

# CONTEMPORARY RECORDINGS OF BELARUSIAN FOLK BIBLICAL AND NON-BIBLICAL ETIOLOGICAL LEGENDS IN THE COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL ASPECT

*Elena Boganeva*

*Center for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature Research*

*National Academy of Sciences, Belarus*

*e-mail: elboganeva@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** The article considers some rare etiologies in contemporary recordings – non-biblical cosmogonic and folk biblical anthropogenic etiologies in the comparative and historical aspect. Cosmogonic etiologies are stories about the predetermination of spatial and temporal parameters of the world (texts about the origins of the elements of the earthscape, in particular, mountains; about the agreement made between God and Satan concerning the distribution of ascendancy over people at the beginning of the world and at the end of it; about the determination of the time of the existence of the world and the change of time); about the structure of the current status of the Universe (the Earth is round, it revolves and is supported by a giant turtle or tortoise); about the primary entity or body, from which the following emerges: the world (out of a child's body), a part of cultural space – a group of inhabited localities (out of a felled statue), and one of the primary elements – fire (out of a human). Anthropogenic folk biblical etiologies include stories about the origins of sexual relations between the first people (two versions); the birth of children out of different body parts (the head, through the side of the body); and the origins of hair on male bodies.

**Keywords:** anthropogenic etiologies, etiological legend, etiologies of cosmogonic legends, folk Bible, folk biblical etiologies, folk narratives, non-biblical etiologies, vernacular Christianity

## INTRODUCTION

According to its administrative division, there are 6 regions (oblasts) and 118 districts in Belarus. Archaic forms of folklore can be collected in Belarus even to this day. Among other texts, the collected pieces include new additions to etiologies, the earlier versions of which were mainly collected at the beginning of the twentieth century and no longer exist in the living heritage of many European countries. One of the purposes of folklore studies in Belarus has

been the ethnolinguistic mapping of mythical and religious lore and in-depth studies of the material that includes vernacular Christianity.

The purpose of this article is an analysis of contemporary recordings of the etiologies of Belarusians. Etiological legends explain the origin of things as well as the properties and the peculiarities of the world, living creatures, natural and cultural objects, customs and traditions, social attitudes, taboos, and orders, and give answers to numerous “why” and “where from” questions.<sup>1</sup>

Etiological folktales have to do with biblical characters, elements, and motifs that are related to the Old Testament and the New Testament, Apocrypha, and other oral and written Christian tradition or mythology in general. Other etiologies do not usually relate directly to the Christian texts or the Bible, biblical events or characters, although some of them do. For example, the origins of storks, reasons for shortening down the ears of grain, for why a woman is always busy, etc., are not uncommonly incorporated into oral biblical narratives.<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, the following tasks should be accomplished: exploring the main concepts and terms that are used in the article; providing a brief description of the history of the research object and publications within the international and Belarusian context. The main part of the article analyses contemporary etiological legends, including cosmological stories with a background in vernacular Christianity and mythology, stories related to genesis and the end of the world, and also part of anthropogenic legends. The comparative historical method is used in the article to analyse the material. The presented material includes several new and rare, single variants of etiologies.

## **PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH**

In comparison to fairy tales, etiological legends are poorly studied corpora of texts. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, a number of regional studies were conducted within the territory of Belarus, as a result of which fundamental corpora of folklore texts were published, including popular prose with a substantial proportion of etiological legends, both biblical and non-biblical. These collections were compiled by Vladimir Dobrovol'skiy (1891), Yevdokim Romanov (1891, 1912), Pavel Sheyn (1874, 1893), Michał Federowski (1897), Aleksandr Serzhputovskiy (1911, 1930), Czesław Pietkiewicz (1938), and others. These collections contain a rich and varied set of texts, and their classification system, skilful delivery of the characteristics of dialects, and the personal touch of a storyteller have, in the long run, become benchmarks for regional publications; they have not faded from importance even today.

In Soviet times, starting from the 1930s, throughout the Eastern Slavic countries and later also in the countries of the “socialist camp”, legends (also memorates and any kind of genre varieties telling about supernatural forces – mythological fairy tales, stories about miracles, mythological stories about God’s help and punishment) were on the fringes of research interest due to their “religiousness” and “reactionism”. In the volume *Legendy i padanní* (Legends and Stories), published by Grynblat and Gurskiy in 1983 as a part of the Belarusian academic series *Folk Art*, consisting of 47 volumes, almost the entire corpus of biblical and non-biblical legends is made up of records written by Vladimir Dobrovol’skiy, Yevdokim Romanov, Pavel Sheyn, etc., made at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In the foreword to the second edition of this scientific work published in 2005, Mikhail Grynblat and Anton Gurskiy point out that, “as a matter of fact, Belarusian folk legends and stories are still poorly studied. There have been no separate works dedicated to the Belarusian legends and stories until recently. The first steps in this field are just being taken” (Grynblat & Gurskiy 2005: 11).

Researchers started taking meaningful interest in etiological legends in the last decades of the twentieth century. One of the first national publications about etiologies was the collection of the Lithuanian author Norbertas Vėlius, titled *Kaip atsirado žemė: lietuvių etiologinės sakmės* (How the Earth Appeared: Lithuanian Etiological Legends) (Vėlius 1986), which was translated into English and published later (Vėlius & Dapkute & Kupcinskaite 1998). The research of Marlène Albert-Llorca, *L’ordre des choses: Les récits d’origine des animaux et des plantes en Europe* (The Order of Things: European Stories about the Origins of Animals and Plants), was also of considerable importance in terms of stimulating scientific interest in etiologies (Albert-Llorca 1991).

Purposeful collection of such texts in the post-Soviet period started in the second half of the 1990s, within the framework of the inter-institutional and interdisciplinary scientific programme of the research of the territories of Belarus, titled *The Current State of the Traditional Culture of Belarus*, in which scientists from different institutions (including the Academy of Sciences of Belarus) and representatives of various branches of science (ethnologists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, ethnochoreographers, art experts, etc.) participated.<sup>3</sup> The programme provided for field research in every district of Belarus with as extensive coverage of the territories as possible. Series of questionnaires were initially developed in line with the methodology of the research, which were related to different types of traditional culture, including popular prose (Boganeva 1998). Questionnaires were mainly compiled on the basis of the publications issued at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, and they were purposefully “verified” in the process of regional research.

In Belarus, within the framework of the regional studies of the current state of Belarusian folklore tradition, in 2002–2013, a 10-volume series called *Traditional Artistic Culture of Belarusians* was published, which had chapters about etiological legends (both non-biblical and biblical)<sup>4</sup> (Tradycyynnaya 2004: 719–724, 752–761; Tradycyynnaya 2006: 348–399; Tradycyynnaya 2009: 373–439; Tradycyynnaya 2011: 384–454; Tradycyynnaya 2013: 526–611).

Ten years later, the team of contributors within regional studies published 20 specified and revised collector programmes pertaining to different types and genres of traditional culture, including popular prose (Boganeva 2008a), folk Bible (Boganeva 2008b), and folk Orthodoxy (Boganeva 2008c). It is in the course of the fieldwork in different districts of Belarus that it became clear what kind of biblical and non-biblical legends are “massive”, which ones are rare, and which of them were recorded as individual cases.<sup>5</sup>

A considerable contribution into the research and publication of etiological texts was made by such recent publications as the multi-authored (both foreign and Russian researchers) monograph called *Contes et légendes étiologiques dans l'espace européen* (Etiological Fairy Tales and Legends in the European Context) under the editorship of Galina Kabakova (2013) as well as a collection of etiological folklore texts of the nineteenth–twenty-first centuries with extensive commentaries, called *U istokov mira: Russkie etiologicalicheskie skazki i legendy* (At the Origins of the World: Russian Etiological Legends and Fairy Tales) (compiled and commented on by Olga Belova and Galina Kabakova) (2014).

## TERMINOLOGY: EMIC AND ETIC TERMS

To designate oral folktales on biblical topics, the term folk Bible has become the most common in Slavonic studies, and this is exactly how the corpora of oral biblical texts were called by the Poles (Zowczak 2000, 2013), the Russians (Belova 2004)<sup>6</sup>, the Macedonians (Vrazhinovski 2006), and the Belarusians (Boganeva 2010).<sup>7</sup> The researchers use also the terms “the rural Bible” (Lammel & Nagy 1985), “the Bible for the poor” (Lapucci 1985), “the folklore Bible” (Badalanova 1994, 1997–1998), “parabiblical folklore” (Lammel & Nagy 2005), etc.<sup>8</sup> In the opinion of Magdalena Zowczak, “the most emphatic term, ‘folk Bible’, came into use as a result of shifting the field of attention and concern of the humanities towards the phenomenon of ‘frontier’ cultures and the changes that are taking place as a result of migrations and the mixing of cultures. Studying the ‘folk Bible’ is similar to being interested in apocryphal stories, which is an example of both a shift in cultural discourse and changes in culture itself throughout the territories of post-communist countries” (Zowczak 2013: 9). What is meant

here is not only and not so much the territorial and geographical frontier, but rather the “frontier” cultural phenomena. In conclusion, the folk Bible is “on the borders” between oral and literary traditions, the canon and the Apocrypha, Christianity and archaic worldview paradigms.

In emic terms, the oral texts on biblical topics and with biblical plots are defined by rural informants in a depictive way, referring simultaneously to the oral tradition and a written source – either the Bible or the Law of God.<sup>9</sup> For example, when retelling a biblical story of the Creation, the informant says<sup>10</sup>:

*Tak yana, mama, raskazyvala. Yana gavarila, shto k ím u shkolu – u Studzyantse byŭ príkhod, í k ím batsyushka kozhnuyu nyadzelyu príkhadzíŭ í chytaŭ Zakon Bozhy.*<sup>11</sup>

This is what Mum told me. There was a parish in Studenets, and she said that a priest would visit them every week and read the Law of God.

Below the informant answers the collector’s question about who Adam and Eve were.

*Adam, pa Bíblíí píshetstsa, svyashchenník. A Yeva – Mikoly Chudatvortsa matsí.*<sup>12</sup>

Adam, according to the Bible, was a priest. And Eve was the mother of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

As for the emic definition of non-biblical etiologies, according to my field observations of twenty years, they were referred to as anecdotes, parables, fairy tales, and sometimes even embellishments, without any precise meaning being read into those definitions. However, even if referring to etiological legends as fairy tales and anecdotes, as a rule, the bearers of tradition believe that they describe true events which happened an indefinitely long time ago, “when God walked the earth”.<sup>13</sup>

A legend is not a term of folk origin, which is why, while collecting material, collectors have to ask questions related to plots, main characters, and etiological morals of popular legends: “Why can’t a stork be killed?”; “Do they say that a stork (a cuckoo, a bear, etc.) comes out of a human?”; “Why is the aspen shaking?”; “Why does a swallow have a swallowtail?”; “Why doesn’t a human know the time of his or her death?”; etc.

By answering such questions, storytellers open up different meanings in narratives, for example, discuss the relationship of truth-value and fantasy in stories. For example, the initial response to such questions among informants was quite similar – a forbearing smile would appear on their faces, as if it was about something trifling and not too serious. However, after hearing a legend followed by a question about whether it was the truth or a fairy tale, they would

seriously say that it was not a fairy tale but rather the truth. For example, after hearing the legend about how God puts people into couples (one person in the couple is lazy, while the other one is hard-working), the informant starts reasoning about the “truthfulness” of this legend, and then suddenly notices a voice recorder in the collector’s hand, which she had not paid attention to before.

*‘Nu yano mozha í praǔdu tak. Praǔda. Yany... Tak Vy mozha zapísyvayetse tu yerundu, shcho ya gavaru?’ – ‘A vy dumayetse, shto geta: yerunda abo praǔda?’ – ‘Nu... kalí geta raskazvalí stareyshyya lyudzí... Tak geta zh, peǔna, praǔda bylo!’<sup>14</sup>*

‘It might be true. Really. They... Are you recording the nonsense I’m saying?’ – ‘What do you think it is: truth or nonsense?’ – ‘Well... considering that the old people told us these things... It was the truth, of course!’

At the start of telling a rare etiological tale about differences between sexes, the informant claims straight away:

*Eta, dzítsyatka, praǔda. Eta praǔda. Eta yak s’vet asnoǔvaǔsya, geta, dzítsya, praǔda. Eta ne skazka, ne. Eto praǔda, mílaya maya, tak vo tak.*<sup>15</sup>  
(Tradytssynaya 2011: 389–390)

Yes, child, this is true. It’s true. This story about the creation of the world is true. It’s not a fairy tale, no way. It’s true, my darling, yes, it is.

It means that in the perception of contemporary informants, legends have a dual status. On the one hand, they are not taken very seriously these days, since axiologically, they are more “inferior” with regard to the Holy Bible, for example (although in the oral tradition, the former is often mixed with the latter), but on the other hand, these are texts that are consecrated through tradition; they explain world phenomena, instruct, and, thus, are of extreme importance for the bearers of the tradition. Maybe this is the reason why etiological texts have been preserved in the rural traditional culture of Belarus until the present.

## **COSMOLOGICAL LEGENDS, GENESIS: DISTRIBUTION OF AND PARALLELS TO ETIOLOGICAL STORIES**

Among the plots of etiological legends (folk biblical and non-biblical), recorded in the territory of Belarus in recent years, the most typical and widespread predominate, such as those about the origins of storks, cuckoos, bears, pigs, turtles, about a ban on killing spiders, the spots on the Moon, about why a woman is always busy, why humans do not know the time of their death, why a child

does not walk until he or she turns one, why horses never eat their fill, cows do not work, the aspen tree is shaking, alder trees have red bark, the reasons for shortening the ear of grain (dogs' and cats' fate), etc. All of these plots have parallels in the Baltic and Slavic countries, while sometimes their geography can be even wider than that (see Berezkin & Duvakin; Vélius & Dapkute & Kupcinskaite 1998; Kerbelite 2001; Belova 2004; Badalanova Geller 2008; Zowczak 2013).

In addition to that, in the course of the past 20 years, some rare, single etiologies have also been recorded in the territory of Belarus, many of which have direct and indirect counterparts in the folklore of Slavic, Balkan, and Baltic people as well as in non-Slavic and non-European traditions. Today the most popular cosmogonic plots are folk biblical: about how God created the world in stages, day after day (Boganeva 2010: 14–15). In Western and Central Polesye there are legends about “how a spider whisked the light” (Tradytssynaya 2009: 373–374; Tradytssynaya 2013: 585–586). Many other etiologies also have parallels in the folklore of different nations. The collection efforts made in the last decade have broadened our existing knowledge of genesis stories. We have seen the addition of several dualist creation motifs, and there are interesting parallels between several oriental traditions, according to which the world is created by dividing up a (human) being. Parallels to this motif can also be found in Slavic and other traditions. Such motifs include, for example: the origins of the Earth's relief (the devil scatters mountains, competing with God); the world order (the Earth is round, it revolves and is supported by a giant turtle or tortoise); the change of time (angels “added” 200 extra years of existence to our world); how God allowed Satan “to rule the world” and how things turned out; the genesis of the world from the body of a child; the genesis of a group of villages from a huge statue that broke into pieces; the genesis of fire from the body of a man. Let us have a closer look at each of these etiologies.

In 2012, a rare, in terms of current existence, recording of the legend about the origins of the Earth's relief was made:

*Kazalí kolís': Bog posporyŭ z chortom. Chort zha tozhe byŭ na nebesakh. A Bog yogo odtul' s'kínuŭ. Dak vun yek padaŭ na zemlyu, dak polovínu z'vozdz khvostom zamoŭ. Dziedz raskazyvaŭ. Dziedz khodzítŭ u tserkoŭ, dzesyats' kilometraŭ peshkom khodzítŭ. 'A chago yon yago skínuŭ?' – 'Nu dyk Bog uzyaŭ sílu bol'shuyu za yago. A dalí yany posporylí, stalí sypats'... Chort staŭ sypats' gory. A voda byazyhts' s'lízíts', a treba yekhats' choŭnom, a yedze cholovek, pkhayetstsa, pkhayetstsa da kazhe: 'Ot chort nasypaŭ – povuchaye yego.' A potym: 'Slava Tabe, Gospadzí, shto ya pereyekhaŭ!' Von yamu ne ponravílas'.*<sup>16</sup> (Tradytssynaya 2013: 585)

They said that once God argued with the devil. The devil would live in heaven in those days, too. And God cast the devil from heaven. When he fell down, he swept away half of the stars from the sky with his tail. My grandfather told me. My grandfather would go to church, ten kilometres on foot. ‘Why did He cast down the devil?’ – ‘God took great power for him. And they started arguing and scattering... The devil started scattering mountains. And the water runs like tears, and the man has to go by boat. He goes by boat and bumps against those mountains and says: ‘The devil scattered those mountains!’ – he swears at the devil. And then: ‘Thank God! I crossed it!’ The devil didn’t like it.

The dualistic motives are very well pronounced in this legend – the joint creation of the world by God and devil. Among Belarusians, the legends with full-fledged dualistic motifs, where the devil takes soil from the sea bottom to create land, “spoils” the earthscape with marshes and mountains, “spoils” humans with diseases, tries to create some animals (wolf, goat, horse, and others, but cannot make them alive without God), were on numerous occasions recorded at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries by Belarusian folklorists and ethnologists Pavel Sheyn (1874: 428–429; 1893: 340–342), Yevdokim Romanov (1891: 1–10, 153–158), Vladimir Dobrovol’skiy (1891: 230–240), Aleksandr Serzhputovskiy (1911: 171–173), and others. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, this type of plot was repeatedly recorded among the Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbians as well as among non-Slavic ethnoses inhabiting Russia (the Karelians, Finns, Udmurts, Mordovians, etc.) (Kuznetsova 1998; Badalanova Geller 2011; Grynblat & Gurskiy 1983: 32–64; Belova & Kabakova 2014: 22–48). At present, dualistic plots have become irrelevant for the bearers of tradition and only rarely pop up in etiological legends (both non-biblical and folk biblical).

A text about who rules the world, recorded in the village of Byvalki, Loyevsky District, Gomel Region, in 2011 also belongs to ambivalent plots about the beginning and the end of the world at the same time.

*A Bog skazaŭ satane: ‘Nyakhay kíruye! Khay kíruye getymí lyudz’mí...’ Í ŭzho ne Bog kíruye, a satana nashym maladym narodam. Bo yany ŭ blud payshlí. Getaya garelka – ŭso! Na pervym plane adna vodka. Í ní rabota ím ne nada, ní dzetsí, níchavo. Yany paturavalí dzyatsey z-za garelkí. ‘Tak geta Bog dazvolíŭ satane kíravats’ getym svetam?’ – ‘Da, Bog. A skora prydydze, shto Bog budze kíravats’. Skora prydydze, vot-vot, shto Bog budze kíravats.’ Yon skazaŭ, razrashyŭ yamu: ‘Kíruy, pabachym, shto budze.’ Nu tak í vot shto robítstsa.<sup>17</sup> (Tradytsyynaya 2013: 585).*

And God said to the devil: 'Let him rule! Let him rule all of those people!' And God no longer rules, but the devil rules our youth. Because they indulge in lust. It is all because of vodka! Vodka is always on top. They don't want a job, kids, they want nothing. They get rid of their children because of vodka. 'Has God allowed the devil to rule the world?' – 'Yes, God. But very soon God will resume his rule. He told him, allowed him: 'Go on, rule! We'll see what happens.' And this is what's happening...

The narration can be perceived as eschatological, all the more so if it is told within the context of a talk about eschatology. However, there are no predictions about the end of the world and the coming of the Antichrist in the text. On the opposite, there is a prophecy saying that the world will soon be ruled by God again because the devil has not managed "to be a good ruler". There is also a parallel to the teaching of the Bogomils which said that Satan (Sataniel) subdued mankind completely, and his rule will reign on the Earth for a very long time, until God releases mankind from the power of Satan (Yastrebov 1993: 269–274). It is more rational to consider this text not as eschatological, but as a dualistic legend about the beginning of times, when a decision was made about who is going "to rule these people" and for how long.

The text about the world being supported by a huge turtle (or tortoise) is rare in contemporary recordings.

*'Na chym svet stait's?' ... 'Cherepakha dzerzhyt. Vona krutsítstsa zemlya, krutsítstsa, staryye baby kazalí...' – 'A yakaya yana, kruglaya? Tsí ploskaya?' – 'Kruglaya, kazalí. Kruglaya í krutsítstsa. Na cherepasí.' ... 'A nebo vzhe yak dzerzhytstsa... Kazhut, yak budze konchyna s'vetu, to vono vzhe upadze. Í vsekh uzhe...' – 'A khto yago trymaye toye neba? Chago yano ne padaye?' – 'Kazhe, vono v vozdukh, vozdukh dzyarzhyt. Kazhut, tam yanguly letayut, tamaka dushy lyudzey, baby roskazuvalí... O, dushy poshlí – eto yak cholovek umer – na nebesa. Na nebe vzhe dusha. Tulovíshche budze gnítsí, a dusha budze na nebí letats'. Dusha letaye.<sup>18</sup> (Tradyt'syynaya 2009: 373)*

'What does the world stand on?' ... 'On a turtle. It goes round and round, the old women said...' – 'What is it like – round or flat?' – 'They said it was round. It keeps on going round and round. On the back of the turtle. And the sky is holding on... They say when the end of the world comes, the sky will fall down. And all of us will be...' – 'Who is holding the sky? Why doesn't it fall down?' – 'They say it's in the air, the air is holding it. They say there are angels flying over there, people's souls, the old women said. Yeah, souls, when a person dies, his soul goes to heaven. The soul

is in heaven. The body will rot, and the soul will be flying around in heaven. Souls can fly.’

A contemporary text about the Earth being supported by a turtle (tortoise) is rare among Belarusians not only with relation to contemporary recordings. In the popular versions of cosmogonies, in the recordings that date back to the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, made in the territory of Belarus, the Earth stands on a fish (Serzhputovskiy 1930: 22; Federowski 1897: 162), on three or four whales (Romanov 1912: 292; Serzhputovskiy 1930: 21–22), or on a chicken leg (Federowski 1897: 162–163). A turtle was not involved in those recordings.

In addition to the contemporary text cited above, another recording about a turtle holding the world, made in Belarusian territory (Eastern Polesye) is available:

*Zyamlya na cherepasí. Yana bula bu ūuzh, bu zhaba. Bog yey nakinuŭ cherap.*<sup>19</sup> (Sudnik & Tsiv’yan 1982: 146)

The Earth on the turtle. It was like a grass snake, like a toad. God put a skull on it.

In these recordings, there is a good reason why a turtle appears as an image of the Earth’s anchorage: firstly, two known recordings were made in Polesye, which, in addition to being regarded as one of the most archaic Slavic areas (see Tolstoy 1983: 6–8), is also the northern part of the natural habitat of the fresh-water turtle (see also Boganeva 2012: 104–107). Secondly, the turtle is a widespread zoomorphic character in the cosmogonies of different Eurasian peoples and of the Indian tribes in North America (see Berezkin 2005: 251–279; Sharakshinova 1980: 26). Herewith the distribution can be regarded as typological,<sup>20</sup> since the image of a turtle, whose shell can carry a load that exceeds its own weight many times, is perfectly suitable for functioning as a support for a load as huge as the Earth itself.

It is commonly known that cosmogony often transgresses into eschatology and the other way round. In recent years, we have been able to observe many times how a storyteller, beginning to talk about the last times, moves on to talking about the Creation. Or, while attempting to describe the world order – cosmography – proceeds to talk about the last times. A contemporary text about a turtle holding the world, cited above, is not an exception in this sense either. In this text, the description of the world state and order (the Earth is round, it goes round, and lies on the turtle) moves on to informing the listener that “when the end of the world comes, the sky will fall down”, followed by a transgression from a “collective” eschatology to an individual one, i.e., what happens to a person after his or her death.

A plot about the genesis of the Earth from the body of a child is typical neither for Belarusian folklore nor for any other Slavic or even European peoples.

*Vygan vyaliki... Neyak raskazana... at veku bylo eta. Zhyvoga ryabonka nayshli malen'kaga, i tady svet zavoušya. A khto nayshoŭ, yak geta – ne pomnyu.*<sup>21</sup> (Tradytsyynaya 2004: 758)

There was a large pasture (field)... They said... Since the beginning of time. They found a little baby who was alive, and this is how the world started. I don't remember who found it and how.

In spite of its uniqueness, this plot does not seem random or accidental, but it appears to be quite typological or even archetypal, since the motif of the genesis of the world from the body of a child (a human) is intrinsic in a huge number of mythologies throughout the territories of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and South America (Berezkin & Duvakin: B2A; B2C).<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, in terms of its meaning, the recording made in Belarus turns out to be quite close to another type of etiological texts – the world emerging from the body of the first human (Purusha)<sup>23</sup> (Berezkin & Duvakin: B43). Besides, this text correlates with a cosmogonic fragment of the Russian spiritual poem, *Golubinaia Kniga*,<sup>24</sup> in which the world is created from the body of Christ.

*U nas belyy svet ot Svyata Dukha, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nibesnyva; Sontsa krasnyya ot litsa Bozh'iva, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Mlad-svetol mesyats ot grudey Bozhiikh, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Nochi temnyya ot volos Bozhiikh, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Zori utrenni ot riz Bozhiikh, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Zvezdy chastyya ot ochey Bozhiikh, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Buyen veter ot dykhaniya Bozh'yego, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva; Drobon dozhzhik iz sloz Bozhiikh, Samavo Khrista, Tsarya Nebesnyva.* (Vlasova 1986, № 5: 10–16)

The wide world is from the Holy Spirit, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the Sun is from God's face, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the young bright moon is from God's breast, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the dark nights are from God's hair, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the morning dawn is from God's garments, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the stars are from God's eyes, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the tempestuous wind is from God's breath, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father; the fine rain is from God's tears, Christ himself, the Heavenly Father.

The famous apocryphal *Story of the Creation of Adam by God*<sup>25</sup> has the same plot, which is reversed: it is not the world that is created from human body, but a human body is created from the elements of the world.

[This is how God made a man]: 1) *the body was made from soil*; 2) *bones were made from stones*; 3) *blood was made from the sea*; 4) *eyes were made from the sun*; 5) *thoughts were made from clouds*; 6) *light was made from light*; 7) *breath was made from wind*; 8) *warmth was made from fire*. (Pypin 1862)

Thus an individual Belarusian recording turns out to be incorporated into the tradition of ancient Russian mythological and apocryphal texts, in which the world does not simply correlate with the human body, but is linked to it under the genesis principle.

One more text correlates with the previous one about the genesis of the world with the genre that can be classified as toponymic stories.<sup>26</sup> This is a tale about the origins of the names of a group of villages – Tsytskovichi, Grudkovichi, Cherepa, Golovichi, Gornovschina, Puzovo, Ridkovichi, Zubki, etc., in Kletsk District, Minsk Oblast.<sup>27</sup>

*Nekalí statuya byla, ... í yaye razbílí. ... Yak u pushku ũsorna ũpustsílí, yana yak bukhnula. Í dze shto nashlí, tam vosku pastavílí. Eta zh ran'shy-ryn'shy bylo. Vot ye Rudkovíchy, Grudkavíchy... Rukí. Puzava nekalí bylo, u nas Tsytskavíchy, shto nashlí, Charapy – cherap galavy nashlí tam. Galavachy – galava tozha. Gornaũshchyna, vrodze ad grudzí. Puzava – puza. Í Zubkí yos', my myazhuyemsya z ímí. Yano razbílasya tut nedaloka.*<sup>28</sup> (Tradyytsynaya 2011: 462)

There was a statue once, ... then it collapsed. ... They hit it from a cannon, and it was gone. And they built a village in every single place where they found pieces of the statue. It was a long, long time ago. We have Rudkovichi, Grudkovichi – arms. There was Puzovo, Tsytskovichi. Cherepa – they found a skull there. Golovichi – they found a head. Gornovschina – from the breast. Puzovo – belly. And we have Zubki, too, we border with them. It crashed right here, nearby.

Just like the myths about the creation of the Earth from the human body, in this story, a significant feature is the creation of a specific utilized cultural space (villages) from a cultural object (a statue). Herewith we should pay attention to the fact that while in the previous etiology the world was created from a living child (just like in *Golubinaia Kniga*, where the world is created from living Christ), in the toponymic story the statue collapsed, and its parts

were scattered all over a specific area. In this respect, it is the story that corresponds to the type of etiologies labelled “Purusha” by Berezkin and Duvakin (B43) much more than the legend about the found child.

## LEGENDS ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD

Let us go back to stories about the end of the world. In 2012, a detailed narrative about the end of times was recorded:

*Í ŭ Yago [Khrysta] bylo atabranykh lyudzey, yakíya bylí k Bogu. A ŭ satany bylo mala. Í yon zaplakaŭ, satana yetyy, shto, mol, k Tabe ŭso. A Yon gavoryts’: ‘Pad kanets use buduts’ tvaye. A Mne takaya chas’tsíchka tol’ki budzets’, yak u tsyabe sychas.’ Tak yano í yos’ts’. Ne verats’. Ran’she zh Bogu malíls’, bayalísyia...<sup>29</sup>*

And he [Christ] had selected people who were close to God. Satan had just a few of them. And he started crying, Satan, he said: ‘You have them all.’ And He said: ‘In the end, all of them will be yours. And I will have just a few of them, just like you do right now.’ So this is it. People do not believe. They used to believe in God, used to pray and feel some fear...

Even though this story deals with the end of times, it also contains a dualistic motif describing how God and Satan discuss the redistribution of power over people at the beginning and at the end of times.

Another etiology that refers simultaneously to the beginning of times and to the last times was recorded in Central Polesye, Zhitkovichsky District, Gomel Region, in 2004:

*Sechyk u nas byŭ dzed, Yon chytaŭ í gavaryŭ, shto buduts’ itsí brat na brata, syn na bats’ka, bats’ka na syna, budze s’vet uves’ abtsyanuty pravadamí... Shto zhaleznyya ptushkí lyatatsímuts’... Í shche yon kazaŭ, shto yak Bog pus’tsíŭ na zemlyu yangelaŭ, da skazaŭ, shto dolzhen s’vet sushchestvavats’ tsysyachu vasemsot god. A yangoly spus’tsílísa na etu zemlyu da rashylí ŭdvoíkh: ‘A chago-to tam Bog skazaŭ tsysyacha vasemsot? Davay okruglím, nyakhay budze dz’ve tsysyachy.’ Nu, prylyatselí nazad í kazhuts’: ‘Ot, tak í tak my zrobílí. Pravíl’no my zrobílí tsí nepravíl’no?’ A Von kazhe: ‘Znayetse, shto? Tsysyachu vasemsot god lyudzí buduts’ po-Bozhomu. A getyya dzvestse god buduts’ zhyts’ – khto yak pry dumaye.’ Mozha yano tak í ye? Khto yak khochha, tak í zhyve. A pos’le dvukh tsysyach, kazaŭ, í s’veta ísnavats’ ne budze, uso budze garets’, budze kanets s’vetu. A kalí yon budze? Uso ídze k yetamu.<sup>30</sup> (Tradytsyynaya 2013: 575)*

Our grandfather's nickname was Sechik. He would read and say that brother would be incited against brother, son against father, father against son, and the whole world would be covered with wires... Iron birds would be flying... He would also say that God had let the angels descend on the earth and said that the world would exist 1,800 years. The angels came down to the earth and decided: 'Why did God say 1,800 years? Let us round it up and make it 2,000.' Then they returned to God and told him: 'This is what we did. Was it right or wrong?' And He said: 'You know what? People will be living according to God's laws for 1,800 years. And they will live the remaining 200 years any way they like.' Maybe this is it? Today we are living any way we like. He said that after two thousand years, there will be nothing, everything will be burning, the end of the world will come. When will it happen? I think we're heading that way.

In this narrative, the prophecies about the last times before the end of the world, which are common for the Belarusian vernacular religious stories, transgress into a single (for Belarus) etiology about the primary purpose and change of times. The recordings of such etiologies also exist, for example, among the Russians and the Komi. In the Russian version, God's messenger brings the books written for people, which say how long the world will exist. The messenger adds 200 years more, during which people will be living in great depravity, and that will be the time before the end of the world.<sup>31</sup> In the Komi legend, extra years are added neither by the angels nor by God's messenger, but by Solomon, who chained Satan in hell until the end of times, and, on his way to Mount Zion, changed the inscription on the stone post put up by Christ, saying that "people will live for a thousand years, and then changes will come". Solomon added 1,000 years, not 200<sup>32</sup> (Limerov 2012: 35–36). A full text of the Komi legend corresponds to the international fairy tale plot ATU 803 about Solomon chaining Satan in hell with a trick, using the chain that will keep him there till the end of times. The Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians have a similar fairy tale plot about Satan's chain (Srvnitel'nyy 803), but without the legendary fragment concerning the change of times. Perhaps the source for this fragment is an international fairy tale plot about Solomon, from which the Belarusians and Russians singled out an independent legendary plot that helped them to justify the end of the world.

## CREATION OF FIRE

A text about the origins of fire, i.e., one of the main elements of the world, was recorded in 2003. It seems very laconic and quite ambiguous:

*Ya chula davno ge, sho to ogon' – yogo ne mozhno bits'. Bo von s choloveka. 'A chamu ne mozhna?' – 'A ya vedayu? Ogon', kaa, s choloveka.'*<sup>33</sup>  
(Tradytsyynaya 2009: 438)

I heard it a long time ago, about fire, that you shouldn't beat it. Because it comes from Man. 'Why shouldn't you do that?' – 'I don't know. They said fire originated from Man.'

There are counterparts to that one neither in contemporary recordings made in Belarus nor in the recordings made by collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Concerning the origins of fire, at the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, recordings were made in Belarus, according to which fire originates from *perun* (lightning) that was used by God when he wanted to kill the devil, who seduced Adam and Eve in Paradise (Federowski 1897: 239; Pietkiewicz 1938: 29–30); God taught Man to make fire, showing to him how to rub pieces of wood against each other. The devil saw how to make fire, which had become “as huge as a forest” and scorched him, and made it himself. The devil took fire into hell “to torture sinful souls with fire” (Federowski 1897: 239; Serzhputovskiy 1930: 25–26). The Ukrainians from Transcarpathia have a similar version of the story. However, they believe that fire was invented by the angels that fell from grace and headed to hell. They invented fire in hell to torture sinful souls (Sen'ko 1993: 21–22). Christ and Peter stole fire from the devil, who had laid the fire near the road, to bring it to people. Similar etiological versions exist among the Russians and the Polish (in Polish Yule-songs).

The Slavs do not know tales about the genesis of fire from a human, although the European geography of the plot describing the anthropomorphic embodiment of fire and the God of Fire is quite extensive (Baltic-Scandinavian, Balkan, South-European) (Kerbelite 2001: 252; Berezkin & Duvakin: D1). Additionally, the Finns have a legend about fire being given birth to by a woman, who had carried to term but was only able to give birth in the sea and could not touch the newborn (Berezkin & Duvakin: D3).

As for a ban on beating fire, it exists among the Ukrainians living in Sloboda Ukraine. In particular, it was forbidden to spit on fire, since in the afterlife, any person who spit on fire would be licking a burning-hot pan (Chubinskiy 1995: 49).

## LEGENDS ABOUT THE CREATION OF PEOPLE

While all of the original cosmogonic etiologies were non-biblical, all of the rare anthropogenic etiologies that are under consideration in this article are folk biblical. The selection provided here makes up part of the motifs in legends about the creation of people.

The most frequent motifs of anthropogenic legends are folk biblical plots about the creation of the first people (Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from Adam's rib), the differences between the sexes (after the fall from grace, people lost their "fingernail" bodies, and sex differences between men and women came into being). This also includes the etiologies about why children cannot walk from their birth and why people do not know the time of their death, which are widespread in Belarus.

As for rare, single recordings of etiologies pertaining to the origins of people, the following has been recorded in the last 20 years: about how sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve happened (two versions); why women do not give birth through the top of their heads; why men have hair on their bodies.

*Íshlí yany ūdvaíkh – staíts' mora. Cheraz mora lyazhyts' kladka. Yany na etu kladku ūzyyshlí. A eta kladka zasygalasya. Eta Yeva sela, a ety staíts' lya yaye Adam. Í zrabílasya: mora nyama, a mos'tsik takí astaŭsya. Yany na kladku stalí, uzho í níma mora, bylo mora, a zrabíŭsya mos'tsík. Í abkhvatsíla íkh noch. Í shto – adnamu legtsí tol'kí, drugomu níma dze legtsí. Í vot aní tut sablaz'nílí drug druga.<sup>34</sup> (Tradytsynaya 2013: 534–535)*

They were walking together – and then there was the sea right in front of them. There was a boardwalk across the sea. They stepped on the boardwalk. But it wobbled. Eve sat down, and Adam stood right beside her. And this is what happened: there was no sea any longer, but just the boardwalk. They were standing on the boardwalk, there was no sea, just the bridge. And then the night embraced them. And if one of them would lie down, another one would have nowhere to lie. And this is when they seduced each other.

The full text is an extensive narrative with the contamination of many motives: the creation of Adam and Eve, their skin as if covered by fingernails before the fall from grace, the fall from grace of the first people, turning a man into a stork, origins of hair on human bodies, etc. When specifying details, the informant provides the following version of the text:

*Íshlí cheraz rechku tsí cheraz mora í payavílasya kladachka. Yany íshlí í payavílasya noch. Yany z nochy. Noch nastupíla – kuda ítsí? Í payavíüsyá mos'tsí. A ety mos'tsí tol'kí adnamu chalaveku legtsí. Log Adam, nyama dze Yeve. Yeva lyazha, Adamu nyama dze. Vot yany ù eta üremya í sgrashylí Bogu. Vot tak.* (Tradytsyynaya 2013: 534–535)

They were walking across the river or across the sea, and they saw a boardwalk. They kept on walking, and then the night fell. They walked into the night. The night came – where to go? And then there was a bridge. But only one person could lie on that bridge. If Adam lies down, there will be no place for Eve. If Eve lies down, there will be no place for Adam. This is when they sinned before God. This is how it happened.

In this interpretation, the etiology of the sexual relationship between men and women is singular, although the perception of the fall from grace of the first people as having sexual relations is typical of many Slavic (Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, etc.) traditions. In the text cited above, an original element is the motif of crossing the sea over the bridge, which was obviously borrowed from magic fairy tales, while at the same time it is perfectly logical and justified: the transition from the “Paradise” state into the earthly life is depicted via mythologically rich images of the sea (water barrier), and a bridge (crossing the barrier, connecting the worlds).

As for the next text about the origin of sexual relations, in the Belarusian version it is clearly incomplete and very unclear.

*‘A dzetsí ù Adama í Yevy bylí?’ – ‘Nu, konechno, poyavílísa. To zh vony Bogu í nagreshylí. Sho vony nekogo platochka, chí sho, s'tsíralí... A sushyts'-to ne bulo dze. Nu ya ne pomnyu, sushylí yak. Odam... Uzhe vony sogreshylí udvokh.’ – ‘A shto zh za platochak yany stsíralí?’ – ‘Nu nosovy platochok. Kogda vony sogreshylí, to vono í poshlo.’<sup>35</sup> (Tradytsyynaya 2009: 375–376)*

‘Did Adam and Eve have children?’ – ‘Yes, of course they did. They sinned before God. They said they were washing a kerchief or something... And there was nowhere to dry it. I don’t remember how they were drying it. Adam... They sinned together.’ – ‘What kind of kerchief were they washing?’ – ‘A handkerchief. They sinned, and then it all started.’

The motif of a kerchief washed and dried by Adam and Eve in relation with the fall from grace is clarified in comparison with the Polish narratives about the fall from grace, particularly with the following text:<sup>36</sup>

*When Adam and Eve lived on the Earth, there were no trees. They washed a handkerchief and did not know where to dry it. Eve saw Adam’s branch.*

*She put the handkerchief on his branch, and Adam bent down. He saw Eve's hole and inserted his branch into her hole, and there was a bull behind Adam who hit him all of a sudden, almost breaking Adam's branch. (Zowczak 2013: 96)*

In another version of the Polish legend, Adam and Eve went down to the river and washed a handkerchief. There was nowhere to dry it, and Eve saw Adam's branch. She put the handkerchief on his branch. Adam grew tired of holding the handkerchief and snuggled against Eve. At this very moment, the devil disguised as a bull butted Adam at his back – “this is how the world started” (ibid.). According to the comment made by Zowczak, the Polish texts differ in the fact that in the first case, sexual relations start by themselves and at the will of God. In the second case, sexual intercourse happens as a result of the act of the devil disguised as a bull, who is literally pushing Adam into intercourse (ibid.).

Since the Belarusian text (more precisely, a fragment of it) was recorded in the Brest Oblast, which had been under the jurisdiction of Poland until 1939,<sup>37</sup> in this case we can assume a direct borrowing from the local Polish tradition. Along all other folk biblical motifs of the Belarusian-Polish frontier, this particular plot is absent from the Belarusian territory in contemporary existence, while many others are widespread until now (about the miraculous growth of wheat, the spider who saved the Holy Family, the reasons why an aspen tree shakes, a prudent bandit, turning Christ into wheat, etc.) (see Tradytyssynaya 2009: 388–394; Boganeva 2010: 79–89).

A rare folk biblical anthropogenic legend is also the etiology explaining why women do not give birth through the top of their heads.

*Eto bylo tak. Byla, vobshcham, Yeva byaremenna, vot. Yey nada bylo razhats'. Í Bog skazaũ tak, shto yes'lí ty, Adam, z'yasí yablako... Yana skora razhala, yana ne razhala tudeyu, kudeyu zaraz razhayuts'. Eto maya s'vyakrukha raskazvala. Yana tsem'yam razhala, tut, dze ũ nas tsem'ya, Yeva razhala yeto dzítso. Í, znachyts', nya nada bylo yes'tsí eto yablyko. A yon yeto yablyko z'yeũ, í ũ yago yeta kostachka. A zhanchyny ne razhayuts' dzyatsey praz tsemya.<sup>38</sup> (Tradytssynaya 2013: 533)*

This is how it happened. Right, so, Eve was pregnant. It was time for her to give birth. And God said that if you, Adam, eat an apple... Soon she started giving birth, but she was giving birth through a different place than the one women give birth through today. My mother-in-law told me this. She was giving birth through the top of her head, this is how Eve gave birth to her child. It means that Adam should not have eaten that apple. But he did, and now he has an apple in his throat. And women do not give birth to children through the top of their heads.

I am not going to dwell upon the motif of miraculous birth through the leg, the top of the head, etc., because this topic is too extensive and is partially dealt with in the *Analytic Catalogue* by Yuri Berezkin and Evgeniy Duvakin (F2). In Europe, this motif comes across repeatedly in the legends of ancient Greece, particularly in the legends about the birth of Dionysus – through Zeus’s hip, and the birth of Athena – from Zeus’s head; in Icelandic legends called the *Prose Edda* we observe the entire generation of frost giants that are born from the leg of the giant Ymir: “They say that once after falling asleep he broke into perspiration, and he birthed a male and a female from the pits of his arms. And his legs together begat a son. And this is where all of his offspring, the frost giants, came from” (Sturluson 1970: 11).

In Slavic legends a miraculous birth is usually ascribed not to Eve, but to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The same motif exists in the Belarusian tradition, too.

*Vyn zhe Syn Bozhy. Yogo zh narodzila Matsí... Prostaya dzevka. Vona í skazala... Pryyshlí do Yeye, toye Dzevochkí, í govorats’: ‘Ot, Ty bíremenna.’ A Vona kaa: ‘Kak ya budu bíremenna, yak ya muzha ne meyu?’ A vony skazalí: ‘Ty ot Dukha S’vyatogo budzesh, da, í vrodzish Bozhogo Sína. Í nazovuts’ Ísus Khrystos.’ Í ot tak vono í bulo. Í Vona zh ne rozhala gek by mí rozhayem. Vona proz bok. ... Yangol spustsívsa s nebes í skazav. A v Yeyí buv zhenikh Íosíf. Vyn... Yangol spustsívsa í skazav na Yeyí, shcho Ty blaslovlена ot Dukha S’vyatogo. ‘Tak Yana praz bok naradzila?’ – ‘Da, da. ... Vona ne rozhala tak, gek by mí.’<sup>39</sup> (Boganeva 2010: 64)*

He is a son of God. Born from a simple girl... She said... They came to visit that girl and told her: ‘You are pregnant!’ And she said: ‘How can I be pregnant if I don’t have a husband?’ And they said: ‘You are pregnant from the Holy Spirit, and you will give birth to God’s Son. And he will be named Jesus Christ.’ And this is indeed what happened. And she did not give birth the way we do. But through the side. ... An angel came from the skies and told her that she was blessed by the Holy Spirit. ‘So did she give birth through the side?’ – ‘Yeah, yeah. ... She didn’t give birth the way we do!’

The motive of the birth of Christ from the head of Mary, the mother of Jesus, also pops up in the legends of the Ukrainians living in Podolia (Chubinskiy 1995: 160). In the legends of the Hutsuls, Christ is born from the cross which “jumped out of the water” and hit the armpit of the Mother of God (Belova 2004: 313).

The etiology about why men have hair on their bodies is individual among the Belarusians.

*A toy yashche Adam. Yano í napos'le bylo. Yany íduts'. Staits' zabor, plot. Í za plotam voïk avechkí kradze. Nu yak zha yon? Khatseü zalez'tsí í ne zaleze – vysoka. Khatseü pad níz – ne mozhna. Dyk u takuyu shchylínu papaü í ülez. Ulez – dyk u nekatorykh vo tut valasy rastuts' [pakazvaye na grudzi] í tut rastuts' [pakazvaye nízhay poyasa]. Vot yon pralez, tut í zrabílasya takoye tsela ü yago. Praüda tsí ne... .. Yon ulez cheraz ety zabor, shtob adbaraníts' ad voïka, avets spas'tsí. Yamu tak nada, ad Boga dadzena. Vot u nekatorykh... tut, dze zachapíüsyia grudz'mí, tut í zastalísyia valasy, vot í yos' u nekatorykh mushchyn, a tut astalísyia naüsegda. 'Yon byü uves' valasaty?' – 'Yon ne byü valasaty, bylo takoye tsela, yak kípets'.<sup>40</sup> (Tradytsyynaya 2013: 534–535)*

And there was Adam. It happened after that. They were walking, and then they saw a fence. And a wolf was stealing sheep behind that fence. And what about Adam? He wanted to climb the fence, but he couldn't, because it was too high. He wanted to crawl under the fence, but he couldn't do that either. Then he managed to squeeze through a gap in the fence. He squeezed through it, and then he had hair on his body, here [points at the chest] and here [points at the area below the belt]. He squeezed through, and then he had a body like that. I don't know if it is true or not... .. He squeezed through that fence to save the sheep, to protect them from the wolf. And God gave him hair on his body. Yeah, and some men... Hair started growing right where his body clung against the fence, for example, on his breast, and now some men have hair on those parts of their bodies, for good. 'Was he hairy all over his body?' – 'He was not hairy, but his body was like boiling water.'

The origin of hair on the human body is quite a rare motif in the folk Bibles of the Slavic and Baltic peoples. More often, we can come across the opposite motive in folk Bibles: at the beginning of times, first people were hairy all over their bodies, but then their bodies became smooth.

*Adam í Yeva... Yak payaülyaüsyia yashche tol'ki bely s'vet. Íz Adamavaga rebra vyrezalí, í yak-to yany tamats'ka sheptalí... Tol'ka my íz Adamavaga rebra. Lyudzi pervyya bylí. Í payavíüsyia ü íkh dzítsonak. Yany bylí takíya zaroslyya, a tady üzho ... stalí narazhdatsya lyudzi kharoshyya. Payavíüsyia s'vet, í stalí narazhdatsya kharoshyya. Achys'tsílasya íkhnaye tsela, í payavílísyia lyudzi kharoshyya.<sup>41</sup>*

Adam and Eve... How did the wide world come into existence? Cut from Adam's rib, whispering something... We come from Adam's rib. There were

the first people. And they had a baby. Their bodies were hairy all over ..., and good people were born. The wide world emerged, and good people were born. Their bodies became clean, and good people came into being.

The motif of the initial hairiness (together with the motive of “fingernail”-type bodies) of people also occurs in Polish (Zowczak 2013: 97) and Bulgarian (Badalanova 1997–1998: 14) traditions, among the Ukrainians living in Transcarpathia and the Old Believers from Kirov Oblast (Belova 2004: 241).

As for the emergence of hair on human bodies, Vladimir Gnatyuk (Galicia, Western Ukraine) reveals the following etiology. Eve was not afraid of Adam at all, and Adam started asking God to make Eve scared of him, perhaps just a little. God told him to go into the river and wash his face, then he would have a beard and moustache. This is what Adam did, and then he put his hand between his legs, and had hair there, too. Eve was not scared that much, and she decided to do the same thing as Adam to make Adam scared of her. But when she entered the river, a bee stung her between her legs. Eve seized her perineum with a wet hand, and hair appeared there. Eve did not touch her body with wet hands anymore, because she was afraid of the bee (Gnatyuk 1902: 23). A similar plot exists in the Lithuanian tradition: Adam washed his head, chin, and the area around his mouth with spring water, and hair started growing there. Eve washed her head and flicked the flies away with wet hands. The parts of her body that she touched became covered with hair (Kerbelite 2001: 53).

In Belarus, there is an original version of the etiology with the motif of squeezing through a gap in the fence. As Volodina has pointed out, “in the Gomel version of the legend, hair started growing on the chest and the genitals of a man after he was trying to squeeze through a gap in the fence in order to chase a wolf away from the sheep” (Volodina 2013). A desire to squeeze through the fence is perfectly clear within the framework of the sound peasant pragmatics. However, the idea of the fence itself and squeezing through it are deeply mythological in the actional language of the culture, where they symbolise a successful crossing of the inter-universe border.

## CONCLUSIONS

The existence and distribution of etiological plots (non-biblical about the origins of the universe and folk biblical about the genesis of human beings), without any doubt, reflect a specific level and character of folk religiousness, i.e., the actualisation of religious experience in culture (see Panchenko 1998: 8). In the vast majority of cases contemporary rural informants of the older generation

belong both to the culture of the oral tradition, and the written, “technical” one (see Chistov 2005: 26–43 about the fundamental differences between those culture types). Among the generation born in the 1920s, there are still some informants who did not have any school education at all, but the majority of them have primary education (four years). The vast majority of the representatives of the generation born in the 1930s–40s have either primary or secondary education (7–10 years). This means that they can acquire knowledge about the origins of the universe and human beings both from the oral local tradition and from written sources (including radio, TV, mass media, etc.). This is why there are contaminations of traditional oral perceptions with the prevailing scientific worldview, resulting in “the Earth is round, it goes round, and lies on the back of the turtle”.

As for the folk Bible, even though today the Bible is generally available, and the informants are able to read it, the proportion of people reading it (especially the Old Testament) among rural bearers of the Orthodox and Catholic tradition is relatively small. At the same time, at the contemporary stage, they find their way around biblical events quite easily, particularly in Western Belarus where the tradition of religious upbringing in families has virtually not been interrupted, and informants often recall older members in their families reading something to them from the Bible (see Boganeva 2015: 285–303). This is why in a vast majority of recordings about the creation of the world and people informants retell the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, in some cases quite close to the original. Dualistic motifs are rarely present in contemporary recordings.

It is as a result of all of the factors listed above as well as due to universal globalisation processes, migration, the distribution of technical communication means, etc., that the field of rural traditional culture in general and of etiological prose in particular is narrowing in Belarus year after year. Nevertheless, even in current decades the corpus of the recordings of facts and artefacts of the rural oral tradition is replenished and expanded, including some rare facts that are deeply enrooted in the tradition of etiologies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The article was written as part of a project financed by the Foreign Ministry of Estonia through the Developmental Cooperation Programme (66-2015-A).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The term “etiological legends” in the sense specified above is used all over Europe.
- <sup>2</sup> As far as tradition bearers are concerned, these biblical texts are quite often related to the Bible in particular. For example, Adam and Eve are turned into storks as a punishment for their fall from grace (Boganeva 2010: 39), ears of grain also stop being filled with grain from the bottom to the top as a result of the fall from grace (ibid.: 18, 26), and this is also the reason why a woman is always much busier than a man (ibid.: 28–29).
- <sup>3</sup> Following the results of this work, which lasted from 1995 until 2013, 10 volumes within the series *The Traditional Artistic Culture of the Byelorussians*, mentioned above, were published, covering all the 6 historical and ethnographical regions of Belarus.
- <sup>4</sup> Elena Boganeva authored and compiled these chapters.
- <sup>5</sup> According to its administrative division, there are 6 regions (oblasts) and 118 districts in Belarus. In the course of 20 years, the author of this article conducted field research in the 64 districts of all of the regions of Belarus (10–12 districts per region, 6–8 villages studied in each district). In addition to the team mentioned above, which was doing field research in 1995–2013, regional studies were also carried out by regional universities (within the framework of student practice at philology departments), and also the staff of the Academy of Sciences on separate topics. Talking about rare and individual etiologies, I also considered archives (academic and university ones) and publications on relevant topics.
- <sup>6</sup> In her collection, Belova studies the Eastern Slavic etiological legends of the folk Bible.
- <sup>7</sup> The term folk Bible itself has not appeared in recent decades parallel to the writings mentioned above, but was used by Russian researchers of the Apocrypha at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, in the work by Mochul’skiy, *Traces of the Folk Bible in Slavic and Old Russian Writing Systems* (Mochul’skiy 1893), but it became obsolete for almost a century.
- <sup>8</sup> For more detailed information about the history of the terminology and evolution of biblical narratives as a subject of research see Boganeva 2016.
- <sup>9</sup> References can also be given only to a written source or to the oral tradition.
- <sup>10</sup> From this point onward, extracts from expedition experience of the author of the article are cited.
- <sup>11</sup> Recorded in 2012 by N. Antropov, E. Boganeva, and T. Volodina in the village of Kanichi, Kostyukovichsky District, Mogilev Region, from Raisa Moiseenko, born in 1936.
- <sup>12</sup> Recorded in 2007 by E. Boganeva in the village of Dukora, Pukhovichi District, Minsk Region, from Sofia Mazovka, born in 1927. If no collector is further indicated, the records are those collected by the author of this article.

- <sup>13</sup> Admittedly, at present many rural informants, especially those born in the 1940s–1950s, who have secondary or vocational secondary education, regard etiological legends as fairy tales.
- <sup>14</sup> Recorded in 2002, in the village of Voistam, Smorgon District, Grodno Region, from Anelia Petukh, born in 1919.
- <sup>15</sup> Recorded in 2006, in the village of Kamenka, Uzden District, Minsk Region, from Larisa Guleichik, born in 1929.
- <sup>16</sup> Recorded in 2012 by T. Volodina in the village of Pogost, Zhitkovichsky District, Gomel Region, from Ivan Zokhno, born in 1929.
- <sup>17</sup> Recorded in 2011 in the village of Byvalki, Loevsky District, Gomel Region, from Maria Davydovskaya, born in 1933.
- <sup>18</sup> Recorded in 2007 by I. Mazyuk in the village of Ulka Telekhanovskaya, Ivatsevichi District, Brest Region, from Lydia Kuprianchik, born in 1923.
- <sup>19</sup> Recorded in 1975 by T. Sudnik in the village of Veliky Bor, Khoynitsky District, Gomel Region.
- <sup>20</sup> It occurs in different parts of the world consistently through a combination of a number of common attributes. Typological relations are not limited by some temporal, territorial or other external factors and are determined by the resemblance between the historical development of peoples, and their social, cultural, household, and psychological differences (see Putilov 1976: 9).
- <sup>21</sup> Recorded in 1998 by E. Boganeva and T. Varfolomeyeva in the village of Andreevskaya Sloboda, Shumilinsky District, Vitebsk Region, from Anna Kozlova, born in 1901.
- <sup>22</sup> That being the case, the proximity to the myths of these distant countries is only in terms of the topic, but not in terms of the plot of meaning.
- <sup>23</sup> In ancient Indian mythology, Purusha is the first human, from whom the elements of space emerged. Purusha is sacrificed by means of dismembering his body into constituent parts, from which the elements of social and cosmic organisation emerge (see Toporov 1992: 351).
- <sup>24</sup> *Golubinaia Kniga* (Stone Book, Depth Book) is a collection of spiritual folk poems from the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Questions and answers provide information about the origins of the world, people, social strata, geographical and scientific data, etc. “The basis of the poem from *The Book of the Pigeon* is made up of the oldest cosmogenic folktales that the great Russian people have in common with other Indo-European peoples” (Mochul’skiy 1887: 4).
- <sup>25</sup> This apocryphal story was well known in the traditional culture of Eastern-Slavic peoples. In particular, it greatly influenced Belarusian dualistic legends, in which the God and the devil take part in the creation of living beings; for example, a legend about the creation of a human and a dog (Dobrovol’skiy 1891: 230–231).
- <sup>26</sup> Unlike the legends describing common regularities of the world, lore tells us about the peculiarities and history of specific areas, their toponymy, hydronymy, etc.

- <sup>27</sup> Translator's note: all of those names refer to the names of body parts.
- <sup>28</sup> Recorded by E. Boganeva and T. Varfolomeyeva in 2006 in the village of Rassvetnoye (formerly Tsytskovichi), Kletsk District, Minsk Region, from Konstantin Shalokha, born in 1935, and Alexandra Shalokha, born in 1930.
- <sup>29</sup> Recorded in 2012 by E. Boganeva and T. Volodina in the village of White Dubrova, Kostyukovichsky District, Mogilev Region, from Sofia Efimenko, born in 1935.
- <sup>30</sup> Recorded in 2004 by E. Boganeva and T. Varfolomeyeva in the village of Veresnitsa, Zhitkovichsky District, Gomel Region, from Olga Mozhak, born in 1948.
- <sup>31</sup> Recording from the archives of the National Literary Museum, made in the village of Yarki, Yeniseysk Governorate of Pinchugskiy District (Belova & Kabakova 2014: 43–44; 333–334).
- <sup>32</sup> Recorded in 2000 by P. Limerov in the village of Pozheg, Ust-Kolomsky District, Komi Republic, from E. Shakhova, born in 1928.
- <sup>33</sup> Recorded by E. Boganeva and T. Varfolomeyeva in 2003 in the village of Sitnica, Luninets District, Brest Region, from Ulyana Yarmolich, born in 1913.
- <sup>34</sup> Recorded by T. Volodina in 2012 in the village of Smykovichi, Oktyabrsky District, Gomel Region, from Evgenia Lukashevich, born in 1929.
- <sup>35</sup> Recorded by E. Boganeva and T. Volodina in 2007 in the village of Ulka-2, Luninets District, Brest Region, from E. Sots, born in 1938, T. Vechorka, born in 1935, and L. Germanovich, born in 1938.
- <sup>36</sup> Author's translation.
- <sup>37</sup> In accordance with the Treaty of Riga (1921), after the Soviet-Polish war (1919–1921), the western part of contemporary Belarus formed a part of Poland until the Soviet invasion of Poland (September 1939). Officially, Western Belarus was incorporated as part of the USSR on 2 November 1939.
- <sup>38</sup> Recorded in 2005 in the village of Novaya Rudnya, Yelsk District, Gomel Region, from Nadezhda Mazurenko, born in 1937.
- <sup>39</sup> Recorded by E. Boganeva and T. Volodina in 2007 in the village of Ulka-1, Luninets District, Brest Region, from Olga Stasyuk, born in 1929, and Maria Lobko, born in 1933.
- <sup>40</sup> Recorded by T. Volodina in 2012 in the village of Smykovichi, Oktyabrsky District, Gomel Region, from Evgenia Lukashevich, born in 1929.
- <sup>41</sup> Recorded by T. Volodina in 2012 in the town of Khotimsk, Mogilev Region, from Elizaveta Shunkinay, born in 1927.

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