian aika, pyvsiansa, guran'ka*), water-spirits (*vasa*) and goblins of the woods (*vörsa*) were widely spread. They could change a baby both during its uterine development and after its birth, leaving a wooden billet with human face in the place of a healthy human child. As usual, the birth of defective children was explained by such exchange. Descriptions of appearance, behaviour of 'changelings', the process of changing itself one might find in a great number of stories recorded in different areas of the Republic. (The following is an original story, told by Gabova G. in the village of Ust-Kulom).

> *There was a man in our village: his head was large, his body small, his face wrinkled. He ate much, but could neither walk nor speak. People said he was changed. Also they told: once a woman lived in the corner of the village. She went to the sauna to wash her new-born daughter – it was a custom to whisk a baby every day during the first week – but she forgot the wrap at home. She left the baby on a bench*

and went to the house. In this time the sauna spirit (...) changed the child. Woman did not notice this exchange; she whisked the daughter, took her home and put her in the cradle. During 18 years the child was in this cradle; she ate, drank, but could neither walk nor speak.

Once some lads argued with each other, who was the bravest and who would come into the sauna at night and take a stone from the hearth. One of them went at midnight to the sauna, stretched the hand to the hearth, and suddenly someone caught him with a shaggy clawing hand. It was the sauna spirit. It said: 'I shall let you go, if you promise to come and marry my daughter tomorrow at midnight'. The young man had to promise. He came back and told his mother about it. The mother tied a belt on his waist and said: 'You may go, but draw a circle around yourself in the sauna. Don't come out from this circle, and don't take off the belt'. The boy came to the sauna and did all as his mother had told. At midnight the sauna spirit came into the sauna with all its family and with a beautiful girl. The lad was not bewildered, he pulled the girl into the circle. There they stood till cockcrow. Then the sauna spirit with its family disappeared, and the girl said: 'There is the house in the village. At this house a woman has rocked a cradle for 18 years. You must go to the house, take the child, put it on threshold and kill it with an axe'. The lad was surprised, but the girl repeated: 'Do it as I tell you'. They came to this house, the lad saw there the woman rocking the cradle. He took out the child, put on the threshold and hit it with the axe. Suddenly they saw a wooden billet instead of the child. So the girl said: 'I am your rightful daughter, you have rocked a wooden billet in the cradle, which was put there by the sauna spirit.' They all were very happy.

Therefore mother told us: 'never leave children, especially without teeth, without any attendance in the sauna. Or, what's even better, when you are in the sauna, touch them with a keen, because you may not notice when they are changed'.

Notions about close relations between the world of living and the world of ancestors were typical for the traditional Komi world view. The wrath of dead relatives, caused by lack of respect to them, violation of traditional norms and customs, may be the reason of a sudden disease. As N. Zavarin mentioned, '*A Zyrian consoles himself that the majority of diseases happen due to 'the dead man coming to a house', (...) and therefore the dead men in the Komi region are often commemorated*.' However, the food, which had been brought to the grave, was a special sacrifice, intended for the ancestors and as a means to keep away ailments.

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Alongside with the concept about supernatural beings, which caused an illness, there was another view. In the traditional beliefs of many peoples, including the Komi, physical and mental states of a man were connected with the state of his soul, his personal name, shadow, heart, breath. Their theft by an evil spirit or a dead relative caused the disease and led to death. Special persons – shamans, sorcerers – were busy with the guarding of and search for stolen souls. Etymology of the term *nim vidzys'* ('guarding a mane', 'guarding a soul'), signifying a good sorcerer who heals people, allows us to suppose that such notions of the Komi have existed in the past. The term *vudzhör* ('shadow'), meaning a whole group of protecting articles (including woollen, cotton, knitted belts, those are made of nets, beads of peony berries, headbands and kerchiefs, i.e. things, which girdled a man's body), may be explained according to these notions. A man's shadow (*mort vudzhör*) was considered by the Komi as 'a part of the man', closely connected with his health and his death. The loss of the shadow, as the Komi believed, brought about serious diseases and death. It is probably therefore that mainly protecting things were united with the term.

The concept about diseases being God's punishment for the man's sins are the latest. Their appearance is connected with Christianity.

According to traditional beliefs, the Komi saw the causes of ailments in the harmful actions of the really existing evil spirits, in the influence of the world of ancestors, in the loss of spiritual substance that embodied the life forces of the man. Mystic views corresponded with magic methods of treatment and prophylactic, which in composition of rational measures formed the whole system of folk medicine.

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ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE UDMURT HEROIC EPIC:

Historical and Archaeological Aspects

Aleksandr Ivanov. Izhevsk, Udmurtia

Every nation needs its heroic past, and strives to seek for it. Trying to find the ideals of the society, we often arrive at the heroic epics. It is no mere chance that many of the Finno-Ugrian intellectuals have landed on the epic genres of folklore.

The first written records of the Udmurt heroic and epic legends date back to the late 19th century (by B. Munkàcsi, J. Wichmann, B. Gavrilov, N. Pervukhin, G. Vereshchagin, G. Potanin and others). Very soon after that, the researchers were at the point of asking many questions: Have the Udmurts ever really had a heroic epic? Was it in verse form? What is the explanation for the regional distribution of the Udmurt heroic narratives? Does Udmurt heroic tradition reflect the heroic period in the history of the Udmurt people? Some researchers corroborate the existence of an Udmurt heroic epic, while others negate it and still others state that the epic has not matured to its final form.[1] The content and disposition of their works is largely determined by the fact that the researchers are folklorists. Specialists of other fields, such as historians and archaeologists, have made only occasional use of folklore, for example, to illustrate their ideas