FAITH, DOUBT AND KNOWLEDGE IN RELIGIOUS THINKING

Edited by
ÉVA PÓCS
BEA VIDACS

BALASSI KIADÓ

FAITH, DOUBT AND KNOWLEDGE
IN RELIGIOUS THINKING

RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES
IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE
10.

Series editor
ÉVA PÓCS

FAITH, DOUBT AND KNOWLEDGE IN RELIGIOUS THINKING

Edited by

ÉVA PÓCS
BEA VIDACS

Balassi Kiadó · Budapest

On the cover
Circumambulating the "tent" of Shahsê Batê
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Contents

ÉVA PÓCS and BEA VIDACS

Introduction

Most people desperately want the world to make sense, they long for certainties and strive to dispel doubt. This is becoming especially clear these days, since as I am writing these words the Coronavirus pandemic is gaining ground worldwide, driving home the point that doubt (about pretty much everything affecting our lives, health and our future) is very unsettling. Although doubt need not be connected to religious faith, it very often is. This is so in part because religion is often what provides the certainties and meaning that people are seeking in the face of doubt. The present volume primarily focuses on the relationship of religious faith and religious doubt and the conceptualisation and role of knowledge in this relationship from the point of view of the anthropology of religion and religious studies, which leaves us with a rich array of topics to investigate.

The present volume grew out of an international conference, entitled *Faith and Doubt* that took place at the University of Pécs in 2015 and was organized by the East-West Research Group. The research group came into being under the aegis of a European Research Council grant[1] that Éva Pócs won to investigate religious interaction on the boundary of East and West both from a contemporary and a historical perspective. One of the goals of the conference was to bring together the results of the members of this multidisciplinary group of senior and junior scholars around a topic that they could all address from the vantage point of their own disciplines, and respective time-periods, building on the research they were carrying out within the project. The research group comprised a wide range of disciplines and approaches from historians of antiquity and the early and high Middle Ages to scholars dealing with the early modern era and anthropologists and folklorists studying the contemporary period through field-based research. This is how our choice fell on the topic of faith and doubt: it seemed to us that the relationship of the two could be of relevance to both

---

[1] Vernacular Religion on the Boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuity, Changes and Interactions, under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement № 324214.

historical and contemporary research and would allow us to enter into dialogue with
each other across both time and space and across disciplines. In addition to members
of our group, the call for papers went out to external colleagues in the hope that this
would lead to further cross-fertilization of ideas among the participants and enrich
the scope of the papers.

The call for papers was purposely broad to enable participants to approach the con-
nections and disconnections of the relationship of doubt and faith from a variety of
perspectives historically, geographically and in terms of the questions raised and issues
concerned. We put the emphasis on the relationship of faith and doubt and on doubt's
role in enhancing or undermining faith. We asked what kinds of forms did doubt take,
how the believer gained or lost conviction, what happened when attitudes of belief and
non-belief /unbelief clashed in different historical periods and finally to what degree
could doubt be regarded an intrinsic part of faith or to be a modern phenomenon.
The resulting volume demonstrates the wide-ranging topics members of our research
group have studied. The theme of the relationship of faith and doubt runs through
the chapters uniting and dividing the papers in exciting ways. The third term of the
title of the volume – knowledge – grows out of the papers, as many of the authors dis-
cuss faith and doubt in relation to knowledge. Both faith and doubt can derive from
knowledge or can be bolstered by it, lack of knowledge can lead to doubt, while acquir-
ing it can reinforce faith. Although non-believers tend to see faith as irrational or false
beliefs, most believers take their beliefs to be knowledge. Unscrupulous swindlers can
take advantage of believers if they are familiar with the beliefs even when they do not
share in them. In several of the papers different knowledge systems are seen to coexist
or clash and their resolution does not necessarily lead to the abandonment of belief
altogether, rather it can lead to the rise of new beliefs (and new doubts).

Doubt is a notoriously complex subject, one that is difficult to pin down as it seeks
its own resolution in most cases (Pelkmans 2013). In many of the cases discussed in
this volume we can also pinpoint the dynamic relationship between faith and doubt
– in most cases we witness faith overcoming doubt or to put it differently, faith being
arrived at through doubt but the processes through which this happens can vary
greatly. Doubt can simply be lurking in the background of affirmations of faith, some-
times coming to the surface only to disappear again, at other times remaining hidden
altogether (Oláh, Vidacs). Sometimes people choose to adopt a new religion or set
of beliefs, which both necessitates doubting old beliefs and accepting new ones and
overcoming doubts that might come up in connection with the latter (Csáji, Csepregi,
Farkas, Kis-Halas). Or less radically, in case of distress people turn temporarily or
partially to the deities or rituals of some kind of a religious (and ethnic) Other for
regaining psychological or physical well-being or peace of mind (Losonczy, Spät).
In yet other cases, doubt is more difficult to resolve and faith and doubt coexist in
an uneasy see-saw where resolution can only be momentary or the questions remain
open, whether we are talking about determining the causes of illness or what the after-
life is like (Győrfy, Hesz). In several of the other studies of the volume, doubt and
faith remain in separate realms, both sides being convinced of the rightness of their

position (Klaniczay, Tóth G., Bárth). But even as some items of faith may lose their relevance or credibility over time, often others take their place (Kis-Halas, Pócs, Tóth G.) In practically all the cases discussed in the volume doubt does not mean unbelief, but rather signals a search for certainty, without necessarily questioning the overall framework of faith or rejecting certain aspects while embracing others.

The volume is divided into three sections. Part I contains a single paper discussing how the Ancient Greeks conceptualized faith and doubt, which at the time did not constitute an inevitable pair that it became under Christianity. Part II brings together cases from different time periods and geographical areas from cultures that belong to the circle of Abrahamic religions, more precisely, with a few exceptions, to Christianity, while the papers of Part III examine cases in which people employ explanatory frameworks that present alternatives to Christianity ranging from *táltos* beliefs as they can be traced in early modern witchcraft trials to "post-modern" angel beliefs.

Antique Doubts

We start our volume with a paper by Anna Judit Tóth, a scholar of antiquity, who demonstrates that faith and doubt may not always have constituted a pair and doubt would not have been part of a religious paradigm among Ancient Greeks. The study of faith is made difficult in this period by the fact that there are very few personal documents, we cannot read about private rites, which could serve as indicators of the degree of faith. In fact, the Ancient Greeks were much more preoccupied with ritual action (orthopraxy) than with adherence to religious ideas (orthodoxy), so for them doubt would not have been something to consider along with faith. The meanings of the concepts of faith and knowledge as well as that of magic (which is in close connection with faith in Christian thinking) were quite different from those of today. Faith, according to the discourses about it at the time, stemmed from science. Philosophers classified every conclusion that they arrived at through rational deduction as definitive knowledge – even if the result was pure theological speculation. According to the author, it was in this context that Christianity began to place faith above knowledge and this is what made doubt become the opposite of faith.

Jews, Christians, Muslims

János Oláh's paper seemingly fits the least the declared purpose of the volume, the examination of the common aspects of faith and doubt inasmuch that it only speaks about faith. Nonetheless, in some respects it is a testament to the coexistence of faith and doubt with its discussion of ritual meals that serve to "strengthen faith." Faith needs to be strengthened again and again, because the weakening of faith, the rise of doubt can happen any time. Oláh's paper discusses the traditional festive meals of Ashkenazi Jews in East Central Europe, with special focus on modern day Hungarian

Jewry in particular. He provides a meticulous and thorough inventory of festive meals, dishes and the rituals associated with them, as well as of the related religious views and explanations that are dictated by the dietary prescriptions of the holy books of the Torah and Kashrut. The faith of religious Jews strictly observing these rules could have many gradations from living faith to the indifference or unbelief of those who only keep the rules as a tradition to signal or reject their identity. The regularly repeated, routinized festive rites can stubbornly survive in the midst of indifference, doubt or even unbelief, but concurrently with processes of the loss of faith, there always is the possibility of its re-emergence. This re-emerging, or as the author puts it "reinforcing," of faith may be aided by the food related rites repeated from Sabbath to Sabbath, from feast to feast, which through recalling the religious symbolism of the dishes always carry in them elements that refer to and recall the first "ad illo tempore" event and its "original" meaning. Along with the other components of festive rites, this keeps alive and enhances that font of religious knowledge that is an important precondition of religious belief; the blessings, prayers, communal songs make even the unbelievers part of the religious cult to some degree. Looking at it differently, this could mean the decline of religious indifference, reduction of doubt and "non-belief".

Ildikó Csepregi examines how doubt appears in miracle narratives first in Greek temples dedicated to such healing Gods as Aesclepius and later, after Christianity began to spread, in Catholic churches where the role of the Roman/Greek God was taken over by Catholic saints. In both settings, stories about instances of doubt were included in the recorded miracle accounts. Csepregi maintains that in these texts doubt serves as a narrative device to demonstrate the curing power of the centre, and to build faith by proving the suppliants' doubts to be wrong. Curing the doubtful is also a way to induce their conversion, which becomes especially important in Christianity. Doubt is shown from the point of view of the venue and the cult of the God or saint who performs the miracle rather than from the point of view of the person cured. Csepregi argues that the inclusion of doubt is meant to demonstrate the ability of the healers to effect a cure even when the patient is not a believer. After encountering and being cured by the healing God/saint, the doubter often began to believe.

Gábor Klaniczay takes us to the high medieval period, to the world of stigmatics, people who display the stigmata of Jesus Christ. While manifesting the stigmata is the ultimate proof and reward of extreme faith, their appearance throughout history has also provoked doubt and mobilized doubters. Doubt and faith go hand in hand, those who believe in the possibility of stigmata and those who do not are pitted against each other and tend to maintain their positions, but the doubters are not unbelievers necessarily: they might doubt the possibility of stigmata altogether or might doubt the genuineness of the stigmata of a particular claimant, but even if they doubt the possibility of stigmata this does not make them unbelievers.

Péter Tóth G.'s chapter tackles the late eighteenth century period in Hungary when witchcraft accusations and other superstitious beliefs have already been discredited by the Enlightenment ideas propagated by Emperor Joseph II. As a result, the law began to reclassify certain activities that had been regarded as magical offences and

treat them either as fraud or mental illness or as something simply lying outside its purview. The unevenness of the spread of these ideas meant that while the courts – driven by the Enlightenment – doubted, even rejected the validity of witchcraft accusations and other superstitious beliefs, certain segments of the population – especially the lower classes – still subscribed to them, while others took advantage of the latter's credulity. Tóth argues that in some cases the scepticism of Enlightenment ideas was undermined by the prejudices the representatives of the law had against certain groups of the accused (in the case he analyses a large group of Roma people). This, however, invited the ridicule of the larger international community against the Hungarian judges, thus showing which side consensus was on. However, just as the "old" beliefs were undermined and being pushed to the margins, in elite circles new kinds of spiritual movements were gaining ground.

Dániel Bárth studied the activities of an eighteenth century Illyrian (Croatian) Franciscan friar in the town of Zombor (Sombor,) who came into conflict with his superiors because in order to cure his parishioners he resorted to liturgical forms of exorcism from an earlier era that had been prohibited by the Catholic Church under the impact of Catholic Enlightenment. The methods he employed were regarded as superstitious "due to changes in ecclesiastic demonology". After several warnings from his superiors, the Archbishopric banned his activities and he was removed from his post where he had been quite popular. However, as Bárth points out the need for his services remained acute, and the Church could not provide better answers. From the point of view of doubt, we can witness here a double movement. While, the Catholic Church began to doubt the certainties it subscribed to only a few decades earlier, the lay public continued to hold the same beliefs as before and have faith in the old methods. As Bárth underlines, the Catholic Church did not reject its own tenets wholesale, but there were certain aspects of it that they no longer held true, that they had surpassed, thus doubt in this case too, did not mean loss of faith, but a transformation of certain elements of faith.

Ágnes Hesz carried out fieldwork in a Hungarian-speaking region of Romania that was until recently quite isolated. She writes about how her interlocutors compensate for their lack of knowledge of what happens in the afterlife when the anthropologist presses them on the question. They of course have several explanatory frameworks at their disposal. In addition to the explanations of the Church, they are familiar with the ideas emanating both from science learnt at school and from vernacular religion in the region. They express their doubts about the validity of these frameworks by means of a variety of dramaturgical devices. The author also considers the possibility that their awareness of her own likely secular-scientific outlook might have induced the sceptical attitudes of her interlocutors, but suggests that there is more to the question than not wanting to appear backward in the eyes of the anthropologist: a genuine feeling of uncertainty or lack of sufficient knowledge, which they indicate by the said devices. Thus, unlike in most other cases they seem satisfied with leaving the question open, but what resolution they veer towards is likely to vary contextually and leaves the rituals associated with death untouched.

Bea Vidacs's paper analyses the pronouncements of a Hungarian seer, who has had visions of Jesus Christ for more than two decades. Since 1994, she has been reliving the Passion of Christ on the first Friday of each month and weekly during Lent. After s/He dies on the cross, Jesus Christ also speaks through her addressing the faithful who come to witness her vision. The paper analyses the published text of the discourse of the seer (purported to be the words of Jesus Christ) during Lent 2015 in which in a series of talks she discussed doubt, fear and anxiety as preventing the believer's fervent prayer from reaching God. Some of what she says can be interpreted as the doubt being the self-doubt of the believer as to whether she is worthy of being heard by God. However, she also identifies the triad as a will to agency (wanting to take action to find a solution to one's problems) which is an indication of lack of sufficient trust in God's willingness or ability to solve the problems of the praying person. The solution the seer offers is that in order for the prayer to reach the divinity, for it to be heard and answered, the praying person has to give up agency and "open" themselves up to allow God in. Thus, here doubt is an impediment to faith that can only be overcome if the believer lets go of her desire for agency (of taking her own affairs into her own hands) in other words, yields her agency to God.

Eszter Spät's chapter deals with people seeking cures for desperate health problems they are faced with. She describes interfaith crossover in the recent past in Northern Iraq where different monotheistic religious communities have lived together for centuries. Since Ottoman times Muslims, Christians and Yezidis (earlier, while still residing in the region, Jews as well) have shared and visited each other's shrines, engaged in religious practices of the Other, beseeched the Deity of the Other, sought divine intercession at the sacred places. It transpires from her account that these practices are centuries old and have led to some shared rituals. All combinations occur between these groups, although in differing proportions. These are not routine actions, rather, they happen as a last resort, when the supplicants have found no resolution to their problem in their own (religious or secular) milieu. They usually relate to mental illnesses or fertility problems. From the point of view of doubt and faith what is striking about these visits is that they both presuppose belief in the efficacy of the Other's rituals, sacred places and saints and at the same time also imply a certain degree of doubt in the efficacy of one's own religious place. What is clear is that these actions indicate a religious outlook on life, where the efficacy of divine solutions is not doubted, but perhaps who has the answers to any given problem is.

Alternatives to Christian Belief

Anne-Marie Losonczy writes about the encounter between ethnic/mestizo South Americans and Westerners both of whom are looking to resolve their doubts through the ritual consumption of *ayahuasca* with the aid of an indigenous shaman. Losonczy argues that the two sets of doubt differ from each other. On the one hand, the indigenous people are seeking answers to epistemic doubts arising from encounters with

indeterminate beings who are part of their belief systems. The foreigners who partake of the ritual, on the other hand, seek a way out of a sense of "personal unwellness" that they attribute to past experiences and the harmful effects of their Western urban lifestyle. Their doubts are ontological, driven by a desire for some kind of spiritual certainty, for proof that "there is something out there". The author argues that although the nature of the doubts the members of the two groups harbour is diametrically opposed and the answers they receive also differ, through creative misunderstanding they are able to partake of a single system and feel that (at least temporarily) they have put their doubts at rest. However, this reassurance tends to be temporary and both sides repeat the ritual when their doubts arise again. In the case of some Westerners this need for repetition may invalidate the entire experience in which case they will abandon the *ayahuasca* ritual networks altogether. Those who stay behind (both the shaman and the other participants who witness such a withdrawal) blame evil forces for misleading such a person and therefore are able to maintain their faith in the system.

Ilona Nagy's article touches upon an aspect of the relationship of faith and doubt that was otherwise not discussed at the conference. Her study examines some aspects of alternative, "apocryphal" Christianity as they appear in European folklore. Church hierarchy, as we know, regarded alternative Christianity to be anti-faith and those who subscribed to these views could be persecuted. However, if we view the myths examined by Ilona Nagy from the point of view of the people who told them and not from that of the official church, they are not about the denial of faith or about scepticism but rather about "dual faith," the coexistence of "pagan", non-Christian traditions with Christianity. Apocryphal legends attribute pagan characteristics to God, Christ, or the Virgin Mary or the saints of Christianity. Myths of dual creation – the creation of the world by God and the Devil as a pair – belong here, as do the dual creation of the world by God and a demiurge in Asian traditions. In this version, the Earth is created together by God and a spirit being that is embodied as a hedgehog, what is more the hedgehog is more successful at creation than God. The inferiority and ambivalence of God in these stories allows the author to conclude that faith in traditional folk culture could equally encompass the "official" Christian God and an ambivalent creator divinity "enhanced" by apocryphal features, even though the latter has been completely rejected by the ecclesiastic elite who considered it as non-belief, and even as blasphemous heresy.

Éva Pócs also examines early modern witch trial documents. She concentrates on the figure of the *táltos,* who are magical specialists: weather magicians protecting the community against hail, but also seen to be capable of seeing treasure, as well as of healing or as unwitchers. We find them in witch trials because they were at times accused of being witches. The author writes about several kinds of doubt in her paper. On the one hand about the doubts of the scholar who is trying to draw conclusions about *táltos* appearing in witch trials and on the other about the doubts provoked by the fact that some of the accused claimed *táltos* status either as a defence against accusations of witchcraft in the trials, or to enhance their reputations in their own communities – thus putting into question whether they were "real" *táltos* or only pretended

to be táltos to gain the respect of their communities or impostors who claimed *táltos* status only to swindle people. The author also asks what we can know about the beliefs and doubts of the accused. She demonstrates that although the genuineness of the *táltos* status of some of the figures who are named *táltos* in the trials is highly questionable, their statements about *táltoshood* and *táltos* activities show that they (just as their audiences) were well acquainted with the possible roles *táltos* could play in the early modern context. The cases of fraudulent *táltos*, similarly to some of whom Péter Tóth G. writes about, show the interaction of doubt and faith in the rather special light of someone who doubts but uses the belief of his contemporaries to defraud them.

Edward Bever's chapter based on trial materials examines divinatory techniques used in sixteenth to eighteenth century cases of "scrying" and "sieve and shears" (or sieve driving) in Early Modern Europe. These methods were used to find treasure (money), or to identify thieves and witches. He notes that finding treasure was a temporary fad so the bulk of the cases he is writing about were attempts at identifying witches or thieves. Unlike many commentators, Bever is not so much interested in how these techniques could be manipulated to find the "right" culprit, rather he shows that both methods allowed for subjective, unconscious knowledge to surface about who might wish to harm others. While Bever does not claim great reliability for these methods, he suggests that given that the alternative was not modern criminology they were an improvement over sheer guesswork. "Scrying and sieve driving to identify thieves were used because they could tap peoples' real awareness of other people's unconscious signals that they were hiding guilty secrets, a real awareness that was often difficult to bring to consciousness and even more difficult to articulate in order to justify social action." Thus, Bever is writing about how doubts could be set aside and a measure of certainty reached through divination.

Eszter Győrfy's contribution stays in the same general geographical area as that of Ágnes Hesz, but her field site is a bilingual (Hungarian- and Romanian-speaking) Transylvanian village. She follows the forty-year history and changing interpretations of the illnesses of a now middle-aged woman. Over the course of the years, she alternated between seeking biomedical and supernatural (witchcraft) explanations and cures for her illness especially as neither the medical nor the traditional diagnoses succeeded in pinpointing the cause of the illness(es) or in curing them. The opinions of her surroundings favoured personalized (witchcraft) explanations looking for the underlying causes in her social relationships in the form of tensions within her extended family. In the course of the years, she modified her opinions on both explanatory frameworks several times, eventually deciding (for the time being at least) that although she had been bewitched once, her illness had a purely medical explanation. The decision in favour of a "rationalistic" explanation, however, does not mean that she rejects the possibility of bewitchment entirely, while at the same time she has also become more active in the Catholic Church recently, which may also have influenced her re-interpretation of her illness. This case demonstrates that doubt and faith can coexist and doubting a particular explanatory framework in a particular case does not necessarily mean its wholesale rejection.

Ildikó Tamás's paper examines the history of the suppression and later revival of *yoiking*, a genre of singing among the Sami of Sweden, Norway, and Finland. *Yoiking* was originally an intrinsic part of Sami culture with shamanistic religious connotations. When Scandinavians encroached on the lifeworld of the reindeer herding Sami they forbade *yoiking* and the shamanistic religion. With the introduction of Christianity *yoiking* was rejected as deriving from the Devil, thus casting doubt on Sami spirituality and undermining Sami identity. Eventually, the Sami adopted the Laestadian version of Christianity, which although it incorporated some elements of Sami culture, categorically opposed shamanism as well as *yoiking*. As a result, *yoiking* could only survive surreptitiously into the twentieth century. The Sami lived as marginalized indigenous people who were compelled to downplay their culture and cultural expression in public. This situation changed gradually beginning in the 1970s when – partly under the impact of worldwide post-colonial indigenous movements – *yoiking* was revived with the purpose of making it an emblematic symbol of Sami identity. While on the whole the attempt was successful it did not happen without controversy. The terms of the debate turn precisely on how to interpret *yoiking*, whether to consider it a religious symbol/genre which then would contradict the current Christian worldview of many Sami or to see it as a broader emblem of Saminess. The paper shows that casting doubt on the religion and central symbols of a culture has serious ramifications for the identity of a people. In this case, the revival of *yoiking* contributes to the strengthening of Sami identity in the twenty-first century, but doubts remain regarding on what terms it can be done.

Judit Kis-Halas's chapter concerns the beliefs of individuals: she examines the diverging cases of two women who have adopted a postmodern esoteric angel cult, a contemporary form of esoteric beliefs that are highly personalized, adaptable and flexible, well suited to our post-modern age. Kis-Halas's first case shows how a bereaved mother was able to adapt her ideas about angels to include her recently deceased son, who from then on acted as an advisor, helper and general sounding-board providing continuity in her life. The second case is that of a woman who also used to have positive views of angels but has been disappointed in them. She does not in fact abandon her belief in angels, rather, influenced by information she gleaned from the internet and under the impact of UFO cults and galactic conspiracy theories, she has refashioned them as malevolent creatures. Thus, while the first woman could reaffirm her faith in angels, the second one began to doubt her earlier assessment of their nature. Both examples Kis-Halas discusses demonstrate a flexible moulding of belief from a broad range of elements, what, however, despite the doubts raised, remains constant is the seeking of spiritual meaning in life.

Judit Farkas has carried out fieldwork among Krishna believers in Hungary and in this paper examines the learning process of the typical convert who in the initial phases of conversion is encouraged to ask questions and express doubts in order for them to be explained and settled by more experienced members and teachers. They are expected to seek answers from books written for the novice. Once they become full-fledged members, who have been educated in the scriptures, their doubts are

supposed to disappear though. *László Koppány Csáji* describes a small New Religious Movement group whose members gather around a prophet spanning three countries (Romania, Hungary, and Serbia). He analyses the process whereby members are admitted into increasingly select circles until they become full-fledged members. One of the characteristics of this process is that knowledge about the belief system of the group is imparted gradually, as Csáji argues purposely to help the candidates overcome their doubts before they are given further (and more outré) information about the tenets of the religion. Members are encouraged to ask questions, but similarly to the Krishna believers written about by Farkas once they attain the status of insider they are no longer expected to doubt. Both groups attempt to decrease the incidence of doubt by endeavouring "to create common registers of knowledge". Csáji also shows that the graduated process he analyses allows a certain amount of leeway to "neglect" some of the teachings by no longer talking about them, these tenets tend to be the most far-fetched. Both are concerned with the role of doubt in building faith eventually counting on faith overcoming doubt.

Reference

Pelkmans, Mathijs. 2013. "Outline for an Ethnography of Doubt." In Id., ed., *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies.* London: I.B. Tauris.

ANTIQUE DOUBTS

Anna Judit Tóth

Faith and Doubt in the Culture of Classical Antiquity

This volume explores the ever-changing dynamics of the relationship between faith and doubt throughout history. The focus of this study is an analysis of the ancient meanings of these concepts, particularly in the religious universe of the Roman Empire.[1] Due to constraints of space, this paper will focus on presenting a montage of images from the age under discussion that provide a valuable illustration of the relationships between faith, knowledge, doubt and credulity in classical antiquity.

With a title of *Faith and Doubt,* most prospective readers of the volume are likely to assume that it deals with religion, which is surprising, since ultimately we are talking about general epistemological concepts. If a Greek philosopher announced a lecture with a similar title, *Pistis kai aporia,* no one in the potential audience would expect a religious topic. The criteria for certain, well-founded knowledge were different in antiquity than today, a difference that had an impact on the meaning of faith and doubt, as well as on the function it fulfilled in thinking, which, in turn, influenced religious faith and doubt.

It is in fact due to the different connotations that the Greek translation of these two concepts raises challenging questions. Faith in Greek is *pistis* and to believe is *pisteuō,* this is somewhat evident; yet, mention must be made that in Greek the notion of *pistis* would not have entailed any specifically religious associations. Their occurrence is rather connected to trust and hope: for instance, one can have good faith in the success of a future action or in the trustworthiness of a person.[2] Doubt is even

---

[2] The *Liddel-Scott Lexicon,* the standard dictionary of ancient Greek language gives the following meanings of the noun *pistis*: 'good faith', 'trustworthiness', 'honesty', 'credence', 'credit', 'assurance', 'pledge of good faith', 'guarantee', 'means of persuasion', 'argument', 'proof', 'political protection'; and also in a personified form it is the translation of the Latin *fides.* In addition, we find the antonym of faith: 'faith, opp. sight/and knowledge', however, it is in the terminology of Christian authors. In the case of the verbal form *pisteuō,* besides the meanings 'to trust', 'to rely on' and so forth, it also has a connotation of 'believe that/feel confident that (a thing is)'.

more difficult to translate into Greek. *Aporia, aporeō* mean 'uncertainty': doubt in the sense that we do not know what to do. *Apistia* and *apisteuō* are negations of *pistis*: when we simply do not believe something. The verb *hypopteuō* means 'to suspect', 'to question something'; *amphisbēteō* means 'to dispute', 'to contest something'.[3] It seems that none of these meanings cover entirely the word "doubt", especially in opposition to the word "faith".

Faith and doubt are filled with meaning if we know the context in which they appear. Whether it refers to the existence of the Holy Trinity, the usefulness of the measles vaccine, the truth of a heliocentric or geocentric universe, the faithfulness of a spouse, the ability to move mountains, or to whether the sky is blue is not an insignificant matter. The concept of doubt is filled with further layers of content depending on what the doubters think about their doubts: do they want to have faith, do they consider their doubts as a deficit, do they seek to strengthen their faith, or do they want the subject of their doubt to be true? It is obvious that doubting the Eucharist, for instance, carries a very different meaning if the parish priest of Bolsena engages in it, or if we read it on a sceptical website.

Faith and belief are important topics of the psychology of religion in the context of any religion; however, in relation to antiquity all this is very difficult to examine. For one thing, very few documents remain from antiquity in which personal or subjective religiosity would be manifested. In religious texts of elite culture (such as hymns to deities, literary texts discussing religious thoughts, sacred precepts, philosophical texts of a theological nature, etc.) the polarity of faith and doubt is not discussed at all. This is so simply because, due to the particularities of Greek religion and philosophy described below, faith was not a religious concept or at least it was not part of the elite religious discourse; yet, it is this elite that this study must focus on since most of the available written sources originate from them. These features, however, do not mean that in the context of antiquity we can declare faith to be an etic category.[4] Faith includes, in addition to its purely Christian meaning, the aspect of "believing something", which is present in every culture where people have to make decisions in matters that need to be handled, understood and proved beyond personal competencies. It is a basic psychological phenomenon that did exist in ancient times in the context of religion; only it was not a particular focus of attention. There are two reasons for this: firstly, as I have mentioned before, religious expectations were different; secondly, the definition of rational knowledge was also different from the one we have today. The present study will examine these two attitudes that seem so different from their current connotations. The modern history of ancient religions started when research recognised that their essence was the practice of rituals. It was basically

---

[3] *Aporia*: 'difficulty of dealing with something', *apistia*: 'unbelief', 'distrust', occasionally 'faithlessness' – especially in the sense of betrayal; *hypopteuō*: 'to be suspicious', 'suspect', 'guess', 'suppose'; *amphisbēteō*: 'disagree', 'dispute'; *adēleō*: 'to be in dark about a thing', 'not understand'; *distazō*: 'doubt', 'hesitate'.

[4] As Giordano-Zecharya (2005, 346) does by claiming that the emic category of "belief" cannot be found in non-monotheistic cultures.

irrelevant whether the individual believed in the existence of the gods: a relatively well-known example is that of Epicurus who, despite denying the immortality of the soul, continued to perform the appropriate offerings.[5] It is even more widely known that Christians who were considered *atheos* were not persecuted for their "faithlessness", but for not performing the obligatory offerings. This, however, does not mean that the contemporaries of the "atheist" were able to distinguish between the individual's religious views and behaviour. The conflict between the various definitions of "atheism" are plain to see in the sources of the trial of Socrates, who was condemned to death in the *asebeia* trial.

The word *asebeia* is the antonym of *eusebeia*: it refers to the lack of reverence due to the gods. Although we know the details of numerous *asebeia* trials, the text of the relevant Athenian law did not survive. According to the definition of Polybius, *asebeia* is a sin committed against the gods, our parents and the dead.[6] Aristotle claimed that one could commit *asebeia* against the gods, the *daimon* (the dead), our parents and the country.[7] These definitions suggest that the Greek *eusebeia-asebeia* is ultimately a similar word pair with multiple meanings, as their Latin equivalent: the pair of *pietas* and *impietas*. However, while in the Roman context numerous cases are encountered in which behaviour related to the country or to blood relatives is referred to, their Greek occurrences are typically associated with the correct or incorrect respect of the gods. The most famous trials took place in the fifth century BC partly against philosophers and partly in the form of show trials against the entourage of Pericles.[8]

We cannot speak about fundamentalism in the context of Greek religion since there was no textual fundament to adhere to; accordingly, in the case of *asabeia* tri-

---

[5] Ulucci (2011, 59) mentions numerous examples to illustrate that Epicureans and Epicurus himself participated at ceremonial offerings.

[6] Polybius 36.9.15.: ἀσέβημα μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τὸ περὶ θεοὺς καὶ τοὺς γονεῖς καὶ τοὺς τεθνεῶτας ἁμαρτάνειν.

[7] Aristoteles, De virtutibus 7.2. 1251a.: ἀσέβεια μὲν ἡ περὶ θεοὺς πλημμέλεια καὶ περὶ δαίμονας, ἢ περὶ τοὺς κατοιχομένους καὶ περὶ γονεῖς καὶ πατρίδα.

[8] The trials are known fundamentally for their cultural historical significance and the reputation of the accused. It is impossible to discuss Greek *asebeia* trials with respect to their sociological, religious, legal and other aspects as, for instance, in the case of modern inquisition trials. There are no legal documents; we cannot be certain what the exact charge was, even in the case of historically authentic trials; the cases of *asebeia* are difficult to distinguish from other charges such as blasphemy, or church robbery. In many cases, late biographical sources "spiced up" the life-stories of almost every great author with an alleged *asebeia* trial, the authenticity of which is very questionable; for instance, all three members of the great trio of tragedians were subjects of such accusations, thus, according to their *vitae* not only Euripides (which is the least surprising) but also Aeschylus and Sophocles (cf. Bauman 1990 *passim* and the critique by P. J. Rhodes 1992). We know barely anything about the situation outside Athens; information about the practice of less-developed poleis would probably transform considerably our image of enlightened Greeks. In Arcadia entering the sanctuary area of Zeus was punishable by death; because entering any given open-air area was prohibited (Borgeaud 1988, 34–38, Plutarchus Quaest. Gr. 39 = Moralia 300a–c). The law was modified by allowing for the possibility of escaping death through certain rituals if the trespassing occurred inadvertently. During a procession of Artemis of Ephesus a golden leaf fell from the statue and a child picked it up – he paid for it with his life.

als the subjects of the accusations covered a wide spectrum. In the 18 b–c sections of the Apology, Socrates refers to those who had been speaking out against him, alluding to the comic playwright, Aristophanes whose play, *The Clouds*, has a protagonist called Socrates who promotes sophist ideas; he continues as follows: "… and accused me without any truth, saying, "There is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a ponderer over the things in the air and one who has investigated the things beneath the earth and who makes the weaker argument the stronger." … For those who hear them think that men who investigate these matters do not even believe in gods.[9]

Here he is referring to the two main branches of Pre-Socratic philosophy: natural philosophy and sophism. The opinion attributed to "the people" does not even qualify as prejudice, since sophism was undeniably atheist. In the Greek texts the English translation's unequivocal phrase, 'believe in gods', is *theous nomizein*.

What is this *nomizein, nomizein theous*? The most common use of the verb is 'to have an opinion on something', 'to think that'; therefore, the phrase referring to the gods could be interpreted as 'he thinks that the gods exist'. In this case the sentence is grammatically elliptic, the complete sentence would be: *nomizein theous einai*. This is, however, not the only meaning of *nomizein*. The etymology of *nomizō* is clear: it stems from *nomos* 'law', 'custom'; thus its basic meaning is: 'practicing something as a custom'. When the object of the verb is "the gods" it probably has to be interpreted in a ritual sense: "practicing the cult of gods". The two meanings are in effect at the same time and thus it is unclear what the actual charge is: having an inappropriate opinion, promoting that opinion, or neglecting the cult of the gods.[10]

Commentators on the Socrates trial can be divided into two groups based on the interpretation they chose: whether Socrates deviated from orthodoxy or from orthopraxy.[11] The historically credible indictment also includes the following phrase: Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τούς τε νέους διαφθείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόια καινὰ. (24b–c) "it states that Socrates is a wrongdoer because he corrupts the youth and does not believe in the gods the state believes in, but in other new spiritual beings (*daimonia*)."[12] The sources of the trial handle the charges differently. In Xenophon's understanding, the charges clearly referred to the practice of cult: he tried to refute the charges by saying that Socrates often visited oracles and participated in public and private offerings.[13] This is also what the original phrasing of the

---

[9] Socrates, Apology 18b–c. Translation from: Plato 1966.

[10] Giordano-Zecharya 2005, 331; Ostwald 1969, 40–43. Reeve's definition explains the meanings as follows (Reeve 2000, 28): (nomizein theous) "through *primarily* a matter of giving the gods the worship prescribed by *nomos*, through participating in the services, rites, and rituals sanctioned by tradition, in fact encompasses all behavior that shows proper acknowledgment of the existence of the gods."

[11] Giordano-Zecharya 2005, 327–330 with an extended bibliography. The philosopher or the literary historian would be inclined to agree with the first opinion because the work supporting it, Plato's *Apology,* has a defining importance in the fields of both literature and philosophy; this interpretation, however, contradicts the entire historical and religious historical context.

[12] Translated by H. North Fowler.

[13] Xenophon: *Memorabilia* I. 1.; Giordano-Zecharya 2005, 337 is of the opinion.

indictment seems to suggest: Socrates was not simply an atheist, he worshipped foreign *daimon*s not accepted by the community.

The Socrates of the Apology, on the other hand, boldly tries to outwit the accuser. He asks what the charge is: Socrates believes in certain gods, therefore, he is not *atheos*, even if they are not the gods of the city; or he does not respect the gods at all. Meletus cannot resist the temptation to come up with an even graver accusation: Socrates does not respect any god at all. In return, Socrates points out that the person who does not consider the sun and the moon to be gods, as others do, is not he, but Anaxagoras.[14] The argument of Socrates finds Meletus unprepared because, as the accuser, he did not specify what he meant under *"theous ou nomizein"*. This is far from surprising: lacking professional prosecution and defence, the Athenian democratic law functioned in an amateur manner; as Robert E. Allen pointed out, the *asebeia* was always what the appointed jury considered it to be.[15] Therefore, Giordano-Zecharya thought that interpreting the accusation as atheism was the invention of Plato, because the eyewitnesses (including Plato) interpreted the accusation as neglecting the cult of the gods;[16] in his opinion, Plato did not have the opportunity to change the accusation, therefore he reinterpreted it – it is not clear, however, what Plato's goal with this was. Xenophon claimed that the accusation of neglecting the cult of the gods was false and Plato had no reason to divert the discussion and defend his master against another accusation. We have no reason to exclude the possibility that Socrates himself did so in his failed defence.[17]

The *Apology* does not clear up one aspect of the *asebeia* accusation, since there was no need to do so before the Athenian public. It is obvious that there were those who did not believe in the existence of the gods at all; atheism in its modern sense existed in antiquity also – the question, however, is left open as to why it should be sanctioned. Declaring an action to be a sin is basically founded upon it being a threat to the community; and atheism could be experienced as a threat by the community of the Greek city for two reasons. Firstly, it was possible that the deity would punish the entire community for the atheism of certain members; however, the main trigger of the gods' wrath would probably have been the shortfall in offerings and other expected cultic actions, and not atheism. The second reason is that if a considerable part of the community becomes atheist then they would no longer respect moral rules, which would threaten the other members of the community. Although Greek gods are not renowned for their ethical behaviour, they are the tokens of earthly moral order, par-

[14] Despite Anaxagoras having fled from the *asebeia* trial against him, his case has become a prime example of *asebeia* cases. Cf. Mansfeld 1980.

[15] Allen 1996, 6 "the elements of impiety were what a simple majority of the discasts on any given day thought was impious".

[16] Giordano-Zecharya 2005, 339, 340. Mikalson (2010, 11) illustrated the duality of the expression with the translation "to recognize the gods".

[17] In the *Apology* one of the corner stones of Socrates's defence is that, due to the accusations of Aristophanes and others, many attribute opinions to him that are not Socratic; hence the argument that it is Anaxagoras and not he who is godless.

ticularly Zeus, because they punish the sinner, and even the sinner's environment; an idea that already appears in Hesiod's thinking.[18] An author who renounces traditional religion can easily draw the conclusion that only fear can compel the ignorant masses to keep the law. This attitude is in play throughout the entirety of antiquity; even the authors who renounce traditional religion believe that the only way to guarantee the respect of laws by the crowd is through fear of the gods.

Whichever case we take, the end is that the community does not tolerate atheism; the question remains, however: how do we define faithlessness? What does it mean to believe in a Greek god? The question goes beyond the simplest level: is it sufficient to present the offering in a hypocritical manner, or is a fear of god really necessary? The problem goes deeper than that. In the major Christian denominations we observe a certain normative effort in specifying how much one has to believe; which philosophical or theological concepts are compatible with Christianity and which are not; how to interpret the truth of the holy texts, etc. These regulating functions were missing from ancient cults; there were numerous ways to believe in ancient gods. It was not a question of which elements of tradition the individual considered true, and which not; the question was: what kind of cognitive attitude did the individual consider to be faith?

Did the Greeks believe in their gods? Did they believe in their myths? This topic has been of strong interest in the modern era (a few years ago a monograph was published with the same title),[19] yet it is difficult to formulate a clear answer. It is hard to distinguish between "religious" and "irreligious" authors of antiquity. There were early atheists, such as Democritus, and the accusation would have been justified with most of the sophists; yet, it is in the work of the most religious authors, such as Pindar or Herodotus, that we see the first attempts to rationalise myths, so it seems that they retained the right not to literally believe in the truth of myths.[20] The aim of the rationalisation of myths was to purge them of those elements that were morally incompatible with the gods. This was true in the case of Pelops: in the original myth his father cooked him and tried to feed him to the gods – Pindar claimed this was a lie, and actually the boy was kidnapped by the paedophile Poseidon who fell in love with him.[21] Although Pindar argues that decency requires to speak rightly of the gods and to avoid the colourful lies of the myths, the original myth did not accuse the gods of cannibalism either.

---

[18] Hesiod refers to this explicitly on several occasions, for instance in *Works and Days,* 238–41: "But for those who practice violence and cruel deeds far-seeing Zeus, the son of Cronus, ordains a punishment. Often even a whole city suffers for a bad man who sins and devises presumptuous deeds." 248–51: "You princes, mark well this punishment, you also, for the deathless gods are near among men; and mark all those who oppress their fellows with crooked judgements; and heed not the anger of the gods." (Translation by Hugh. G. Evelyn-White, in Hesiod 1914.)

[19] Veyne 1988. We can ask similar questions in many other regards; Versnel, for instance, examines a problem equally difficult to explore: did the Greeks believe that their Hellenistic rulers were gods (Versnel 2011, 465–92).

[20] On the very early beginnings of myth rationalisation by Hekataios and his contemporaries: Hawes 2014, 6–13.

[21] Pindar, *Ol,* 1.

Two examples, one from the early phase and one from the late period of Greek literary history, illustrate the liberty with which religious authors handled myths. In the introduction to *Theogony,* Hesiod describes heroic poetry as consisting of "many lies", but in fact, he used creative imagination just like any other poet. It is unimaginable, for instance, that before Hesiod all fifty Oceanids would have had names of their own in Greek religion; after all, they did not even have a cult.[22] There are no two identical versions of the genealogy of the first gods of creation in Greek sources; therefore we can presume that, again, Hesiod formed the family tree with a certain liberty.[23] And perhaps the most blatant example: Hesiod corrects himself regarding two myths in his later work, *Works and Days*: in *Theogony* Eris, the goddess of discord is one, in the introduction of *Works*, however, there are two, a good Eris who motivates people to compete, and another, who is only the source of envy and hatred.[24] The transformation of Pandora's story is even more drastic. In *Theogony* Zeus punished humans for Prometheus' stealing fire from the gods; therefore he created Pandora with the other gods, the first woman, and sent her to the men – in this case the punishment is simply the existence of women. In the version of *Works* the story changes, the punishment is related to the curiosity of Pandora, who opened the box containing troubles and ills, which were thereby spread across the world.[25] These changes indicate that Hesiod already from the seventh century, when talking about the criterion of truthfulness, was referring to some sort of philosophical truth and not to a fundamentalist insistence on inherited mythical tradition.

The other author who illustrates the liberty with which Greek writers handled myths is Sallustius, who lived in the court of Emperor Julian in the fourth century AD. His aim was to systemically create a sort of a pagan theology that competed with Christianity. In the introduction to his work he narrates the myth of Cybele and Attis, which he ends with the sentence that could be considered as his definition of myth: "These things never happened, but always are",[26] implying that the plot of the myth does not reflect actual past events, but describes the mechanism of the universe. The late antique author interprets the love of Cybele and Attis in the context of the eternal versus the ephemeral world; but the allegoric myth for him is not only a kind of abstract allegory like that of the baroque painters arranging Greek gods on their murals, but it is also the subject of faith, although not in a literal sense.

The existence of Greek gods is far from being transcendent; they are parts of this world. This may be one of the reasons, why the significance and role of miracles and signs in strengthening faith varies between antique religions and Christianity.

The miracle and the possibility of a miracle is a central focus of Christianity. A repeatedly reoccurring element of Christ's miracles is the assertion "your faith has

---

[22] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 243–262.
[23] Kirk and Raven 1957, 11–72.
[24] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 11–26.
[25] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 570–602; *Works and Days*, 59–105.
[26] Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World*, 4.

healed you". Faith makes the miracle possible, which engenders stronger faith, which is the condition of salvation. This faith conveyed by the Gospels is not an epistemological concept, but the manifestation of trust, the denomination of an interpersonal relation. In this conceptual framework "faith" and "doubt" are emotionally charged concepts on which the salvation of the individual stands or falls. A miracle not only changes the life of the individual for the better, but is also evidence proving both the truthfulness of the subject of faith and the fact that the believer possesses the faith which is the condition of salvation. This attitude not only characterises the age of the Apostles, but the entirety of Christianity, right up until the present day.

Miracles are also present in ancient cults, but without the function of being a "sign". This does not mean that Greek religion did not know the intervention of supernatural creatures in the world of everyday rationality; or that people did not desire to experience miracles. Nonetheless, with them the manifestations of the supernatural, the effect of the divine were practically routine phenomena. Divine intervention was regular in two instances: a) healing miracles, in a broad sense because the healing gods were also capable, for instance, of finding missing persons;[27] and b) sending prophecies, either through an inspired oracle in trance or via signs – the latter was known in both the Roman and Greek religions. There is a third possibility that can be considered a subcategory of the second group: any human achievement or failure could be explained with how much that person was or was not favoured by the gods. For the people of antiquity, events occurring in nature, be they the flight of birds or natural catastrophes, formed a mass of encoded information through which the gods tried to communicate with humanity. All these miracles did not interrupt the process of everyday reality; they *were* everyday reality.

Naturally, these "miracles" were capable of strengthening someone's faith; this, however, was important in its impact, and not in itself: faith could enhance the legitimacy of a given cultic place and, thus, could increase its income.[28] For the individual, faith had no advantages; Apollo and the other gods did not reward faith, but the immolated greasy ham offerings, and occasionally the respect of the moral rules they had set; but by no means did they expect faith.

The other perspective from which the study of religious manifestations of faith and doubt is interesting is that of knowledge and science: it is possible that the Greek practice of cults did not require faith, yet, doubting these practices might have come up in the field of philosophy or science.

This problem was in the focus of one of the most influential works in classical philology, *The Greek and the Irrational* by E. R. Dodds. Naturally, it is impossible to exhaustively explore this issue within the framework of this short essay; even a com-

---

[27] Versnel 2011, 400–21, 401: the god's activities and the treatment carried out by the physicians of the sanctuary often took place simultaneously.

[28] Ibid., 406 the figure of the "doubter" also appears in ancient sources; cf. the study of Ildikó Csepregi in this volume.

plete monograph would not be sufficient for this purpose. Irrationality is the focus of Dodds' book and the series of lectures upon which it is based; his main goal was to show an image of the Greek world opposite to the one inherited from classicism: the primitive, ancient, irrational manifestations in Greek religion. One of the problems that inspired him was the developmental trajectory specific to Greek civilisation: the rationalisation of thinking, which peaked in the third century BC and then came to a halt and with it the evolution of Greek science seems to have stopped. By the end of antiquity the only thing left of the previous broad spectrum of philosophical schools was a theologically oriented Neoplatonism. Dodds obviously considered this process, which is hard to explain, a threat to modern scientific and technical development where this same process could happen again, the premonitions of which he believed he had detected in the middle of the twentieth century.[29]

Although there are indeed similarities between the evolutionary trajectories of the two eras, the differences are just as significant; one of them is that antiquity never theorized the opposition that influenced Dodds: the juxtaposition of rational and irrational, faith and science, a "primitive and a "civilised" mentality, is a modern concept.[30] The view according to which faith is irrational behaviour if, *per definitionem,* faith means the acceptance of claims lacking a sound "scientific" justification, appeared in modern, or rather contemporary times. The opposition of faith and knowledge is but a few centuries old; in early modern discourse "knowledge" (which is often identified with science) is the result of rational thinking, as opposed to faith, which is irrational. Such an interpretation of these concepts raises serious issues, because in modern vernacular language and sometimes in (natural) scientific terminology the word "rational" usually means that it can be known empirically – since this is the most important characteristic of early modern science. This, however, is not the real meaning of rationality; moreover, the word can even be used as the antonym of empirical. This will have serious consequences as regards antiquity: while today we consider a known fact to be one that can be justified empirically, in antiquity the criterion for the same thing was logical deductibility. We do not know of any ancient attempts that tried to develop a scientific methodology in order to deduce generally valid assertions from information gained from the perceptible world.

Why can this become an issue of religious studies? Because it is not an imperative to associate religion with faith in the faith-knowledge opposition. The modern opposition of religion and science could come into being only because Christianity had defined itself with the concept of faith since the beginning; albeit they tried to comply with the criteria of rationality as well. The entire history of Christianity is accompanied by debates between the Church and people proclaiming doctrine that promised

---

[29] Dodds 1951, 237.

[30] Dodds does not define any of them and in certain cases he assigns labels of irrational and rational in a non-obvious way. He puts Plotinus, for instance, among the rational philosophers on several occasions (Dodds 1951, 246, 265, 285); but why would Plotinus be more rational than his contemporaries when his life goal was to achieve a mystical union with the gods and he believed that magic worked.

knowledge. This choice by Christianity is not even an imperative for Christianity; and other religions are not even concerned. Many religions define or have defined themselves as conveyors of knowledge.

  The most influential philosopher who opposed justifiable and certain knowledge to unfounded opinions was Plato; and the split between justified knowledge (*epistēmē*) and simple opinion (*doxa*) could not be further from the modern dichotomy of faith and science. Plato's *epistēmē* is not founded upon empirical demonstration, but on rational reasoning; and the source of certainty is ultimately the world of ideas; rational induction is basically *anamnēsis,* remembering the world of ideas that the soul had experienced before being born.[31] Not every philosophical school shared Plato's idealism, it was, nevertheless, a general view that the main criterion for scientific justification was to present an argument complying with the formal standards of logic. The concept of scientific experiment remained unknown in antiquity; it is typical that until Galileo no one thought of checking Aristotle's intuitive proposition that, when dropped, heavier objects reach the ground faster.[32] Lacking proper measuring devices they were unable to describe mathematically or geometrically their observations, except in the fields of astronomy and musicology; therefore they could not develop a method in the fields of physics, medicine, etc. that would have enabled them to set up hypotheses that could have been verified or refuted. Thus, the only measure of an arguments' truthfulness was the consistency of the logical argument. From this perspective, religions can be just as rational as any scientific field. Or, if we reverse the assertion: while modern science has no instrument to examine the supernatural and there are no scientific ways to justify or refute the existence of transcendence, ancient science considered religion a subject of enquiry; which paradoxically had a negative effect on the critical approach to religion. If a philosopher developed a system of arguments to refute the existence of the gods, another philosopher could create a new "scientifically founded" religion. We can find numerous examples for both attitudes; it was not the reasonability of the applied method, but the current intellectual trend that determined which attitude prevailed. Epicurus renounces the immortality of the soul and denies the possibility of the gods interfering with the earthly matters of humans – yet, the most beautiful part of Lucretius' epicurean educational poem is a hymn to Venus, in which he lionises Epicurus.[33] The stoic considers the religion of

---

[31] Plato, *Republic,* Book V, 476c–480a: *epistēmē* and *doxa*, VII. 514a–18b: the allegory of the cave.

[32] A few years ago Alejandro Amenabar made a film, Agora, about the life of a woman philosopher, Hypatia, the anachronism of which was mostly manifested in the research of Hypatia: the Hypatia of Amenabar discovers that the world is heliocentric and the planets have an elliptical orbit. Hypatia illustrates how we would not perceive if the Earth moved under us with a clever experiment. The reasoning that enabled Hypatia to anticipate the recognition of heliocentrism à la Kepler (and which was ignored because of Christianity) could actually have been proposed by any Greek intellectual six hundred years earlier, but it never happened. For the lack of experimental methods and the exceptions proving the rule, see Dodds 1951, 251.

[33] Lucretius, *De natura,* I. 1–43: Hymn to Venus, In V 8. He calls Epicuros *expressis verbis* a god, and compares the good emanating from the life work of the philosopher with the gifts of the other gods.

his ancestors a Roman superstition – however, it would be difficult not to consider the divine pneuma or the complicated eschatology of the Stoa, to be a religion from an anthropological point of view. It should be noted here, that another typical characteristic trait of antiquity was that the Roman intelligentsia, aristocracy and the priesthood did not base its worldview on traditional religion, but rather on the teachings of philosophers. This also meant that for centuries Roman state religion and its complex rituals were maintained by priests who did not believe in this religion.[34]

Over the course of the Roman Empire a process unfolded, which we could indeed describe as the turn towards religion and transcendence of the entirety of intellectual life. Dodds highlights two phenomena as the precursors of this: the rapid spread of astrology from the second century BC on; and the more or less concurrent appearance of the teachings on magical *sympatheia*;[35] they not only have irrationality in common, but also the fact that they vested their system with the appearances of fashionable philosophical-scientific speculations. Dodds rejected other explanatory frameworks for the transformation of the intellectual climate of the Roman Empire that were current at the time he was writing, but the process he proposed instead (one he characterized as a shrinking from freedom and responsibility) was much too psychologising and transient to be verified.

It is doubtful that the Greek people were aware of exposing themselves to fatalism when they decided to believe in astrology or magic besides or as a supplement to the cult of the old gods. The appeal of the religious phenomena of late Hellenism and the imperial period was neither their irrationality nor their fatalism, but rather the fact that they confusingly resembled science – with the difference that, obviously, it was much easier to understand them, they provided more of an experience, and invested the individual with a power that philosophy and especially its sceptical trends had rejected. The appeal was not the possibility of escaping responsibility, but the illusion of acquiring power.

The deceitfulness of the most respected forms of Greek divination, those practiced by oracles in trance was accepted by all; the divine was infallible, the oracle could not be mistaken, but the gods refrained from giving clear answers, they could mislead the person asking the question with their deceptive answers, or could cause his downfall with the truth through self-fulfilling prophecy.[36] This factor of uncertainty is missing from astrology and magic; an eventual mistake will be blamed on the feeble skills of the mediator. The Frazerian approach, considering magic as primitive

---

[34] Algra 2009, 236. Augustinus in *De civitate Dei* 6.5 discusses Varro's distinction between three types of theology: mythical, physical (i.e., philosophical) and civil theology. It is philosophical theology that comes the closest to the true cognisance of the gods; this religion, however, does not concern the people. Civil theology mostly concerned traditional practices of religion and rituals; and as Varro said, it was important for the citizens, especially the clergy.

[35] Dodds 1951, 246.

[36] This thought is explicitly expressed in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. The plot of the Oedipus myth cycle already known by Homer cannot be imagined without the interference of the Delphic oracle.

science, applied to ancient magic well; only this magic did not have a precedent in ancient Greek culture: it was a symptom of a declining culture in crisis.

Several new forms of cult and religious movements appeared, which were selling "Knowledge". This knowledge was by no means philosophical, and was not deductible through logical argumentation; it was rather the revelation of information, yet it was similar to philosophy since it promised knowledge of the true nature of the world. Having this revealed "knowledge" ensured salvation for the believer. The gnostic sects already included the word knowledge in their names; such as Christian, Jewish, or even pagan gnosis, which were all somewhat similar, yet evolved within different systems.

The renewed mystery cults also developed their own scientific theology, which was completely different from that of gnosis. The Mithras cult was the most widely-known, the central cultic image of which, the god Mithras killing a bull, represented a star-map or a calendar related to the celestial journey of souls, according to the current status of research; the knowledge and understanding of which could lead to the individual's salvation.[37] Although the theology of mysteries is less well-known due to the secret nature of cults, there are signs indicating that this approach had infiltrated other mysteries as well.

The so-called hermetic documents follow a different trend.[38] Their sacred texts are known, but we know nothing of the community that produced them, or whether the documents were the sacred texts of religious communities. The texts were typically written in the form of a dialogue, and they placed the source inspiring divine wisdom in Egypt: Hermes, who in the texts introduces his son, Asclepius, and the reader into the functioning of the world, is in fact the Egyptian Thot under a Greek name.

It is impossible to determine how many further, independent revelatory religious texts and associated trends existed; their survival and knowledge of them was often accidental. Somewhere in the second century a practicing sorcerer named Julian assembled the *Oracula Chaldaeica,* the Chaldean Oracles or, as we should rather interpret it, the Chaldean Revelations. In the texts the goddess of the moon, Hecate, describes the functioning of the world and the role that man plays in this. The text probably would have been forgotten if the Neoplatonic Porphyry had not rediscovered it and written commentaries on it. From that moment on the text essentially functioned as a sacred Neoplatonic text of unquestioned authority.[39] From a modern perspective, it is not clear why people in antiquity recognised a philosophy in these doctrines; but we should not forget that respected sacred texts were missing from the earlier religiosity of Greek and Latin territories; gaining wisdom did not happen through religious cults.

While religion came closer to philosophy, philosophy also embraced religion. In the first century the Pythagorean doctrine was revived, which was inclined towards

---

[37] Beck 2006.
[38] *Corpus Hermeticum*, 1945.
[39] Tóth 2013, 929–32, 934.

mysticism even in its classical form. Its most famous representative, Apollonius of Tyana was presented as a religious teacher and miracle maker in the famous third-century biography by Philostratus.[40] Diogenes Laertius was still reluctant in the third century to consider the Greek philosopher the Greek equivalent of the Indian brahman, the Celtic druid or the Persian magician;[41] and the epicurean Lucian also often mocked the "philosophers" for posing in the role of a prophet. However, examining the tendencies from the point of view of the anthropology of religion we find, indeed, that philosophy becomes a religion. Neoplatonism, appearing in the third century, completely turned towards the exploration of transcendence; and became the exclusive, dominant trend on the intellectual horizon of the antique world in a previously unknown manner.

The evaluation of the Neoplatonic School has always been ambivalent. While the great figures of the doctrine are worthy heirs of Greek philosophers and of their scientific traditions, their own intellectual system is actually a theological system, and while they seek to connect with the transcendent, they accept the crudest manifestations of magic or religion with a shocking naiveté. For Plotinus, the main goal was *unio mystica*: to unite with the divine in meditation. Although he considered contemplation to be the perfect path, he did recognise the mechanism of religious-magic rituals; moreover, he believed that prayer and magic had a near-identical mechanism of action: via the network of *sympatheia* systems our actions come into contact with the "surface" of the deity without reaching its essence, but it is sufficient to provoke a response, or a reaction: the deity listens to the prayer, fulfils the request of the magician without being aware of it.[42]

The new generation of Neoplatonists took this one step further and made religious rites part of philosophy. The focus is on Iamblichus because even the ancient observers thought that he was the one after whom the Neoplatonic school split into two branches of research. For Iamblichus there is a sympathetic relationship among the things that exist in the world (objects, living creatures, gods). He describes a magical principle: through the manipulation of an object connected to a deity we can indirectly affect the deity as well. Although meditation is the noblest way to unite with the gods, for most people this goal can be achieved through magical rituals performed on objects related to the deity.

The majority of Neoplatonic philosophers are characterized by an almost incomprehensible dichotomy: they are still representing sophisticated philosophical thinking, yet, they perform magic, fabricate talismans, provoke rain, etc.[43] Neoplatonism is characterized by a complete openness towards the "pagan theology" of the previous three centuries; in fact, it is essentially thanks to them that we know of these traditions. The role of Porphyry in the discovery of *Oracula Chaldaeica* has already been

---

[40] Dzielska 1986.
[41] Diogenes Laertios I:1–14.
[42] Tóth 2013, 932–33.
[43] Ibid., 934–48.

mentioned; it cannot be coincidental that the modern reconstruction of the Mithras theology would have been practically impossible without documents such as the *De antro nympharum* of Porphyry.

This was the context in which Christianity appeared and spread. Dodds simply classified Christianity among the other new irrational intellectual trends that ultimately led to the development of the medieval mentality. Although the conclusion was left unstated, it seems as if Dodds' opinion was that the Middle Ages would have developed a fairly similar intellectual milieu regardless of which religion or philosophy prevailed.

There is a partial truth to all of this: the Christianity of late Antiquity had several things in common with the pagan intellectual trends of the age; such as the belief that the written word is the truth only because it is written and because it is old. Another shared element is the almost full lack of immunity against fraud: the Greek philosopher believes that it is possible to revive a statue and have it talk or move with magic; the Christian Eusebius also suspected magic and not deception when he heard about statues desecrating Christianity.[44]

Meanwhile we can find profound and fundamental differences as well; and not only in terms of social function, or the fact that Christianity operates as an ecclesiastic organisation. Christianity is different from all the aforementioned cults and philosophies in that it has never offered knowledge, but faith to its followers. In the Gospels it is Christ who talks about faith and this concept of faith is related to the concept of trust according to the lexical meaning of the Greek *pisteuō,* which refers to an interpersonal relation and not to the acquisition of information. Theology started to use the concept of faith as an epistemological concept from very early on, by introducing the text of credos with it. The Nicene Fathers were not the first to start the *symbolon* with the verbal form *pisteuomen*/we believe; we find the same in earlier creeds that have sporadically survived; we find this in the Apostles' creed; the baptismal creed of Saint Cyrill of Jerusalem also begins with this word.[45]

The use of *pisteuō/credo* does not seem entirely necessary because the claims phrased by the creed are theological facts, which are either *expressis verbis* in the Holy Scripture, or can be rationally deduced from it. Christ, who was crucified, who died and was buried is not a matter of faith, but of knowledge, even for an atheist. However, the battles with the gnosis have made the word "knowledge" somewhat suspicious. In the context of the *symbolon,* faith has to be more than knowledge, yet this means less from an epistemological point of view. When Christianity emphasised belief instead of knowledge it chose an avenue that had not been typical of the religious and *philosophical* movements of the Imperial Age, thus the opposition of knowledge and belief played an important role in the course of the pagan-Christian polemics.

---

[44] Eusebius IX:2–3.

[45] The creed of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: *Catechesis V,* 12: PG 33, 521–24. Although not in a prominent place, the Quicumque credo also contains the verb *credamus.*

The first, partially known text qualifying as an anti-Christian pamphlet was written by Celsus, the content of which can be reconstructed with more or less certainty thanks to Origen who authored a monumental refutation to it. One of the focal arguments of Celsus was in relation to faith: Christians lack the effort to seek to know the world; instead of knowledge they choose unfounded faith.[46] Without being familiar with Celsus's philosophical background the modern reader can very easily misunderstand his argument. Celsus probably was a Platonist who accepted the existence and the non-corporeality of God, or the existence of providence. He calls this foundation rational knowledge, which he opposes to Christianity. A modern scientific approach would not find fundamental differences between Celsus' allegedly founded knowledge and Origen's unfounded faith. Origen also underlines another issue when he approaches the problem from the perspective of everyday psychology. At the time, there were numerous philosophical schools with many contradictory doctrines. Origen points out that nobody chooses their worldview by first becoming acquainted with all the available options, learning all about them and then deciding which one has the most substantial foundation. We simply pick one that feels appropriate based on our superficial knowledge of it and start to study it; this is the case with philosophy also: faith comes first, then comes knowledge.[47]

The transcendence of the Christian God cannot be contemplated independently of His cognoscibility, or more precisely the lack of it; and thereby the religious attitude becomes part of the coordinate system of faith and doubt; knowledge, the purely rational cognisance or rebuttal cannot be applied in relation to the cognisance of God. The additional consequence of this is that philosophy and theology become separable – a distinction for the establishment of which there was no appropriate terminological framework in Greek culture.

Sources

Aristoteles, *De vitiis et virtutibu*

Aristotle. 1935. *The Athenian constitution, the Eudemian ethics: On virtues and vices,* 488–503. London and Cambridge MA: William Heinemann Ltd. and Harvard UP.

Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*

Augustinus. 1955. *De civitate Dei.* In B. Dombart and A. Kalb, eds., *Corpus Christianorum.* (Series Latina XLVII/XIV 1–2.) Turnhout: Brepols.

Corpus Hermeticum

Hermes Trismegistus. 1945. *Corpus Hermeticum.* Ed. and trans. Arthur D. Nock and André-Jean Festugière. 2 vols. Paris: Société d'édition "Les belles lettres".

Diogenes Laertios

Diogenes, Laertius. 1925. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers.* Ed. R. D. Hicks. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

---

[46] Origen, *Contra Celsum* I. 9.
[47] Ibid., 10.

Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*

Eusebius. 1857. *Historia Ecclesiastica.* In Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 20. Paris: J. P. Migne.

Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days*

Hesiod. 1914. *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica.* Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP and William Heinemann Ltd.

Lucretius

Titus Lucretius Carus. 1969. *De rerum natura.* Recensuit: Joseph Martin. Lipsiae: Teubner.

Origenés: *Contra Celsum*

Origenes. 2001. *Contra Celsum libri VIII.* Ed. Miroslav Marcovich. Leiden: Brill.

Pindaros

Pindar. 1937. *The Odes of Pindar including the principal fragments.* Intr. and English trans. Sir John Sandys. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Plato, *Apology, Republic*

Plato. 1966. *Plato in Twelve Volumes.* Trans. Harold North Fowler, intr. W. M. R. Lamb. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP and William Heinemann Ltd.

Polybius

Polybius. 1904. *Historiae.* Ed. Theodor Büttner-Wobst. Lipsiae, Teubner.

Sallustius

Sallustius. 1926. *Sallustios: Concerning the Gods and the Universe.* Ed. Arthur Darby Nock. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Xenophón, *Memorabilia*

Xenophon. 1921. *Xenophontis opera omnia II.* Oxford: Clarendon.

References

Algra, Keimpe. 2009. "Stoic Philosophical Theology and Graeco-Roman Religion." In Ricardo Salles, *God and Cosmos in Stoicism,* 224–52. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Allen, Robert Edward. 1996. "The Trial of Socrates: A Study in the Morality of the Criminal Process." In William J. Prior, ed., *Socrates: Critical Assessments. Issues Arising from the Trial of Socrates,* II:1–14. London and New York: Routledge.

Bauman, Richard A. 1990. *Political Trials in Ancient Greece.* London and New York: Routledge.

Beck, Roger. 2006. *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire. Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Borgeaud, Philippe. 1988. *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dodds, E. R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational.* Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Dzielska, Maria. 1986. *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History.* Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider.

Giordano-Zecharya, Manuela. 2005. "As Socrates Shows, the Athenians did not Believe in Gods." *Numen* 52: 325–55.

Hawes, Greta. 2014. *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Kirk, G. S. and J. E. Raven. 1957. *The Presocratic Philosophers.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. With revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon.

Mansfeld, J. 1980. "The Chronology of Anaxagoras' Athenian Period and the Date of His Trial. Part II. The Plot against Pericles and His Associates." *Mnemosyne* 33: 17–95.

Meijer, P. A. 1981. "Philosophers, intellectuals and religion in Hellas." In H. S. Versnel, ed., *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World,* 216–64. Leiden: Brill.

Mikalson, Jon D. 2010. *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Ostwald, Martin. 1969. *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Oudemans T. C. W. and A. P. M. H. Lardinois. 1987. *Tragic Ambiguity: Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone*. Leiden and New York: Brill.

Pleket, H. W. 1981. "Religious History as the History of Mentality: the 'Believer' as Servant of the Deity in the Greek World." In Henk S. Versnel, ed., *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World,* 152–92. Leiden: Brill.

Reeve, C. D. C. 2000. "Socrates the Apollonian?" In Nicholas D. Smith and Paul B. Woodruff, eds., *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy,* 24–39. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Rhodes P. J. 1992. "[Richard A. Bauman: Political Trials in Ancient Greece. London New York Routledge 1990]." *The Classical Review* 42: 462.

Tóth, A. J. 2013. "Az újplatonikus theurgia." [Neoplatonic theurgy.] In Nagy Árpád Miklós, szerk., *Az Olympos mellett. Mágikus hagyományok az ókori Mediterraneumban,* II: 926–50. Budapest: Gondolat.

Ulucci, Daniel. 2011. "Contesting the Meaning of Animal Sacrifice." In Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, eds., *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice,* 57–74. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Versnel, Henk S. 1981. "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer." In Henk S. Versnel, ed., *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World,* 1–64. Leiden: Brill.

–. 2011. *Coping with the Gods. Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Veyne, Paul. 1988: *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

JEWS, CHRISTIANS, MUSLIMS

János Oláh

Reinforcing Faith
Traditional Ashkenazi[1] Food

The assertion that food plays a primordial role in the life of human beings is one that does not need to be demonstrated. Its crucial role has seen food become the carrier of various rites[2] and ritual activities.[3] As a result, eating, food and rituals have been associated from the earliest of times; leading them to become a central element of various religions and later distinctive and community-binding forces.

The establishment and axiomatic observation of dietary laws takes on meaning in the domain of belonging and of apartness. It strengthens religious consciousness and the bond and sense of belonging among people of the same faith. Thus, eating, which is already closely linked to every moment of our lives, also becomes an integral part of spiritual life.

The food we consume and introduce to our organisms is not an inconsequential matter. This is particularly true for a Jew; since eating is a religious act, and as such, it has its own specific rituals. There is an established set of rules and traditions for the consumption and preparation of food that usually have a significance beyond themselves; they teach and reinforce faith in the creator God, the God who has chosen the Jews, the God who gave specific and unique commandments and precepts to this one people.

The original meaning of a symbol: sign, image; ergo the representation of something that is not present, an inner representation. Human beings define their relationship to the world in symbols that they had created. "… our mind does not settle for accepting the different impressions, it associates and pervades every impression

---

[1] I put the Hebrew words in cursive. The word *Ashkenaz* (אַשְׁכְּנַז) occurs in Genesis 10:23 and Chronicles I, 1:6 (name of a person) and in Jeremiah 51:27 (country/people).

[2] By rite, in this case, I mean the particular form of social behaviour, which is mainly distinguished by the symbolic additional meaning it gains from other social activities.

[3] Ritual activities have a religious origin, therefore in traditional societies, and thus, in observant Jewish families, rituals are typically associated with God, regardless of it being a ceremony related to religion or to an event of human life. Eating habits and food represent this in a dual manner.

with the action of expression. The world of symbols and images they created is confronted with what we call the objective reality of things"[4] – wrote Ernst Cassirer. This is also the case with festive meals prepared according to Ashkenazi traditions.

The focus of this article is on the traditional food and dishes of the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe and primarily in Hungary – who almost exclusively belong to the Ashkenazi group of Jews – that either in their names (German or Yiddish), ingredients or mode of preparation refer to or teach the consumer about Judaism, about the Jewish belief system, about Jewish faith, about God, even in a profane but necessary, important, vital and frequent action, such as eating.

The well-known maxim applies here (even if originally it is from the nineteenth century, from Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin[5]): "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are."[6]

Generally, people who consume traditional Jewish food are Jews who respect traditions, that is, who are aware of their ancestors' traditions and the commandments of the Eternal God; or of the rules extrapolated from the commandments.

Jewish cuisine is regulated by the approximately three thousand year-old Sinaitic laws (the laws God gave and that were written down on Mount Sinai[7]), such as the basic concept of keeping kosher (*Kashrut*);[8] the roughly two thousand year-old Mishnah[9] and Talmudic[10] laws and commandments (the laws also given by God on Mount Sinai and that were redacted later[11]), the detailed rules of keeping kosher (*Kashrut*), and

---

[4] Cassirer 1973, 322.

[5] See for instance: Villeneuve and Dulaud 1952.

[6] *Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.* The original text can be found here: http://gallica. bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8626673x/f16.image. Accessed 12 August 2015.

[7] This is the "Written Torah", or in the vocabulary of Judaism: *Tanakh*. The word is an abbreviation acronym/*Notarikon* of <u>*Torah*</u> + <u>*Neviim*</u> + <u>*Ketuvim*</u> = Teaching/the five books of Moses + Prophets + Scriptures; that is, the "Old Testament" of the Protestant canon (or "Palestinian canon") of the Bible.

[8] Approximately: being fit, compliant and trustworthy from a ritual point of view. See for instance Oláh 2009a, 230–42.

[9] The meaning of the Hebrew word, *Mishnah*: 'study, review, teaching'. The first canonised selection of laws of the "Oral Torah" containing about five hundred years of "oral teachings" and commentaries. It was redacted by the *Tannaim* along the works of numerous generations of scholars at the beginning of the third century. Later it was completed with the *Gemara*, the analysis and commentary to the Mishnah, with which they compose the *Talmud*. For more on the *Mishnah* see for instance: http://zsido.com/fejezetek/misna-es-legfontosabb-kommentarjai/. Accessed 17 September 2015.

[10] *Talmud* is a Hebrew word, it means: 'learning, teaching'. The Talmud contains the entire life of the Jewry from the post-biblical period. When reading the Talmud we can see how ideas became laws (*Halakhah*); we see the starting point: the Torah (the five books of Moses) and the laws extrapolated from it (*Mishnah*); then the proceedings of the debate and discourse surrounding the process of becoming laws (*Gemara*). The Talmud also includes the *Aggadah*, the ethics, biblical poetry, philosophy and everything of post-biblical era Jews. For more on the Talmud see for instance: Dr. Blau 2006.

[11] This is the "Oral Torah", which usually refers to the oral teachings that the Holy One revealed on Mount Sinai at the same time as the "Written Torah" (*Tanakh*), which were redacted later.

the implementation precepts extrapolated and thoroughly elaborated in detail based on these laws and regulations among those who faithfully protect the traditions of Judaism.

As already mentioned, the dietary customs of a Jewish person are regulated by the *Kashrut*. The word *kasher* (in Yiddish: *kosher*) means 'appropriate', 'permissible', 'immaculate'. It is forbidden to consume food that does not comply with the laws of the *Kashrut*; it is considered *terefah* (Yiddish: *treif*).

The significance of consuming kosher food is that by keeping the culinary laws and regulations and by practicing this behaviour on a daily basis, Jews express their fidelity to God; they reaffirm their faith through this observance. Keeping kosher is the main criterion of religious purity; it is what makes assimilation to divine holiness tangible because as the Torah[12] says after listing the pure and the impure, the permitted and forbidden animals: "… you shall be holy, because I am holy."[13]

The laws of the *Kashrut* play an important role in the survival of the ideology of the "holy people",[14] i.e., Jewish people, the community God chose and to whom God has given special (also dietary) laws. According to the *Kashrut*, the species of the animal world can be and are usually grouped into three categories:
   – animals that live on the earth (domestic, wild, small and large animals);
   – animals that live in the water;
   – animals that live in the sky (birds).

The Torah writes about the kosher ear-marks of land animals as follows: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: These are the creatures that you may eat among all the animals on earth: Any animal that has a cloven hoof that is completely split into double hooves, and which brings up its cud that one you may eat."[15] If one of the two ear-marks is missing (split hoof, rumination) then the flesh of that animal is forbidden, it is unclean from a ritual point of view (*tamei*). Clean (*tahor*) animals are those that Ashkenazi Jews eat: beef and veal.

Of the things that are in the waters you can only consume fish, and only fish that have fins and scales. The fish usually consumed by Ashkenazi Jews are: carp, pike, and herring.

Of the animals living in the air, only birds can be eaten; except for the birds listed by name in the Torah.[16] The rabbinic tradition[17] lists various characteristics for the birds that can be eaten (for instance, to have a crop, to have a gizzard that can be peeled, etc.). Birds usually consumed by Ashkenazi Jews are: hen, chicken, turkey, goose.

---

[12] Torah = the five books of Moses.
[13] Leviticus 11:45.
[14] "For you are a holy people to the Lord, your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be His treasured people, out of all the peoples upon the face of the earth." – Deuteronomy 7:6.
[15] Leviticus 11:2–3.
[16] Leviticus 13:20; and Deuteronomy 14:12–18.
[17] Talmud, *Mas. Chullin* 61a.

Our sages have forbidden[18] the consumption of meals that contain meat (Yiddish: *fleishik*) and dairy (Yiddish: *milkhik*) at the same time; this is deduced from the sentence of the Torah claiming: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk!"[19]

According to the tradition of Judaism, the laid table is similar to the altar of the Temple, and the food on it is similar to the offerings.[20] Therefore the laying of the table also takes on significance. For instance, the Sabbath (Yiddish: *Shabbos*) place setting for the Friday dinner is as follows:

– white tablecloth;
– *barkhes/berkhes/challah/*braided (Hungarian: *kalács*) and a knife for cutting it, on a platter (covered);
– wine and a cup;
– salt;
– candleholders with white candles in them.

The white tablecloth (usually a nice satin or atlas silk[21] cloth) on the table is to remember that after the exodus from Egypt, during the wandering in the desert, manna rained from the sky[22] and it was like the white hoar frost that covered the ground and so the food provided by God's providence did not have to be picked up from the ground, according to the Talmud.[23] The Temple has perished, but for the past two thousand years the Jewish people retained it in their memory and have been waiting for the coming of the *Mashiach* (Messiah) when the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt.[24]

We set the *barches/berkhes* or *challah* (Yiddish: *chale*), or in some places they call it *taster*,[25] on the table covered with a white tablecloth.

The *barches* is made of enriched yeast dough; it is a special bread, "a cake resembling braided hair",[26] the taste and dough of which is more delicious than ordinary bread. In accordance with the instructions[27] for the Sabbath meal we always put two loaves of *barches* on the table,[28] because it reminds us of God's providence, of the food that rained down from heaven during the wandering in the desert, the *manna,* and of which, according to the Torah, they could gather double portion on Friday.[29]

---

[18] In detail: Talmud, *Mas. Chullin* 115b.
[19] Exodus 23:19, 34:26; and Deuteronomy 14:21.
[20] E.g., Talmud, *Mas. Berachoth* 55a; *Mas. Chagigah* 27a; and *Mas. Menachoth* 97a; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 41:6 and 44:4.
[21] The word "atlas" (אטלס) can be interpreted as an abbreviation: "Truly God is good to Israel …" – (סֶלָה) אַךְ טוֹב לְיִשְׂרָאֵל – Psalms 73:1.
[22] Exodus 16:35.
[23] Talmud, *Mas. Pesachim* 100b.
[24] E.g., Talmud, *Mas. Megilah* 17b; Jerusalem Talmud, *Mas. Ma'aser sheni* 5:2. (29b.); *RAMBAM: Mishneh Torah,* Laws of Kings 11:4.
[25] In Kohlbach 2007, 123.
[26] Ibid.
[27] *Shulchan aruch, Orach chaim* 274:1.
[28] This custom is already mentioned in the Talmud (*Mas. Shabbat* 117b).
[29] Exodus 16:22.

A more "prosaic" explanation claims that during the week they always used to put just one loaf of bread on the table, but this day is a day of celebration when we remember the day of rest following the creation of the world, the seventh day;[30] we rejoice in the memory of God's mighty act, and the rejoicing is coupled with an abundant meal, with the nourishment of the body.

The *barches* loaves are long-shaped, similar to the twelve loaves of "showbread" (because they were always present before God)[31] representing the twelve Hebrew tribes. The long-shaped challah loaves also represent the Hebrew *vav* (ו) letter that is essentially a long line, and its numerical value is six, therefore the two loaves add up to twice six: twelve, which refers to the twelve loaves of showbread.

By the same logic, the *barches* loaves are customarily braided from six strands (three plus three) because the total number of strands, twelve, reminds us once again of the twelve loaves of showbread.

Furthermore, the braided form of the *barches* also resembles an ear of wheat, which is the symbol of life and fertility, of divine providence.

The name *hallah* can be found in the Torah[32] and it reminds us of the gift given to the priests of the Temple,[33] to the *kohanim*, taken from the dough made of flour.

Currently there is no Temple and the *kohanim* cannot carry on God's service; but when God will send the *Mashiach* (Messiah).

A few words on the denomination of this sweet bread[34]: popular etymology usually traces the name *barches* from the Hebrew word, *brachot* or *barakhot* (*Ashkenazi* pronunciation: *brochays;* Yiddish: *brocheh*),[35] because we recite a blessing to God for the nourishing bread before and after consuming it.

Tamás Raj[36] proffered an interesting, albeit incorrect in my opinion, explanation of the word; namely that the Jewish population at the confluence of the Rhine knew about the popular belief according to which the River Rhine had a fairy called Berchta.[37] German popular belief says that Berchta is a girl with long braided blond hair who seduces men sailing on the Rhine. The women, as an act of defensive magic (to ensure that their husbands do not become prey of the fairy) braided the loaf bread modelling Berchta's locks of hair. The local Jews took over this technique of making challah and named it *barches* because of the similar sound of Berchta and *brochays*.[38]

---

[30] Genesis 2:3.
[31] Exodus 25:30; and Leviticus 24:5–9.
[32] Numbers 15:20.
[33] *Mishnah, Mas. Hallah* 1:9.
[34] On the challah see for instance: http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/2-1768.html. Accessed 27 August 2015.
[35] For instance: Jólesz 1987, 26. Ujvári 1929, 87. Also mentions: "Philology originates the word from the ancient German *brezita* (braid, twist) or from the ancient German word *berchtis* (related to offerings)."
[36] Tamás Raj (1940–2010). Rabbi, one of my masters who taught me much.
[37] For instance: Berchta/Perchta was not the "fairy of the Rhine". On Berchta/Perchta see for instance: Grimm 1882, 272; Frazer 1920, 240–43; Natko 2014; Mogk 1907.
[38] "54. A bárhesz." [The barches], in Raj 1999, 118.

One of the most prominent Hungarian-Jewish folklorists, Bertalan Kohlbach[39] associated the *barches* with the hair-cutting customs of *Ashkenazi* women.[40]

Outside Europe the braided loaf prepared in this Jewish way (without milk) is called *halah* everywhere; and within Europe it is only in Western Hungary that they call it *barches* (*berkhes*).[41]

In certain areas they refer to it as *taster* and its variations,[42] which could originate from a sentence in the Book of Proverbs: "The blessing of the Lord makes rich [*ta'ashir* (תַּעֲשִׁיר)= 'to make rich']."[43] And the fine-dough bread is a sign of wealth, which is thus the realisation of God's blessing, and making us aware of it.

The *Ashkenazi* Jews usually sprinkle the *barches* loaves with poppy seed before baking them. In Judaism the poppy seed represents fertility and wealth and it was also believed to have properties to ward off bewitchment.

It is customary to cover the *barches* loaves with a white tablecloth because according to commentators[44] the *manna* was embedded between two layers of dew or frost (above and below) so that it remains clean and desirable; this is how God took care of his people after being delivered from Egypt, and it is also ordained by the *Shulchan aruch,*[45] the code of Jewish law.[46]

There is another explanation for the covering of the *barches*: the rules say that before eating one should first say a blessing over the bread (in this case the *barches*) and only after that should we say the blessing over the wine; however, one cannot eat anything before reciting *Kiddush* over the wine on Shabbat (and on festival days); therefore we must cover the bread so that they "do not see and hear" the blessing said over the wine.[47]

---

[39] On his life and work see for instance: Oláh 2007.

[40] Kohlbach 2007, 123–29.

[41] Cooper 1993, 171–94.

[42] For instance, in the region of Frankfurt am Main: Judentartscher.

[43] Proverbs 10:22.

[44] According to the commentary of *Mechiltah* and *Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki/*RASHI to Exodus 16:13–14.

[45] *Shulchan aruch, Orach chaim* 271:9.

[46] The meaning of the Hebrew words *Shulchan aruch* (שֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ) is 'the set table'. It is the Code of Jewish Law authored in the sixteenth century summarising the rules of the *halakhic* rulings and the rabbinic traditions and decisions, and which are accepted as obligatory by the entire Jewry with minor modifications. The most fundamental source of the practical *halakha* is the work by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575) relying on the codex, *Arba'ah Turim* ('four rows') by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1269–1344), by adopting its structure. Its parts are: 1. *Orach chaim* ('manner of life': laws concerning everyday life, Shabbats and festival days); 2. *Yoreh De'ah* ('Teach Knowledge': laws of *Kashrut* and other religious commandments; 3. *Even Ha'ezer* ('The Stone of Help': laws of marriage and of family matters and related issues); 4. *Choshen Mishpat* ('Breastplate of Judgement': the *halakha*s of common law). The book published in 1565 in Venice took into special especially the traditional lives of Sephardic Jews (see for instance: Berenbaum and Skolnik 2007); therefore it was completed with the commentaries of a Polish rabbi: Moshe Isserles (1525–1572); he added commentaries to the *Shulchan aruch* from the perspective of the *Ashkenazi*, which was republished with his commentaries called *Hamappah* ('tablecloth') a few years later (1569–1571, 1574) in Krakow.

[47] *Kitzur Shulchan aruch 55:5.*

We also put salt on the table, and before eating we must salt a piece of the *barches*. The salt "sanctifies" the table to become an altar because the salt is the symbol, one of the signs of the covenant with God, as is written in the Torah: "… you shall not omit the salt of your God's covenant…"[48] The Torah says that one must offer salt on all the sacrifices,[49] and now the table is like the altar of the Temple and the meal is like the offerings;[50] once again, this reminds us of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, the symbolic dwelling place of God.

Salt is also the symbol of permanence, of incorruptibility; and as such, it represents the incorruptible covenant between God and the Jewish people.[51]

For breaking the *barches* or *halah* we use a sharp knife (remembering the slaughter of the animal sacrifices offered in the Temple, because this is a rule of kosher slaughtering[52]), which we cover during the *Kiddush* so that it is out of sight. This also reminds us of the altar of the Lord, during the building of which one should not wield any iron upon it, says the Torah.[53] The *Kitzur Shulchan aruch*[54] says: "… iron shortens man's life, while the altar prolongs man's life."[55]

Before slicing the *barches*, one has to say a blessing over the bread in which we thank the Lord who "brings forth bread from the earth".[56] The Talmud says: "It is forbidden for a man to enjoy anything of this world without a benediction; and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege. To enjoy anything of this world without a benediction is like making personal use of things consecrated to heaven (consume from the animal sacrificed to God), since it says: The earth is the Lord's and the fullness of thereof …"[57]

Before saying the blessing it is customary to put both of our hands on the *barches* loaves and to hold them up a little with our ten fingers. This refers to the fifteenth sentence of Psalm 145 that contains exactly ten words: "Everyone's eyes look to You with hope, and You give them their food in its time."[58] This also reminds us of God and that

---

[48] Leviticus: 2:13.

[49] E.g., Leviticus: 2:13; and *Yechezkel*, 43:24.

[50] E.g., Talmud, *Mas. Berachoth* 55a; *Mas. Chagigah* 27a; and *Mas. Menachoth* 97a; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 41:6 and 44:4.

[51] E.g., Numbers 18:19; and Chronicles II 13:5.

[52] *Shulchan aruch, Yoreh de'ah* 18:1–3.

[53] Deuteronomy 27:5.

[54] The abbreviated *Shulchan aruch,* or *Kitzur Shulchan aruch* (the abridgement of the *Shulchan aruch*) is a code of laws written by Shlomo Ganzfried (1804–1886) from Ungvár (Uzhhorod). It was translated into Hungarian and published in 1934 by Leo Singer (1877–1944), the rabbi from Várpalota.

[55] *Kitzur Shulchan aruch* 44:4.

[56] The integral text of the blessing is: "Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the World, who brings forth bread from the earth." For the Hebrew version see for instance: http://zsido.com/fejezetek/liturgia-az-etkezes-aldasai /. Accessed 14 August 2015.

[57] Psalms 24:1; and Talmud, *Mas. Berachoth* 35a.

[58] עֵינֵי-כֹל אֵלֶיךָ יְשַׂבֵּרוּ וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן-לָהֶם אֶת-אָכְלָם בְּעִתּוֹ.

he is the one who provides us with food, who nourishes the people, and we have to be grateful to him and thank him.

There must be also wine and cups/glasses for everyone on the table. Wine is necessary for the blessing and prayer sanctifying the festival day (*Kiddush*). Wine is always the drink of festival days, the symbol of joy and merriment: "And wine, which cheers man's heart."[59] They usually fill the glass to the brim referring to the following sentence of the psalm: "… my cup overflows. May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life…"[60]

One of the recurring phrases of the Lord's blessing is that he will provide grain, wine and oil.[61] We read about the production of wine for the first time in the Torah, in the story of Noah.[62] In the time of the patriarchs wine was a well-known beverage.[63] The expression "the blood of grapes"[64] suggests that they were drinking mostly red wine. Wine has always been a part of festive meals;[65] it was even part of the travel equipment.[66] The wine reminds us of the sacrifices offered to God to which they always added some wine.[67]

Besides the wine, among the Shabbat table's ornaments and indispensable accessories there are also the candles. One must light at least two candles before the start of the Shabbat.[68]

The table, set traditionally by the woman of the household and the lit candles greet the members of the family for the Shabbat dinner. The Friday Shabbat dinner within the Hungarian Ashkenazi community usually contains the following dishes:
– fish;
– meat broth;
– meat with sauce/with garnish;
– cake and/or compote.

The woman of the household who maintains the traditions and adheres to the rules of the *Kashrut* is limited in her culinary creativity. Such dietary restrictions require ingenuity and resourcefulness on the part of the cook. This is especially the case on the Shabbat and other festival days and holidays during the year.

Friday evening, after the Shabbat "comes in"[69] the early dinner begins with a fish starter: fish jelly, *gefilte fish* (stuffed fish), fish with walnuts, etc. Fish is the symbol of multiplication and fruitfulness for the Jewish people;[70] the numerical value of the

---

[59] Psalms 104:15.
[60] Psalms 23:5–6.
[61] E.g.: Deuteronomy 7:13; and Jeremiah 31:11.
[62] Genesis chapter 9.
[63] E.g., Genesis 14: 18 and 27:25.
[64] E.g., Genesis 49:11; Deuteronomy 32:14; Yeshayah 63:1–3.
[65] E.g., Samuel II. 13:28; and Chronicles I. 12:40–41.
[66] Judges 19:19.
[67] Exodus 29:40; Numbers 15:5; 28:7; and 14.
[68] *Kitzur Shulchan aruch* chapter 75.
[69] Ibid.
[70] See for instance: Genesis 48:16.

Hebrew letters of the word fish (ג = 3 + ד = 4 = גד = 7) reminds us of Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, when God, after having finished creation, "rested". The consumption of fish is already mentioned in the Talmud.[71]

Then the meal continues with a meat broth generally prepared with vegetables (carrots, celery, etc.), garlic, onion and some beans. The onion is significant because Shabbat dishes usually retain the taste of the *manna* that fell in the desert,[72] because in the *manna* one could taste all the flavours of the earth except for the onion (and the watermelon, the cucumber and the leek because these are harmful to pregnant and nursing women).[73]

Consuming garlic on Friday evenings is an old custom; it is even recommended in the Talmud and is attributed to Ezra, he ordained that: "the garlic be eaten on Fridays because it increases virility".[74]

The onion has seven layers of fleshy leaves that remind us of the Shabbat, the seventh day of the week when the Lord rested.

It is also customary to put sliced (black) radish on the table and to dip it in salt and eat it with the meat-broth. This is, on the one hand, a practical thing; since one can no longer salt the soup because it is part of the cooking process and it is forbidden to cook on Shabbat;[75] on the other hand, consuming radish all year round is the symbol of God-given wealth, as is stated in the Talmud.[76]

The next course is the meat from the broth served with a sauce; or roast meat with garnish (*tzimmes*), from the German *zum essen* or from the word *zimt* ('cinnamon'), which usually contains some kind of sweet fruit with cinnamon). Consuming meat is always a sign of wealth; one of the important elements of the "goods" provided by God. As a sauce they often serve tomato sauce, horseradish sauce or garlic sauce.

The usual garnishes are: *farfel* (from the Yiddish word *farfallen,* which means: 'lost'; referring to how everyone "loses" their sins if they observe Shabbat according to the Lord's commandments); potato *kugel* or just *kugel* or *kigli* (its round shape reminds us of the *manna* fallen from Heaven, the food provided by God); or mashed onion potatoes. The dinner is usually completed with a cake, compote and/or fruits.

The Shabbat breakfast, which is eaten around noon, after coming home from the synagogue, is usually cakes and sweets. Such as the *kichlach* (sweet biscuit), *delkelekh* (pastry filled with jam or cottage cheese), *eier kuchen* (milk challah), different cakes and biscuits eaten with tea or coffee; before which it is customary for the men to take a shot of *pálinka* (brandy/firewater/schnaps/*bronfn*/ *slivovitz*) to "burn up" God's potentially unfavourable judgement for the time to come; and for the women to drink

---

[71] Talmud, *Mas. Shabbath* 118b.

[72] Numbers 11:7.

[73] *Sifrei*: Numbers 11:5. A *Sifrei* (סיפרי) is an Aramaic word meaning: books. Selection of *halakhic Midrash* related to the fourth and fifth book of Moses made in the third century.

[74] Talmud, *Mas. Baba kama* 82a refers to the third sentence of the first psalm: „… That bringeth forth its fruit in its season …"

[75] *Kitzur Shukchan aruch* 80:3.

[76] Talmud, *Mas Berachot* 57b.

a glass of something sweet to signal their desire to "sweeten" the Lord's heavenly judgment.

Lunch traditionally starts with an egg dish prepared with onion and egg and liver (Yiddish: *gehakt leber and ey aun tsibele,* Hungarian Yiddish: *eier laiber cibeles*); followed by the main course: *cholent.* The numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew word for liver (כבד = ד =4 = ב + 2 = כ + 20 = 26) is the same as the numerical value of the four letters of the Lord's name, the Tetragrammaton (יהוה = ה = 5 + ו = 6 + ה = 5 + י = 10 = 26), and thus, refers to God.

Eggs are, on the one hand, among the Jewish symbols of grief (according to the tradition this is when Joseph, Moses (*Moshe*) and David died,[77] but since it is forbidden to grieve on Shabbat[78] we mourn "in secret" because the shape of the egg is unrecognisable) and of fertility and multiplication. The egg represents the belief according to which it has no opening, no "mouth" and the Lord will do the same in defence of his people and will shut the mouths of those who slander them.

The main dish is the *cholent,* which is a one-dish meal of beans prepared with meat (smoked beef or goose), with barley, *ganef/ganev* (a sort of dough kneaded into a long shape, which absorbs the flavours and the fat) or *helzel* or *halsli* (stuffed goose or chicken neck skin). There are several theories about the etymology of the word *cholent,* the dish prepared on Friday, which is still warm for the Shabbat lunch.

A few of these theories are as follows: the origin of the word is the French *chaud lit* ('warm bed'); or "*chaud lent*" ('hot/warm slow') because in some places they kept the dish warm under the covers of the bed; or it comes from the German *Schul ende* ('end of the synagogue (praying)') because the *cholent* is eaten after the morning and noon prayers, as the Shabbat lunch.

The last course of the lunch is the *parve* desserts that do not contain dairy products: sweets made with apple,[79] *lokshen kugli* (it is a sweet noodle pudding baked in a cake-pan, with eggs; its round, spherical form reminds us of the *manna* that fell in the desert, the food given by God) or *rugelach* (a cinnamon or cocoa filled pastry crescent).

Before the Shabbat goes out ("before the Sabbath is over"), there is a third meal ordained[80] to be consumed called the *Seudah Shilshit* (Yiddish: *shalesudes*), which is a sort of afternoon snack with sweets and fish (sardines or *gehakte herring*: salted herring with apple, onion and a hard-boiled egg); by eating a water-dwelling animal, which represents wealth, we signal our expectations for the coming week to the Lord.

---

[77] The Talmud says (*Mas. Kidushin* 38a) that the Holy One takes back the soul of true people on the same day that they were born.
[78] *Kitzur Shulchán aruch*, 219:1.
[79] The apple is the old symbol of fertility; and the sentence of the Song of Songs ("As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons" – 2:3) is often applied to the Jews.
[80] *Kitzur Shulchán aruch*, 77:16.

During the days of *Rosh Hashanah*,[81] the Jewish New Year, we aspire to be given a good and sweet new year by the Lord. The food consumed during this period reflects this aspiration: mostly sweet and "fat" (greasy) meals, representing New Year's expectations we have for the Lord who decides the fate of every living creature for the upcoming year.[82]

The *barches* is not elongated, like on the Shabbat, but it is braided in a round shape and instead of salt we dip it in honey; and after having said the blessing we eat it in hope of a God-given sweet and rich year. The round shape of the *challah* may represent wholeness and perfection because it rounds up on itself, it has no end and no beginning, therefore it is perfect, which is what we expect from the Holy One for the upcoming year. The *barches* might also refer to the vicissitude of fate because these are the days of judgement when the Lord passes judgement on every living creature, says the Talmud.[83]

Traditionally we also eat pretty, round apples also dipped in honey for the above-explained reasons. (It is also customary to eat desserts with apple, such as apple pie and/or apple compote.)

It is customary to put a fish (the symbol of multiplication) with its head on the table, referring to God's promise: "And the Lord will set you at the head, and not at the tail …"[84]

It is also customary to eat pomegranates, which have many seeds (according to the tradition, six-hundred and thirteen), which is also the number of commandments God gave to man in the Torah.[85]

Carrots in any form (with honey, steamed, grated or sliced with cinnamon, or just more carrots in the broth) are also on the festive table because the Hebrew consonants making up the Yiddish word for carrots and the German word for multiplying (*mehren/Möhren*) are identical; also the consonants of the Hebrew words for carrot (*gezer)* and judgement (*gezar*) are identical, which indicate the good and "sweet" judgement that they expect from the Lord for the upcoming year. The sliced carrots resemble gold coins, which also represent wealth, the expectation and desire for the New Year.

The traditional meal contains goose because the Yiddish word for goose (*gandz*) sounds similar to the Yiddish word for whole (German: *ganze*), and we hope that the New Year will be a "whole" because hopefully God decided so at *Rosh Hashanah*.

---

[81] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 36–40.
[82] Talmud, *Mas. Rosh Hashana* 16a–b.
[83] Talmud Yerushalmi, *Rosh Hashanah* II.5.
[84] Deuteronomy 28:13.
[85] See for instance: Kraus 2004.

Before the twenty-five-hour fasting of *Yom Kippur*[86]one is required to *Shemini Atzeret*[87] we start to say the Central Prayer[88] in the synagogues including the petition of rain and this is when we start to give prayer asking God to give rain for the lands. It was also customary to eat with the broth or separately a sort of woven/braided noodle. According to Bertalan Kohlbach, this noodle resembles earthworms. "The farmer returning from the synagogue wants to see the creeping worms after a country-wide rain."[89]

At the celebration of the Torah, the *Simchat Torah*,[90] the traditional meal is stuffed cabbage or *holishkes* (Polish-style cabbage rolls). This day marks the conclusion of the Torah readings in synagogues, the public reading of the scrolls containing the Lord's actions and commandments, and the beginning of a new cycle of readings. One cycle ends and another begins, which is a symbol of wholeness and perfection; as are the dumplings of the stuffed cabbage due to their shape.

At *Hanukkah*,[91] during the days remembering the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, we eat meals and pastries fried in oil to remember the miracle of the oil and how God helped his people. Such pastries are doughnuts (Hebrew: *sufganiyah*, in certain regions *pampushka*) and *tarkedli/talkedli* (Czech doughnut) which represent wholeness and perfection with their round shape; pancakes (*blinches*); *langos* or *fladen* and *chremsel* (also called *hremsli/kremsli, latkes*), a flat cake made of grated potato with flour, garlic, salt, pepper fried in oil to golden brown.

Traditionally during the days of *Hanukkah* it is customary to consume dairy dishes because this is when the events of one of the Apocrypha (books excluded from the Tanakh), the Book of Judith, occurred.

It is customary to serve dairy dishes (sweet cheese *delkli* or *delkelekh*, pastry filled with cottage cheese) during the *Hanukkah* period to honour the heroic act of Judith carried out with the help of God.

At *Purim*,[92] on the day commemorating the saving of Persian Jews, the day celebrating God's help, one must prepare a festive meal, as did our ancestors make: "… it a day of feasting and joy."[93] The special dishes of *Purim* tend to be a great variety of desserts; however, it is also customary to eat some sort of vegetable stew; also soup with *kreplach* (dumplings) and stuffed cabbage. Eating stew is the symbol of Queen Esther having observed the rules of *Kashrut,* the rules set by God, even during her exile at the Persian Royal Court.

---

[86] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 40–44.
[87] See for instance: Ibid., 49–50.
[88] The eighteen blessings (שמונה עשרה) or Amidah (תפילת העמידה) is the central prayer recited three times a day in which we ask from God all kinds of things related to every aspect of life, such as healing patients, punishing sinners, the return of the Messiah. See for instance: http://www.myjewish-learning.com/article/the-amidah/. Accessed 17 September 2015; Feuer 1990.
[89] Kohlbach 2007, 130.
[90] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 64–65.
[91] Ibid., 65–69.
[92] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 50–52.
[93] Esther 9:17.

The cabbage leaves covering and hiding the ground meat dumplings in the soup (*kreplach*) refer to the words "Purim letter"[94] in the Book of Esther, where the name of the "more valued" part of the dish is concealed by the leaves, as is the name of the Lord in this Biblical book.

Among the traditional desserts we find *flódni* (a sort of confection, multi-layered with poppy, apple, walnut, and plum jam; or walnut, apple, poppy and plum jam); *kindli* (walnut or poppy roll shaped like a baby wrapped in a blanket, so the dough is pinched at the ends); *kranzli* (round shaped cake); *lekuch* or *lekach/leykech* (honey cake, with walnut of which one could mould the characters in the Book of Esther); in many places doughnuts and the most popular *Purim* dish is the *hamantash* (*homentash, ozne Haman*).

The four layers of *flódni* (from the German *Fladen* [flat cake]) represent the desire for wealth, beseeching the Lord to grant a rich harvest (*Purim* is usually in early spring) and other forms of wealth.

The name of *kindli* (from the German word for children, *Kinder*) represents the ten sons of Haman who were hanged along with their father, according to the Book of Esther,[95] which is when the Jews escaped their execution in Persia.

The *kranzli* (from the German *Kranz* [wreath]) and the donut symbolize, with their round shape, wholeness and perfection that the Lord will hopefully provide.

Hamantashen are triangular cookies filled with poppy seed or (plum) jam the shape and consumption of which have several explanations. According to one explanation, it is the combination of the German words for poppy seed (*Mohn*) and bag (*Taschen*) with the Hebrew article (*Ha*-Mohn-Taschen), which also includes the word Haman (*Ha-Mohn*). Some say that they are shaped like Haman's cap; others claim they used to cut the ears of those condemned to death (*oznei Haman* = Haman's ear). Some believe that the three angles remind us of the three patriarchs because God's help came through the merits of the ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) at *Purim.* The triangular pastries filled with poppy seed or (plum) jam might also represent one of the characteristics of the Book of Esther, namely that the essence is hidden in everything: the filling of the pastry and in the Book of Esther the omnipresent but never-mentioned God.

During *Pesach,*[96] the celebration of the exodus from Egypt, the eating habits of observant Jewish families change completely; they eat different meals than usual; instead of bread and *barches* they eat *matzo/matzah/mazzoth* (unleavened flatbread, Yiddish: *matzot/matzos*), for which they grind flour only used to prepare this food, according to the commandments given by the Lord.[97]

---

[94] Esther 9:29.
[95] Esther 9:14.
[96] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 53–59.
[97] Leviticus 23:6.

The night when *Pesach* or *Passover* ("comes in") is called the *Seder*[98] when we commemorate God's liberation of the Jews from Egyptian captivity with a festive dinner. The following items are required on the festive dinner table:

- *Seder* plate (with symbolic foods);
- wine (at least 350 ml per person);
- glass (for everyone);
- a large and ornate cup (*Eliyahu*/Elijah's cup);
- a hard-boiled egg;
- a bowl with salt water;
- three ceremonial *matzos*;
- festive candles (at least two).

We put a comfortable armchair at the table for the *Seder* leader, which indicates that we are free people in the good will of the Lord and therefore we eat in an easy, comfortable position (leaning to the left). Both leaning and the whole dinner honour ancient eating customs.

On the *Seder* plate we put the following symbolic foods:

- on the upper left is a roasted/hard-boiled egg (*beitzah*).

The egg represents the holiday offering brought in the days of the Holy Temple; but it is also the symbol of grief; the grief we feel and keep until this day for the destruction of the Temple. (The day of commemoration and of mourning of the Temple (*Tisha B'Av*[99]) and the first day of *Pesach* always fall on the same day of the week.) The egg also reminds us of human life, of transiency, fragility and the vicissitude of fate; but also of birth with the help of God, the arrival of a new life and of rebirth.

- on the upper right side of the table a piece of roasted meat is placed (*zeroa*), usually chicken neck or wing.

The roast meat on the bone represents the lamb that was the special *Pesachal* sacrifice in the Temple, which had to be roasted whole without breaking a bone. The straight wing represents the outstretched arm because: "… the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm …"[100]

- under the egg and the roast meat, in the middle are the bitter herbs (*maror*), usually horseradish.

The bitter herbs represent the bitterness of life in Egypt, which was ended with the help of God.

- on the right, under the bitter herbs is the *charoset* (a sweet paste of apple, walnut/almond/fig, cinnamon and wine).

It represents the mortar and bricks made by Jewish slaves during the Egyptian captivity. The liberation from slavery happened with the help of God.

- on the left, under the bitter herbs is another kind of vegetable (*karpas*).

---

[98] For more detail see: *Kitzur Shulchan aruch,* chapter 119.
[99] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 93–95.
[100] Deuteronomy 26:8.

It can be parsley, celery or boiled potato, which alludes to spring time, to rebirth and to the eternal regeneration; to God renewing nature every year.

- at the bottom of the plate we put bitter herbs (*maror/chazereth*) again; usually horseradish, endive or lettuce.

This will be consumed between two pieces of *matzos* with the *charoset* in commemoration of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, God's symbolic place of being.

Beside the *Seder* plate we put a bowl of salt water on the table, which alludes to the tears and sweat of enslavement in Egypt, from which the Jews were liberated with the help of God.

Under/beside the *Seder* plate (separately) there are three pieces of *matzos* that either represent the three groups making up the Jewish people: *Kohanim*, *Levites* and the rest (*Israelites*); or the three patriarchs of the Jews: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who faithfully carried out the Lord's commandments. For practical reasons we always put three breads on the table (in this case it can only be unleavened cake, which is why we us *matzos* because during festive meals there has to be two whole breads present; but since we break one we put three *matzos* on the table at the meal's beginning.

Furthermore we put wine/grape juice on the table and a glass for everyone. We have to drink wine/grape-juice four times during the dinner because the Torah mentions God's help[101] in escaping Egypt with four phrases.

The feeling of liberation, of freedom is the feeling of joy; and wine is the symbol of joy because: "… wine cheers man's heart" – states the psalm.[102]

The other (filled up) glass, the ornate cup on the table is for the prophet Eliyahu/Eliyah because in the book of Malachi it says[103] that Eliyahu will come as the forerunner of the Messiah,[104] he will bring the news of the Messiah's return and we welcome the prophet arriving from a long journey with the beverage of joy, with wine. For this reason it is customary in Hungary to sing the song "*Szól a kakas már …*"[105] [The rooster crows], praying for redemption, known throughout the world; a song composed by Rabbi Yitzhak Taub according to tradition.[106]

If all these things are set on the table then, after returning from the synagogue, we light the candles and say the *Kiddush* (blessing said over the wine to consecrate the feast) and the *Seder* can start following the traditional order of the "script", the *haggadah*: first by telling the story of the exodus, then eating the symbolic foods, then eating dinner, saying thanks and singing.

---

[101] Exodus 6:6–7.
[102] Psalms 104:15.
[103] Malachi 3:23–24.
[104] *Mishnah, Eduyot* 8:7.
[105] You can listen to it, for instance at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuTuKufvgO4. Accessed 20 September 2015.
[106] Rabbi Yitzhak (Eizik, Ájzik) Taub (1751–1821), the *tzadik* (righteous man) or *rebbe* (Yiddish: rabbi) from Nagykálló (Yiddish: *ha*kalever), the founder of a rabbi dynasty. http://www.geni.com/people/Admor-Isaac-Taub-of-Kaliv-1st-Kaliver-Rebbe/6000000007016587264. Accessed 20 September 2015.

Traditionally the festive Passover *Seder* menu is as follows: chicken broth (bouillon) with *matzo* ball (*kneidlach*); the meat from the broth with garnish (mashed potatoes with onions, *matzah farfel*); compote and *matzah* cake. On the second day of *Pesach* one of the lunch courses is boiled (smoked) beef tongue to commemorate the turn of "fate" with the help of God, and instead of the Jews it was the one wanting to kill the Jews, Haman and his ten sons who were hanged that day[107] and their tongues hung on the gallows.

In the days of the festival and the intermediary "semi-festival" (week) days, food can only be consumed with ingredients that comply with the special Passover kosher requirements and are labelled *Kasher le Pesach* (kosher for Passover); because this certification (*hechsher*) means that it contains no *chametz* (leavened product). With this food we complete the order of "… you shall eat unleavened cakes for a seven day period!",[108] which the Lord commanded us to do in the Torah.

During the festival of *Shavuot*,[109] the celebration of the "revelation" by God, of the giving of the Torah, we eat sweet dairy dishes, the consumption of which has several explanations. Some eat milk and honey because of the allegorical interpretation of the following sentence alluding to the Torah: "honey and milk are under your tongue …"[110] The milk and the honey also represent the land flowing with milk and honey, which the Torah mentions as the land God promised to the Jews.[111]

Moreover, our sages say that milk is as "sweet" as the Torah because as the milk nourishes the infant, the words of the Holy One nourish and strengthen the Jews. The numerological (*gematria*) explanation claims that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of milk (חלב) is forty, which refers to the period of forty years of wandering in the desert ordered as a punishment by God;[112] and also to the forty days that Moses spent on Mount Sinai with God[113] after which he came down with the two stone tablets and the promise of forgiveness.

Eating dairy dishes at the beginning of the dinner is explained with an interesting observation; namely, that we read the following words in the Torah:
"…מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה בְּשָׁבֻעֹתֵיכֶם…" ("… / when you offer up / a new meal offering to the Lord, on your festival of Weeks …), the first letters of which give the word "מחלב", milk. They traditionally eat potato or green bean soup with sour cream; *barches* 'enriched' with butter; sweet cheese *delkli* or *delkelekh; lokshen kugli*; cheese pie; sweet cheese noodles; cheese pancakes; pudding.

The period between the first day of the month of *Av* until the ninth (*Tisha B'Av*) is called in Yiddish *nayn teg* (nine days). It was during these days that the destruction of the symbolic place of God, the Temple in Jerusalem, became widely known; the

---

[107] See Book of Esther 9:14.
[108] Leviticus 23:6.
[109] See for instance: Oláh 2009b, 59–63.
[110] Song of songs 4:11.
[111] Exodus 3:8.
[112] Deuteronomy 1:3.
[113] Exodus 34:28.

Jews were not able to perform the meat and wine offerings.[114] In these days tradition-ally no meat, no meals prepared with animal fat and no wine is consumed (except for the sanctification of Shabbat and the commanded and obligatory (*mitzvah*) feasts,[115] which is why we also call it "dairy days".

In the eating customs of observant Jewish families, family celebrations and festi-val days play a special role. The name of the Friday evening before newborn sons are admitted into the bond of the covenant of Abraham (*brit milah*[116]) and marked with the seal of the covenant with God, is *Shalom Zachar*, literally meaning 'welcoming the male' or 'peace be upon the male'. On this evening the parents give a *seuda* (festive meal) and the people present eat cooked lentils, beans or peas because these crops do not have an opening/mouth (פה, the numerical value of the letters of which is 85); and the infant has no *milah* yet (מילה, the numerical value of the letters of which is also 85), which is the sign of the covenant with God.

On the night before the *brit milah* guests are traditionally invited again, spending the night awake studying the Torah, praying to God for the health of the baby, the happiness of the parents, reciting psalms; this is how they keep the evil demons away who want to harm the infant. This night is called in Yiddish the *vach nacht* or *vakh-nakht* ('watch night'), or with a Hebrew-Yidddish term: *vaad nacht* or *vaadnakht* (night of the gathering). This night and the subsequent day following, the *brit milah*, they often eat *zocher* peas (Yiddish: *zocher*, split peas cooked in salt water with black pepper). The explanation for this is that the consonants of the words *zachar* (Yiddish: *zocher*) [boy, male], and the word z*echer* (memory, remembrance) are identical (זכר); this is the remembrance of the covenant between God and Abraham's descendants, of the *brit milah*. The spherical shape of the peas alludes to the circle that is about to start, because the boy is soon entering the covenant between God and the Jews, the cove-nant of many generations that never ends. Furthermore, the pea is a "seed", and thus, it refers to the promise of God written in the Torah: "… I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore."[117]

In Yiddish the *brit milah* is called *bris* (archaic: *yidishen*, which basically means to 'make him a Jew'); in Latin it is called *circumcision*; when God and the Jewish male infant seal a covenant and the eight day-old baby boy is marked for this occasion. After that the parents invite the people present for a *seudat mitzvah* (a festive meal for the fulfilment of a commandment), serving them deserts and wine or *pálinka* (brandy/ firewater/schnaps/*bronfn*/*slivovitz*).

According to tradition, the *pidyon haben*,[118] the redemption ceremony of the first-born son (since he is still God's possession) is also performed in the framework of the *seudat mitzvah*. After the ceremony the *kohen* blesses the child first with Jacob's

---

[114] See Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews,* X:7. http://www.church-bg.eu/blog/dokumentumok/. Accessed 20 September 2015. http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-10.htm. Accessed 20 April 2016.
[115] *Kitzur Shulchan aruch,* 122:8.
[116] See in detail: *Shulchan aruch, Yoreh De'ah* chapters 260–266.
[117] Genesis 22:17.
[118] See in detail: *Shulchan aruch, Yoreh De'ah* chapter 355.

blessing,[119] followed by the *kohanim* benediction;[120] finally he pronounces a blessing over the wine before the traditional meal of pastries mostly consisting of *lekuch* or *lekoch/leykech* and *kihli* or *kichlach* (sweet cookies).

When they start to study God's "doctrine" on a regular basis, that is, when they first go to the *cheder* (elementary school), children bring honey cookies shaped like or decorated with Hebrew letters as snacks. This "sweetened" the learning of the *alef-bet*, the Hebrew alphabet.

When a girl turns twelve it is customary to have a *bat mitzvah*,[121] the ritual of initiation into adulthood. At the age of twelve a Jewish girl comes of age and she becomes responsible for observing the negative commandments of the six hundred and thirteen commandments given by God in the Torah, the number of which is three hundred and sixty-five, according to the Talmud:[122] "All affirmative precepts limited to time, men are liable and women are exempt; but all negative precepts are binding upon both men and women …"– says the Talmud.[123] Usually after the initiation held at *Shavuot*, according to tradition, the parents invite the people present at the ceremony to a *Kiddush* (a festive meal after having said blessing over the wine), where they serve wine and cookies.

When a boy turns thirteen[124] and becomes a fully integrated member of the community who may be counted as a member of the *minyan* (the praying quorum consisting of ten adult Jewish males) and is responsible for observing the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah given by God, then they have his *bar mitzvah*. The "initiation into adulthood" is usually performed Shabbat morning, after which the parents invite the people present to a *Kiddush* where they serve wine and cookies.

---

[119] Genesis 48:20.

[120] Numbers 6:24–26.

[121] The festive ritual was first introduced in a German Jewish reform congregation in 1815 along the guidelines of Israel Jakobssohn. In Hungary, the first such ceremony was held in 1860 by Wolf Alois Meisel, the rabbi of the Dohány Street Synagogue. The initiation, or with the archaic term: "confirmation" (the terminology of Protestant churches) does not always take place at the first *Shavuot* after turning twelve, as it is the custom nowadays; there are precedents that the adult girl takes a ritual vow after the morning prayer (*shacharit*) on the first Shabbat following her twelfth birthday. In Hungary, before the *Shoah*, the Holocaust, it was often at the last class-day ceremony that the twelve (later fourteen) year-old girls were initiated, a practice started by the rabbi of Pest and Jewish *amunh lere*m ('faith teacher') Izrael Bak during the second half of the nineteenth century.

[122] Talmud, *Mas. Makkoth* 23b.

[123] *Misna, Kiddushin* 1:7.

[124] The initiation or acceptance into adulthood of thirteen year-old boys is not described in the Torah but our sages have found several allusions to this date. For instance, they deduced it from the numerical value of words: "This people, which (זו) I formed for Myself; they shall recite My praise" (Isaiah 43:21), the numerical value of 'which' is 13 (זו = ז = 6 + ו = 7 = 13),, therefore man is obliged to praise the Holy One from this age onward, this is man's main duty. In the time of the Talmud a thirteen year-old boy was considered a major (Talmud, *Mas. Baba metziah* 96a); nonetheless, it was not until the seventh century, the age of Geonim that we saw the father praising the L-rd for being exempted, because before that he was legally responsible for his son's actions. (And the expression *bar mitzvah* is even younger, it has only been in use since the fourteenth century.)

The engagement, or at least the official part[125] ordained by Jewish law (*halakha*) usually takes place under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy, in Yiddish: *khupe*); but in traditional families the parents organise a gathering where they sign a written agreement stipulating the conditions of the marriage. At the feast organised for this occasion they also serve milk and honey with the traditional pastries, alluding to the lines of the Song of Songs: "Your lips drip flowing honey, O bride; honey and milk are under your tongue."[126]

At a traditional *Ashkenazi* wedding they serve the following menu: fish (fish jelly or stuffed fish), which is one of the Jewish symbols of multiplication, reproduction, fertility; followed by a chicken soup "gilded" with saffron (Yiddish: *gold zipp*); cooked and roasted meat, which indicates well-being and prosperity, one of the important things among the "goods" God gave us; and pastries (*lekuch* or *lekoch/leykech* cakes, cookies); and the beverages are kosher wine, *pálinka* (brandy/firewater/schnaps/*bronfn/slivovitz*) and (nowadays) sodas. The whole feast starts with the wedding *barches*, which is sweet and sometimes enriched with raisins.

There are less joyful moments in life when someone has to mourn.[127] It is customary for the mourners to go from the cemetery to the flat of the deceased where they sit on low seats, after having finished fasting they eat hard-boiled eggs and bread rolls or bread, which they sprinkle with ash instead of salt.

After that they usually drink a little wine, the "cup of consolation",[128] because as the Talmud says: "Wine was created for the sole purpose of comforting mourners …."[129] The round shape of the egg and the bread roll represent the continuity and cyclical character of life;[130] it is also a symbol of the mourner who becomes withdrawn. Sprinkling ash is an ancient tradition; it has been known as a sign of grief since the time of the *Tanakh*.[131]

According to another tradition, the mourners eat a vegetable stew made of lentils[132] or beans, remembering that just as the seeds have no opening/mouth,[133] they should also make peace with the inevitable, with the judgment of G-d, and not to feel indignant and discontent about it.

As I have demonstrated, eating habits and preparation of food have their established set of rules and traditions that usually have a significance beyond themselves. They teach and reinforce faith in the creator God, the God who had chosen them, the God who gave specific and unique commandments and precepts to the Jewish people.

---

[125] See in detail: *Kitzur Shulchan aruch,* chapter 165.
[126] Song of Songs 4:11.
[127] See in detail: *Kitzur Shulchan aruch,* chapters 203–221.
[128] Yirmeyah 17:7.
[129] Talmud, *Mas. Eiruvin* 65a.
[130] Talmud, *Mas. Baba Bathra* 16b.
[131] For instance: Jonah 3:6; Job 2:8; Lamentations 2:10; and so forth.
[132] Commentary of *RASHI* to the sentence of Genesis 25:30.
[133] Talmud, *Mas. Mo'ed Katan* 21b.

References

Berenbaum, Michael and Fred Skolnik. 2007. "SEPHARDIM (סְפַרְדִּים)." In Id., *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 18:569–71. 2nd ed. Jerusalem: Keter.

Cassirer, Ernst. 1973. "A szimbolikus forma fogalma a szellemtudományok felépítésében" [The Philosophy of Symbolic Form in the Structure of Humanities]. *Helikon* 1 (1973): 220–22.

Cooper, John. 1993: Sabbath and Festival Food of Central and Eastern European Jews. In Id., *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food,* 171–94. Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson.

Dr. Blau, Lajos. 2006. *A Talmudról* [On the Talmud]. Magyar Zsidó Tudományok 2. Budapest: Gabbiano Print Kft.

Feuer, Avrochom Chaim. 1990: *Shemoneh Esrei.* New York: Mesorah.

Flavius, Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews.* Antiquitates Judaicae. http://www.church-bg.eu/blog/dokumentumok/. Accessed 20 September 2015. http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-10.htm. Accessed 20 April 2016.

Frazer, James G. 1920. *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion.* London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd.

Grimm, Jacob. 1882. *Teutonic Mythology* I. London: George Bell & Sons.

Jólesz, Károly. 1987. *Zsidó hitéleti kislexikon* [Jewish religious encyclopaedia]. Budapest: Korona GT.

Kohlbach, Bertalan. 2007. *A zsidó néprajzról* [On Jewish ethnography]. Magyar Zsidó Tudományok 4. Budapest: Gabbiano Print.

Kraus, Naftali. 2004. *613. A zsidóság parancsolatai* [The commandments of Judaism]. Budapest: PolgArt. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/613_mitzvot.html. Accessed 3 May 2015.

Mogk, Eugen. 1907. *Germanische Mythologie.* Straßburg: Trübner. e-book: http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015008990957.

Natko, David. 2014: *Ritual Rebellion and Social Inversion in Alpine Austria: Rethinking the "Perchtenlauf" in its Relationship to the Carnivalesque. A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts.* Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University. http://repository.asu.edu/items/24915. Accessed 3 August 2015.

Oláh, János. 2007. "Kohlbach Bertalan, a folklorista [Bertalan Kohlbach, the folklorist]." In Bertalan Kohlbach, *A zsidó néprajzról.* Magyar Zsidó Tudományok 2. Budapest: Gabbiano Print, 7–32.

–. 2009a. XIII. "Az étkezési előírások és szokások" [Dietary laws and customs]. In Id., *Judaisztika,* 230–42. Budapest: Gabbiano Print Kft.

–. 2009b. *Judaisztika* [Judaism]. Budapest: Gabbiano Print Kft.

Raj, Tamás. 1999. "A bárhesz" [The barches]. In Id., *100+1 jiddis szó.* Budapest: Makkabi.

Ujvári, Péter. 1929. *Zsidó lexikon* [Jewish encyclopaedia]. Budapest: Zsidó Lexikon.

Villeneuve, Germaine de et Joseph Dulaud. 1952. *Antelme Brillat-Savarin 1755–1826. Prologue et biographie par Germaine de Villeneuve, suivi d'un avant-propos et d'une pièce en V actes par Joseph Dulaud, préface par Georges Nicolas.* Ambérieu-en-Bugey: Arc-en-ciel.

ILDIKÓ CSEPREGI

The Role of Doubt in Miracle Narratives[1]

Miracle stories usually depict how the divine powers work within a certain cult practice or ritual. Their chief function, both religious and narrative aim, is to strengthen the faith in the miracle itself, reaffirm the thaumaturgic capacity of a certain figure, enhance the fame attached to some miracle working place. At first glimpse, miracles are for believers and depict believers and we would hardly think that doubt and doubters have a specific place in these accounts. Although such stories can have several different forms, from short inscriptions to long, literary pieces, there are some necessary elements they all have in common. Two of such motifs are the great faith of the worshipper and the successful intervention of the miracle worker. Quite understandably a large number of events that could happen around a miracle worker had never even become narratives and had never entered the collection of miracles stories. These unsuccessful attempts or failed miracles where the miracle worker's power was challenged, however numerous they might be, are absolutely irrelevant from the point of view of the miraculous.

Sometimes the narration makes even a direct connection between the great faith of the worshipper and the miraculous event. What is, then, the reason for the rather prominent presence of doubt and doubters in miracles stories, both antique and medieval? They seem to undermine the power of the miracle associated with the place or with the miracle worker, but after a closer look their inclusion will be easier to understand. In order to provide a wider range of typology I use sources partly from pre-Christian antiquity, especially from ancient Greek miracle narratives, partly from early Christian and medieval records. This choice of source material encompassing different religious environments would also help to see the miracle narratives on their own, with their characteristics often not limited to their theological background.

Types of Doubt and Doubters in the Miracle Stories

Doubt in the actual miracle-working

The following miracle comes from the *Iamata* inscriptions, Epidaurus, Greece, fourth century BC:

> A man whose fingers … were paralyzed, came as a suppliant to the god. While looking at the tablets in the temple he expressed incredulity regarding the cures and scoffed at the inscriptions. But in his sleep he saw a vision. It seemed to him that, as he was playing at dice below the temple and was about to cast a dice, the god appeared, sprang upon his hand, and stretched out his fingers. When the god had stepped aside it seemed to him that he bent his hand and stretched out all his fingers one by one. When he had straightened them all, the god asked him if he would still be incredulous of the inscriptions on the tablets in the Temple. He answered that he would not. "Since, then, formerly you were incredulous of the cures, though they were not incredible, for the future," he said, "your name shall be 'Incredulous'." When day dawned he walked out sound.[2]

The story shows several key elements that characterize this particular miracle-working cult. First of all, it attests that the god Asclepius turns also to those who are doubting his powers. Its second characteristic is that instead of keeping silent about it or diminishing it, the story focuses on the incredulity and makes it the core of the narrative. In addition it also illustrates that becoming a believer in the divine power from a doubter is a miracle itself, just as much as becoming healthy from being sick. And finally, we learn that the man's former incredulity should be remembered, not just on site, on a miracle record but also during his whole future life, back in his home. Changing his name does not sound like a punishment, however, rather it offers an occasion for the man to explain, telling and retelling his miracle story again and again.

> Ambrosia of Athens, blind of one eye. She came as a suppliant to the god. As she walked about in the Temple she laughed at some of the cures as incredible and impossible, that the lame and the blind should be healed by merely seeing a dream, in her sleep she had a vision. It seemed to her that the god stood by her and said that he would cure her, that in payment he would ask her to dedicate to the Temple a silver pig as a memorial of her ignorance. After saying this, he cut the diseased eyeball and poured in some drug. When day came she walked out sound.[3]

This narrative depicts a timeless tension at any miraculous healing cult site: that the sick ones come as suppliants and they are ready to undergo the ritual, yet they do not

---

[2] T423.3.
[3] T423.4.

really believe. Furthermore, their incredulity in the text is termed ignorance by the miracle worker, a frequent connotation between doubt and the lack of knowledge, instead of the lack of faith! Another ever present problem is also described in this story: That the miracle stories told, heard, read at the cult place, which are to confirm the suppliants' faith by telling the most wonderful miracles, precisely because of such exaggerations could have the opposite effect. The miracle writer calls them "incredible and impossible", accommodating the view of the sceptical patient.

The stories at the same time offer the solution, and illustrate well how a doubter can actually confirm the miracle-working power and this "doubter ashamed" theme should be remembered, both with the help of a material memorial and by their becoming a story in the miracle collection.

Doubt from outsiders: incredulity of others

A man came as a suppliant to the god. He was so blind that of one of his eyes he had only the eyelids left – within them was nothing, but they were entirely empty. Some of those in the Temple laughed at his silliness to think that he could recover his sight when one of his eyes had not even a trace of the ball, but only the socket. As he slept a vision appeared to him. It seemed to him that the god prepared some drug, then, opening his eyelids, poured it into them. When day came he departed with the sight of both eyes restored.[4]

In this story the doubters are outsiders and the emphasized impossibility of the man's conditions renders the miracle even greater. It also depicts a sort of gradation in believing in the god's power: the other suppliants in the temple generally believed in the miraculous power of Asclepius (this is why they were themselves in the sanctuary) but they doubted that the divine power could perform a miracle on such a dire physical condition.

A very different doubt and a different miraculous solution are described in the following story:

The goblet. A porter, upon coming up to the Temple, fell when he was near the ten stadia stone. When he had gotten up he opened his bag and looked at the broken vessels. When he saw that the goblet from which his master was accustomed to drink was also broken, he was in great distress and sat down to try to fit the pieces together again. But a passer-by saw him and said: "Foolish fellow, why do you put the goblet together in vain? For this one not even Asclepius of Epidaurus could put to rights again." The boy, hearing this, put the pieces back in the bag and went on to the Temple. When he got there he opened the bag and brought the goblet out of it, and it was entirely whole; and he related to his master what had hap-

---

[4] T423.9.

pened and what had been said; when he (the master) heard that, he dedicated the goblet to the god.[5]

Nothing is too small for a divine being to attest his powers – this is one of the lessons this story teaches, while the real focus of the miracle is doubt itself, completely realistic and well-founded doubt, expressed even in a joking way. In this story, nothing was at stake, no actual offence was made against the deity, his abilities were not really challenged, his miracle working power was used as a metaphor for the impossibility. Yet, Asclepius was ready to intervene to repel any shadow of doubt.

Punishment of unbelief

Another common motif when doubt is included in the miracle narrative is that of the punishment of incredulity. Unlike the protagonists of the first quoted stories, who came to Asclepius and only remained skeptical at the most incredible stories read in the Temple, there are people who generally question the god's power and come to the ritual place only out of curiosity.

The punishment of doubt can offer two different endings to the miracle stories: the doubter is either punished by the miracle worker in a way which is clearly and only a retribution for the offence. For example, in the most serious cases, the one who refuses to believe in the miracle worker's power could be put to death. Elsewhere an offender, who did not believe that the god could actually know about his past experiences and was ready to cheat on him had to wear lifelong scars on his forehead. The most frequent punishment in the context of ritual healing is making the doubter ill, either for good or only temporarily, to force him or her to acknowledge the healer's powers. And this leads us to the motif when doubt is turned into belief:

A doubter becomes a worshipper

Aeschines, when the suppliants were already asleep, climbed up a tree and tried to see into the Abaton. But he fell from the tree on to some fencing and his eyes were injured. In a pitiable state of blindness, he came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the Temple and was healed.[6]

One of the important characteristics of the Epidaurian inscriptions is that they are not just a random collection of votive texts but they underwent a redaction, an editorial process, done by the temple personnel. The original plaques that covered the temple walls, when they were taken down, were rewritten, divided into groups. One of the guiding principles behind this process was to establish thematic unities and place miracles with a similar theme next to each other. That the stories 423.9–10–11 form a

[5] T423.10.
[6] T423.11.

group, just as the miracles 423.3–4 come after each other, shows that the temple personnel, the redactors of these stories were aware of the narrative function of doubt and its punishment and treated these features as characteristic motifs of such texts.

Here we have what is probably at the core of this paper: the real, practical role of writing about doubt. Besides its narrative role, doubt is present in stories of conversion, when a doubter becomes a believer, which is the real and concrete aim of miracle stories in general.

Doubt in the origin and nature of the religious experience

Another area for scepticism is to question where the miracle working powers come from not their efficacy. Such events can be best observed when the religious climate changes, at the confrontation of different belief-systems. With the arrival of Christianity and especially with the formation of the organized Church many elements changed also in the realm of miracles, even if rituals and miracle narratives often retained their pagan background along with the radically altered theological message. Regarding the issue of doubt the significant changes in Christian miracles was the expression of doubt that concerned not the miracle itself but the origin of the miracle. The early apologists did not discredit a miraculous event per se but attributed it to demons. The Greeks, likewise, offered alternative explanations for Christ's deeds:

> And again when they [=the gentiles] learned about the prophecies to the effect that He [Christ] would heal every disease and would raise the dead, they brought forward Asclepius.[7]

A somewhat similar issue comes up in the case of rivalry between cults of different cult sites of the same miracle worker. Doubt about which miracle worker worked better was often formulated in the clash of different religions, like the example cited above, between Christ and Asclepius. It is also frequent in cases when a newcomer replaces a previous miracle worker, with the suppliant clearly hesitating which healer to address, the old or the new one or simply does not believe that the previous miracle worker no longer functions at that site. In Christian times, with the proliferation of relics and the multiplication of cult sites, the question of which one was the better, became even more pressing. (And in hagiographic records we read about such men in doubt who address or even visit several different saints in a row.)

Another issue regarding doubt about the origin and nature of the ritual experience often comes up in miracles involving dreams. On such occasions we often read about the dreamers' scepticism, who are prone to discard the dream as mere *phantasia*. Classical and Hellenistic Greek dream interpreters knew several methods of distinguishing between true and false dreams, as well as between real dreams and mere imaginations, for example based on the clarity of the appearance, its being shiny,

---

[7] Iustinus, Apologia 54.10 = T 332.

and being easily recognizable. From elaborate dream books to medical diagnostic dreams and divination and to the everyday dreams of ordinary men it was of towering importance to tell apart the true dreams from the false ones beyond doubt. In this respect, although dream interpretation was not exactly viewed favourably, even Christians stayed on guard and in early Byzantine miracle accounts we also find doubt arising about the nature of dreams. We encounter claims that the vision was a *phantasia* instead of the real dream appearance – such affirmations figure, for example, among the sixth–seventh century miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian.

Another frequent motif involving doubt about the source of the miraculous is when the miraculous remedy or advice is so bizarre that even the believers doubt that it could come from the saints (e.g., to drink poison as remedy). Such dubious saintly prescriptions were so incredible on purpose and served to test the faith of the sick worshippers.

From the types of doubt in miracle accounts we arrived to the doubting figures: who are those, who question the miracles? In what follows I will give a brief sketch of such persons, mainly those unbelievers who are sceptical in face of the miraculous because of their worldview, religion, medical or scientific expertise.

Doubting figures

In the Christian miracle collections, there are several groups of non-Christians who turn to the saints, with different motivations and with different outcomes. The most simple group involves those about whom we know only that they were "pagans", that is Hellenes who had not yet been converted to Christianity. A more frequently mentioned set is the learned Greeks: professors, philosophers, sophists and rhetors, who questioned their entire cultural knowledge with the saints' power. They may also be physicians, who are thus challenging divine healing as heirs to the Hippocratic and Galenic traditions.

Just like the diversity of these groups, the saints' attitude in the face of their doubts also varies – from nonchalance or attempts at persuasion to anger and violence. The outcome of the confrontation likewise could be various: it could happen that the healed pagan returned to his fellow-believers and recounted his miraculous recovery and they also converted. Turning to the saint may have been a final step in the emerging interest in the new faith on the part of the unbeliever, who may have been already familiar with Christians and Christian rituals. It was quite common that a sick Greek approached the saints only out of extreme necessity, under the pressure of illness alone, not firmly convinced about the miracle working powers. The presence of such unbelievers *at the cult place* was presumably connected to the fact that in some cases the relatively quick Christian replacement of the previous (pagan) healer of the site resulted in the new, Christian saint along with the cult place and the healing ritual inheriting some of the pilgrims as well, these being those who had wanted to turn to the earlier healer. The presence of various non-Christian groups *in the stories* presupposes that they were still an active part of the collective memory after Christianity con-

quered the area. Moreover, the narrative role these real or fictitious doubters played served also as a model for the target audience, for those hesitant or recalcitrant or sceptical Christians who did not necessarily number among the "pagans" of the miracles yet who in the same way represented the theological adversary – both in the stories and in real life. In what follows, I identify those categories of miracle stories in which non-Christians could play a narrative role in the miracle stories and point out some instances of the underlying social reality.

Pagans versus Christians

This confrontation might be between generations, spouses, or lord and servant. What makes the evocation of this context fascinating, beyond the colour it brings to the narrative, is that the adherents of the old faith in this way confront not only the saint but those near to them. In the fifth century miracle collections of Saint Thecla, such was the case of the grandmother in a family where her children were already Christians, and she turned to the previous pagan healer of the cult site, Sarpedonios to seek cure for her grandchild. The new owner, Saint Thecla, healed the boy as a reward of the parents' faith, nevertheless the grandmother did not start believing in a Christian saint.[8] The daughter of a tolerant pagan family was healed and thus won for Christianity,[9] and the pagan husband of a devotedly Christian wife was converted as a reward for the woman's faith.[10] Here, as all over in the Byzantine collections of miraculous healing, doubt and believing take on the context and terminology of illness; when a Christian wife prayed to Thecla for the conversion of her pagan husband, Thecla, to achieve this, made the husband ill, that is, manifested the illness of his soul in bodily pains, and this illness she then healed miraculously. A Christian servant may also teach a lesson to his master, as so often in the collections the same miracle involves a rich and a poor man together. The rich Maximo, a sceptical pagan, turned Christian after witnessing the miraculous cure of one of his servants,[11] while Thecla elsewhere proved her wonderworking capacity to a doubting Christian by healing his sick horse.[12] A Christian friend could also familiarize a pagan Greek with the idea of conversion; the stages of such decision-making are described in the KDM 10, where the not-yet-believing pagan man went regularly to pray for a vision or illumination that would eventually bring him to a decision to convert.

It could happen that the Christian ritual experience was viewed by the unbeliever as authentic manifestation of his own faith. That is, and this brings us back to the type of doubt discussed earlier, a suppliant may acknowledge the miracle but doubt that it came from the miracle worker in place and instead attributes it to another source. Thus the pagan Sophist Aretarchos stubbornly interpreted his healing by Thecla as

[8] MT11.
[9] MT18.
[10] MT14.
[11] MT17.
[12] MT36.

having been performed by Sarpedonios, and the hagiographer, still at home in both worlds, used the mystery vocabulary in describing how the patient after experiencing a miraculous cure defined himself as a follower of Sarpedonios, "his suppliant and worshipper and initiate and lover".[13]

Men of learning as doubters

Those Greeks who did not embrace Christianity were not the saints' enemies; on the contrary, they were a challenge, both in the narrative as well as in the eschatological sense. They often represented the hagiographers' own ideal of manhood: nobility, education, and fidelity to a tradition even if it was fated to decline. In the case of Thecla's hagiographer, this positive attitude is easy to understand. He converted to Christianity but never dreamt of giving up what had made him a man of culture; he rather depicted Saint Thecla as quoting Homer, just as he was quoting Greek authors. One of the doubting figures of the collection is the famous rhetor Isocasios, who also benefitted from Thecla's miracle working power and still refused to convert to Christianity. Did his visit (even if incredulous) contribute to the fame of Thecla's church? Did the hagiographer want to portray Thecla as learned and tolerant, not withholding her curative powers from anyone even if they doubted? Or was the famous rhetor more important to the rhetor-hagiographer as a narrative figure, a doubter, to be placed next to himself, a believer? In any case, Thecla was happy to have him in her church, no less than the other pagan rhetor Aretarchos, mentioned above, who likewise remained firm about attributing the miraculous cure to Sarpedonios and not to Thecla. We meet another Greek Sophist called Stephanos in the miracle collection of Saints Cosmas and Damian, who knew the philosophers well, and what was more, was the author of "pagan books" (*ethnika biblia*) and was described as a rhetor of Tarsus. But he was blind – both physically in his eyes and symbolically in his heresy – and when healed he earned praise only when he put his talent to the service of the saints, when he wrote a book about them in an act of gratitude.[14] The other learned pagan of this collection, though he still believed to be carried to the healing sanctuary of the Dioscuroi, Castor and Pollux, recognizing the saints as the new healers, converted and advertised the miracle among his pagan friends as it were done by Saints Cosmas and Damian.[15]

Doctors also belong to this category of learned Greek pagans and were often represented in the healing stories. They voice accurately their doubts concerning the miraculous healing in medical terms. To reply to their doubts, the miracle workers often dedicate special attention to them, either by involving them in performing the miracle or openly confronting their medical knowledge with their own miraculous remedies. In this context, overcoming the challenge of the doctors' doubts results in confirming the efficacy of the saintly medicines.

---

[13] MT40.
[14] CL10.
[15] CL23.

Conclusion

Doubt and doubters in miracle stories first and foremost have a narrative role. The stories of doubters always find a narrative solution of confirming the miracle workers' powers and authority, either in a positive way (the doubter is convinced) or in a negative way (the doubter is put to shame, or punished). Besides this, openly challenging doubters and clearly voicing arguments against them had an important role as theological propaganda. The spectrum of such issues ranges from a particular cult site establishing credibility over its rivals, to the confession of a certain credo or the right way to take the Eucharist. Including doubters into theological propaganda can work in two directions: on the one hand, enlarging the healer's clientele by showing that he or she works miracles even on those who do not firmly believe; on the other hand, it can also limit the group of potential worshippers by clearly outlining the conditions regarding the faith of those who wish to turn to the miracle worker. A third reason for including doubt in the miracle accounts could be to reach the potential audience and clients, as doubters are always among the targets of the writers of miracles. And last, the stories involving incredulity, doubters convinced or punished, or stories about testing faith had a strong entertainment factor, a narrative variant that produces memorable stories, things to remember especially because they are so bizarre or difficult to believe.

References

All T references: Edelstein, E. J. and L. Edelstein, eds. 1998. *Asclepius: collection and interpretation of the testimonies.* 2nd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP [1945].

CL: Rupprecht, E., ed. 1935. *Cosmae et Damiani sanctorum medicorum vita et miracula e codice Londoniensi.* Neue Deutsche Forschungen 20. Berlin: Junker & Dünnh.

KDM: Deubner, L. 1907. *St. Kosmas und Damian. Texte und Einleitung.* Leipzig: Teubner.

MT: Dagron, G. 1978. *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle: texte grec, traduction et commentaire.* Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes.

GÁBOR KLANICZAY

Doubts in the Reality of Stigmata
Stigmata as a Weapon against Doubt

The most famous case of doubt in the stigmata is of course the episode from the Gospel of John (20:24–29):

> Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe". 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Though Jesus admonished his followers to believe even without seeing and touching the signs, the habit to be only convinced by such *signa* persists till our days. One of the most extreme miracles in medieval and modern Christianity, the stigmatization, i.e., the appearance of the holy wounds of Christ, the *stigmata* on the body of the devout, in a supernatural manner, was naturally subject to doubts, controversies, denials; often a "doubting Thomas" appeared who challenged the possibility of such an occurrence. This paper presents some of the most spectacular cases in these debates.

It is natural to start with the first, paradigmatic such event, the stigmatization of Saint Francis, discussed in a host of excellent studies and monographs.[1] This "new and unique miracle" was first announced by Elias of Cortona, vicar general of the Minor Brethren, after the death of the saint, in a letter addressed to Gregory of Naples, the provincial minister of France:

---

[1] Vauchez 1968; 2012; Schmucki 1991; Yarom 1992; Frugoni 1993; Dalarun 2006; Benfatti 2011.

> I announce to you a great joy and a novelty among miracles. Throughout the ages such a sign has not been heard of, except in the Son of God, who is Christ the Lord. Not long before death our brother and father appeared crucified, bearing in his body the five wounds which are in truth the stigmata of Christ: for his hands and feet had as it were the punctures of nails pierced through on either side, retaining the scars and showing the blackness of nails; his side appeared to have been lanced and often oozed blood.[2]

Recent studies have insisted that the Christ-like scars on the body of the deceased Francis, however unique they seemed to Elias of Cortona, were not unprecedented: such bodily imitation of Christ had been developing among the self-flagellating religious ascetics of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.[3] The real novelty attributed to Francis was that the reception of the stigmata, the "stigmatization" was attributed to a miraculous supernatural intervention.[4] This attribution was made by Thomas of Celano the author of the first life of Francis, written around or shortly after the canonization.[5] While Elias only mentioned that the stigmata appeared "not long before death", Thomas related this event to a vision Francis received on Mount La Verna on 14 September, in 1224, a vision Francis never talked about to anybody, so what Thomas wrote could only be his own reconstruction attempt or, to echo Chiara Frugoni, an invention.

> … he had a vision from God. There appeared to him a man, like a Seraph with six wings, standing above him, with his hands extended and feet joined, fixed to a cross. … He anxiously meditated on what the vision could mean, and for this reason his spirit was greatly troubled. While he was unable to come to any understanding of it and his heart was entirely preoccupied with it, this is what happened: the marks of the nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen them before in the crucified man above him. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing in the inner side of the hands and on the upper sides of the feet and their pointed ends on the opposite sides …[6]

It took a century for the Franciscan order to authenticate, accommodate and reinterpret this extraordinary miracle. An initial uncertainty is reflected by the contradictory report on the stigmata by Roger of Wendover, transcribed by Matthew Paris, which still ignores the vision of the seraph, dates the stigmatization to two weeks before the

---

[2] Menestò e Brufani 1995, 254; Benfatti 2011, 17–30.
[3] Constable 1995; Trexler 2002; Muessig 2013.
[4] Dalarun 2013.
[5] Michetti 2004.
[6] Thomas of Celano 1999, 263–64.

death of Francis, who, according to Roger, did show his wounds in public, and they had perfectly healed before his death.[7]

The debates around the stigmata also influenced the iconography of this miracle, which became a popular theme of late medieval painting and book illumination. The oldest panel painting is that by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, representing the stigmatization as a miracle episode on his altarpiece for Pescia (1235), and framing the event as a parallel to Christ's vision on the Mount of Olives (an appropriate way to see Francis as "Alter Christus").[8] The illus4tration in the autograph copy of the *Cronica maiora* of Mathew Paris,[9] prepared by the chronicler himself after 1236, provides a different suggestion. Contradicting the narrative of Roger of Wendover, included in a preceding part of Matthew's chronicle, he certainly used Thomas of Celano's legend, so he included in the illustration the seraph. Nevertheless, in opposition to Thomas, he depicts the vision according to the dream-convention: Francis is shown in a reclining position, asleep on a green patch of grass, while the red stigmata become visible on his hands, feet and his side.[10] The confusion surrounding the stigmata illustration, as shown by Chiara Frugoni, continued for several decades: for instance, in the Book of Hours from Carpentras (ca. 1250), instead of the mountain wilderness, the scene is set in a church where the seraph appears on the altar.[11]

In the meantime one could witness the creation of a new series of legends of Saint Francis, nourished by the controversies and tensions between the Spiritual and the Conventual branch of the order – the *Assisi Compilation*, the *Legend of the Three Companions* (1240), the *Vita secunda* by Thomas of Celano (the *Memoriale* 1246–1247), supplemented with a *Tractatus de Miraculis* (1251–1253, composed at the request of Minister General John of Parma),[12] and finally that by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, whose *Legenda maior* put an end to the controversy, in a rather drastic way: all previous legends had to be destroyed in the Franciscan convents.[13] Needless to say, one of the principal points of disagreement was precisely around the modalities of Francis's stigmata, and the growing need to bring additional convincing proofs for their veracity.

While Pope Gregory IX might have alluded to the stigmata of Francis in his canonization bull *Mira circa nos* of 19 July, 1228, he certainly avoided mentioning them. It took nine years, until he decided to take an open stand for the stigmata in his bull *Confessor Domini* dated 5 April, 1237.[14] In the bull *Usque ad terminos,* issued the same year, we are informed that his newly acquired conviction (supported by an apparition of Francis to him in a dream) was also a reaction to the doubts circulating around these

---

[7] Hewlett 1886–1889, II:328–33; Robson 2015, 86–88.
[8] Frugoni 1993, 321–30.
[9] Corpus Christi College Library, Cambridge, MS. 16, f. 70[vo].
[10] Matthaeus Parisiensis 1872–1883, III:132–33; Lewis 1987, 317, Fig. 201; Brooke 2006, 192–202; Robson 2015, 90–93.
[11] Frugoni 1993, fig. 10.
[12] Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999a, 61–469; cf. Dalarun 2002; Brooke 2006, 102–59.
[13] Bonaventure of Bagnoregio 1999.
[14] Vauchez 1968, 600; Schmucki 1991, 273–74.

stigmata, above all in the circle of the Cistercians and the Dominicans, the two prin-cipal rivals of the Franciscans. Robertus de Anglia, the Cistercian bishop of Olomouc (Bohemia) strongly opposed this new cult, saying that "Because the son of the eter-nal Father alone was crucified for the salvation of mankind, and the Christian reli-gion ought to adore his wounds alone with suppliant devotion, neither blessed Fran-cis nor any other of the saints is to be depicted with stigmata in the Church of God, and who asserts the contrary, sins." Gregory IX suspended him from his episcopal see for this statement. In the same bull, he also condemns a Dominican friar named Evechardus, preaching in Oppava (Moravia) against the authenticity of the stigmata of Saint Francis and labelling the Franciscans as "false preachers".[15]

While in the rather rushed canonization examination of Francis and his first leg-end ocular and judicial testimonies on the stigmata were curiously missing, in the 1230s they started to multiply, to attest the veracity of the stigmata in the eyes of those who have doubts in it. In 1236 a notarial list of 36 ocular testimonies was compiled in Assisi.[16] The *Tractatus de Miraculis* (the second part of the *Memoriale)* by Thomas of Celano makes a special place for John Frangipani, the son of Lady Jacoba, who by that time had become proconsul of the Romans, and who was one of the first peo-ple to have had the privilege of seeing and touching the sacred wounds immediately after the death of Francis.[17] The treatise also enumerates a series of further miracu-lous events attesting to the miracle: a doubting cleric of Potenza who is punished by having similar wounds on his hand; a noble woman in Rome, on whose devotional image of Francis the stigmata did appear; a doubting Franciscan friar, to whom Fran-cis appears in a dream and lets him touch his wounds; and a mortally wounded man saved and healed by an apparition of Saint Francis, who touched the mortal wounds with his own stigmatic wounds.[18]

All these proofs were supported by the testimony and above all the most precious relic of Leo, the closest companion of Francis, who had been there with Francis on Mount La Verna, and had received a parchment with the autograph words of the hymn *Laudes Dei Altissimi* composed and written down by Francis after his vision of the Seraph. Leo had added a brief factual note concerning this donation, stressing that he received it "after the vision and the allocution of the Seraph and the impression of the stigmata of Christ into his body".[19] Though the precise date of this note is much debated, it seems clear that at least from the 1240s on Leo had also agreed to appear as the principal witness to the stigmata.[20]

The *Legenda Maior* by Bonaventura, while giving a new, more complete and theo-logically elaborated account of the vision received by Saint Francis and the causality of his bodily transformation, also added a further list of ocular testimonies to the stig-

[15] Vauchez 1968, 601.
[16] Penacchi 1904; Dalarun 2010, II. 3059.
[17] Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999a, 417–19.
[18] Ibid., 404–8.
[19] Bartoli Langeli 2002, 31–32.
[20] Frugoni 1993; Benfatti 2011, 44–51, 170–76.

mata, among them a certain Brother Illuminatus, who convinced Francis to reveal his "great secret" by reminding him that "at times the divine sacraments are revealed to you not for yourself alone but also for others".[21]

The authority of Bonaventura, and the 1266 order of the destruction of the other legends did not fully eliminate the question marks around the stigmata of Francis. The ongoing interrogations are reflected by the fact that in 1282 a curious document is produced by Philip, minister of Tuscia entitled *Instrumentum de stigmatibus beati Francisci.* This is a protocol on the visions of a lay brother, Giovanni di Castiglione, who made a pilgrimage to Mount La Verna in 1281, where Saint Francis appeared to him when called upon. The lay brother interrogated him in detail, how precisely the reception of the stigmata took place, with the same kind of inquisitorial meticulousness, as the witnesses of canonization investigations are questioned.[22]

Chiara Frugoni,[23] Arnold Davidson[24] and Hans Belting[25] also analysed the parallel iconographic evolution, where a similar change of interpretations could be observed as in the texts. It was Giotto who elaborated the new iconographic canon, based on Bonaventure's text, but with several fascinating novelties. One of these was of the crucified seraph "impressing" the stigmata by means of five luminous rays emanating from the wounds of Christ and piercing the body of Saint Francis. A further development of this motif is that while on the Assisi and the Louvre paintings the rays impress the wounds as if coming from a mirror-image (from the left hand of Christ to the right one of Saint Francis, and so forth), the Bardi Chapel fresco corrects this by an even further bodily identification: the wounds on the left hand and feet are beamed to the left ones of Saint Francis and the right ones to the right: thus Francis is not "mirroring" Christ, but becomes simply identical with him.[26]

This strong claim then became the principal source of the identity of the Franciscan order. Despite the vicissitudes of the order during the persecutions from Pope John XXII, the uniqueness of Francis was further bolstered in the fourteenth century by the broad popular reading of his legends, new compilations such as the *Actus beati Francisci* (ca. 1320), the *Speculum Perfectionis,* and their new vernacular versions, above all the *Fioretti,* and the attached anonymous treatise, *Considerazioni sulle stigmate.*[27] In 1390 Bartolomeo da Pisa could resume this tradition in a magisterial, two volume work: *De conformitate vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Jesu.*[28] No wonder that this claim also provoked strong counter-reactions.

As already mentioned, those who were the most reluctant to accept the attribution of this prestigious emblem to Saint Francis, were the two rival religious orders of the

---

[21] Bonaventure of Bagnoregio 1999, 633.
[22] Heullant-Donat 2013.
[23] Frugoni 1993.
[24] Davidson 1998.
[25] Belting 2010.
[26] Gardner 2011; Frugoni 1993, 210–16.
[27] Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999b, 207–660.
[28] Bartholomaeo de Pisa 1906–1912.

age, the Cistercians and the Dominicans. This is exemplified in the anecdote included in the *Actus beati Francisci* where a Dominican friar, angered by a fresco depicting Saint Francis's stigmatization, tried to erase the stigmata from the painting, but these stigmata miraculously reappeared.

> … when the friar sat down at table, he looked at the picture of Saint Francis and he saw those sacred Stigmata seeming more beautiful and new than they had ever appeared before. … And he said to himself: "By God, I am going to erase those Stigmata so that they will never appear again!" … Then with intense fury he took a knife and dug the marks of the Stigmata out of the picture, cutting out the color and the stone. But just as he finished digging, blood began to flow from the openings and it gushed out violently and stained the friar's face and hands and habit.[29]

Another, less aggressive way to express doubts concerning the divine origin of Francis's stigmata was represented by the famous Dominican preacher and legend-writer James of Voragine (1230–1298), who related in one of the four sermons he had dedicated to the stigmata of Francis:

> His ardent imagination (*vehemens imaginatio*) imprinted the stigmata on his body as is evident in two examples which are in Jerome's writings. The first is the account of a certain woman who gave birth to an Ethiopian baby, because of this she was suspected by her husband of having an affair; but it was discovered that this happened to her as a result of a certain image of an Ethiopian which she could not get out of her mind. … If therefore, Francis in a vision had imagined the crucified Seraph, so great was his imagination that it impresses the wound of the passion on his flesh.[30]

Despite all the praises heaped by James of Voragine on Saint Francis, one must admit, this is quite a frivolous parallel to the grand miracle of the Franciscans, which, incidentally, undermines their explanation of the supernatural nature of these precious *signa*.

The Franciscans retorted as best they could. They took issue with the hypothesis of "*vehemens imagination*" being the cause of the stigmata of Francis, in a *quodlibet questio* by Petrus Thomae, a Franciscan master in Paris, around 1320. The treatise ends with the refutation of the interpretation proposed by James of Voragine: Francis "could not have his stigmata in a natural way" (*non potuit habere Stigmata per naturam*).[31] This interpretation – the precursor of the modern psycho-somatic explanation of stigmata – persisted. It is in this vein that Petrarch wrote his famous letter to a humanist doctor friend of his, Tommaso Garbo in 1366:

---

[29] Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999b, 559; *Actus Beati Francisci*, cap. LXV, 2214–15.
[30] Jacobus de Voragine 1926; Bériou 2015.
[31] Mohan 1948; Boureau 1995.

Concerning the stigmata of St. Francis, this is certainly the origin: so assiduous and profound was his meditation on the death of Christ that his soul was filled up with it, and appearing to himself to be also crucified with his Lord, the force of that thought was able to pass from the soul into the body and leave visibly impressed in it the traces.[32]

We subsequently find the same argument in the famous critical treatise *De incantationibus* (On the Enchantments) of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1524), published posthumously, in 1567. He also refers to how the imagination of women leaves a mark on the foetus thus suggesting that it seems also reasonable that Saint Francis had his stigmata "not by miracle" but by "some natural force".[33] This explanation of the stigmata of Saint Francis persists to this day.

* * *

While these polemics continued, repeated attempts emerged to appropriate this special sign of perfection. These attempts came precisely from the two religious orders that we have already seen to pronounce sceptical views about the stigmatization of Saint Francis: the Cistercians and the Dominicans, or rather from lay Beguines patronized and advised by them. It might be worthy to observe at the outset that almost all these stigmatic rivals of Francis were women – stigmatization became a specific, privileged aspect of the bodily expression of late medieval female spirituality.[34]

The first spectacular example of a new female stigmatic, with detailed documentation came from this milieu, the Low Countries. In 1267 Philip of Clairvaux, from the Cistercian abbey of Herkenrode, diocese of Liège, reported that a Beguine living nearby in the village of Spalbeek, named Elizabeth, "bore most openly the stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, in her hands, feet, and side, without ambiguous simulation or doubtful fraud. The visibly open, fresh wounds are bleeding frequently and especially on Fridays."[35] Abbot Philip raises the question of how the divine choice for representing "this glorious victory, this wonderful virtue" could fall upon "a representative of the feeble feminine sex", and tries to justify it with eloquent arguments.

In the male sex, namely in the person of Saint Francis, God has revealed himself already. So that both sexes not only by the testimony of the Scriptures, but also by living examples of the human condition, may perceive on Christ's cross what should be honored, venerated, adored, imitated, and loved… in the members and the body of this girl as a vivid and unmistakable Veronica, a living image and an animated history of redemption … could be read, even by the illiterate.[36]

[32] Petrarca, 1868, VIII. 465; Vauchez 1968, 625.
[33] Pomponazzi [1520] 2011, (chap. 5, octava dubitatio); cf. Vidal 2007, 501–2.
[34] On the general features of this "somatic spirituality" see Bynum 1991a; and 1991b.
[35] Simons and Ziegler 1990; 1994; Rodgers and Ziegler 1999.
[36] Vita Elizabeth 1886, 373.

An indignant response to this claim came from Guibert of Tournai, a Franciscan master of Paris, who gave an account of this attempt to steal the privilege of stigmatization from Saint Francis in his treatise "On the Scandals of the Church" (*Collectio de scandalis Ecclesiae*), and expressed his conviction that it was a fraud.[37]

Almost simultaneously, in the Rhinelands there emerged another stigmatic Beguine: Christina of Stommeln (1242–1312), a devout laywoman near Cologne, discovered and promoted by Peter of Dacia, a Dominican friar from Gotland. He met Christina in 1267 who already bore the stigmata in her body then; Peter visited her thirteen times before leaving for Paris in 1269, and he provided a detailed description of the divine experiences of Cristina, the appearance of bleeding stigmata on her body, and the diabolic tribulations that tortured her.[38] From our point of view it is of special interest that the Beguines of Cologne, with whom Christina of Stommeln spent several years, had little appreciation for her positive and negative supernatural experiences, and considered her simply an epileptic and a fool (*fatua*).[39]

A third noteworthy case is from the beginning of the fourteenth century, that of the Italian Augustinian nun, Clare of Montefalco (1268–1308).[40] She bore the signs of the suffering Christ not on the outside of her body but inside her heart. She saw the suffering Christ in several visions. One of these visions was narrated by a fellow nun during her canonization process:

> She heard from the aforesaid Clare that Christ appeared to her in the form of a man with a rather large cross on his neck … Christ seemed very tired, and said to Saint Clare, "I am searching for a strong place to establish this cross in the earth, and here I found an apt place for it". And the witness said that she believed that Christ left the aforementioned signs of the Passion and sent them into Saint Clare's heart at the time of this vision, just as they were found existing in Clare's heart after her death.[41]

The nuns wanted tangible proof of this miracle. After the death of Clare, without asking the assistance of a professional physician, they extracted the heart from the corpse, cut it in two, and discovered there indeed all those *arma Christi*: the Cross, the nails, the lance, the sponge, the Crown of Thorns, the scourge and the column.[42]

In 1318–19, during her canonization process, there was a lengthy interrogation on these miraculous *signa* in her heart. A feature of special interest from the point of view of faith and doubt is that there was also a negative testimony recorded. Among the witnesses there was a "doubting Thomas", a Franciscan friar, called Tommaso Boni da Foligno (what a coincidence of names!). He stated he heard from another

---

[37] Guibert de Tournai 1931, 62.
[38] Coakley 1991; Kleinberg, 1992, 40–98; Ruhberg 1995.
[39] Petrus de Dacia [1896] 1985, 111 ff.
[40] Warr 2007; Menestò 2009.
[41] Menestò 1984, 234; Caciola 2003, 77–78.
[42] Menestò 1984.

friar, Giovanni Pulcino da Bevagna, that the *signa* in Clare's heart were created by the nuns. He also added that Clare's spirituality was suspicious because she had close relations with heretics of the Free Spirit. He also accused her of only pretending to fast all the while eating secretly. Finally, he recounted that her ecstasies were fake since she was an epileptic …[43] One wonders how such a negative testimony could find its way into the carefully selected set of documents compiled to support the canonization initiative – maybe Clare's saintly reputation seemed too strong for the inquisitors, so, they decided confidently that even this defamation could be included. In any case, the suspicion about the truthfulness of such extraordinary miraculous signs was "officially" there.[44]

Throughout the fourteenth century the Dominicans made renewed attempts to have a stigmatized saint of their own. In the second half of the century news spread among Italian Dominicans that their first "official" female candidate for beatification, Margaret of Hungary (1242–1270), daughter of King Béla IV, whose canonization process began with the investigations between 1273 and 1276,[45] had received the stigmata. She was represented in a number of Dominican convents as receiving this divine grace, like Saint Francis, from a seraph; the stigmatization episode was even added to one of her legends.[46]

The same expectation of having a stigmatized Dominican saint was fulfilled, however, by the greatest spiritual authority of the order, the mystic and visionary tertiary (*mantellata*) Catherine of Siena.[47] According to the report we can read in *The Life of Saint Catherine of Siena* by Raymond of Capua, Catherine obtained the stigmata in 1375 in Pisa, in the circle of her devout followers, during an ecstatic rapture:

> … Suddenly, before our eyes, her emaciated body, which had been prostrate on the ground, rose up to a kneeling position; she stretched out her arms and hands to their full length; her face grew radiant. For a long time, she knelt like that, bolt upright, her eyes closed. Then, while we still looked on, all of a sudden she pitched forward on the ground as if she had received a mortal wound. A few minutes later she returned to her senses. In a little while, she sent for me, and spoke to me privately apart from the others. "Father," she said, "I must tell you that, by his mercy, I now bear the stigmata of the Lord Jesus in my body." … "I saw our Lord fastened to the cross, coming down upon me in a blaze of light. With that, as my spirit leaped to meet its Creator, this poor body was pulled upright. Then I saw, springing from the marks of his most sacred wounds, five blood-red rays coming down upon me, directed towards my hands and feet and heart. Realizing the meaning of this mystery, I promptly cried out: "Ah, Lord God, my God, I implore you not to let

[43] Ibid, 435–36.
[44] Vauchez 1991, 40.
[45] Csepregi, Klaniczay, and Péterfi 2017.
[46] Klaniczay, G. 2009.
[47] Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle 2012; Cinelli, Piatti e Bartolomei-Romagnoli 2013.

the marks show outwardly on my body." While these words were still upon my lips, before the rays had reached me, their blood-red colour changed from blood red to radiant brightness, and it was in the form of clearest light that they fell upon the five points of my body – hands, feet and heart …[48]

These stigmata became at least as controversial as those of Saint Francis and, not surprisingly, the arguments against the miracle were coming this time from the Franciscans. The apology of these wounds was elaborated by Tommaso di Antonio da Siena, called "Caffarini" (1350–1434), from San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, in a way as a Dominican response to the *De conformitate* of Bartolomeo da Pisa. Caffarini worked for decades to gather supportive materials for the canonisation of Catherine, he compiled a *Libellus de Supplemento* to the legends of Saint Catherine between 1412 and 1417, where he added further documentation to her hagiographic material as well as an entire chapter on the phenomenon of the stigmata.[49]

His critical approach was to challenge the claim of the Franciscans for the uniqueness of Francis in this domain by assembling a record on other stigmatics, as precursors to the stigmatization of Catherine. He also took care to dissipate possible doubts in these cases by making inquiries on their authenticity. It is likely for this reason that he entered into correspondence with Gregory, prior provincial of the Hungarian Dominicans, concerning the stigmatic fame of Margaret of Hungary. And when Gregory responded in 1409 that this renown was undeserved, because in the oldest legend and the canonization acts of Margaret her stigmata are not mentioned, Caffarini took care to include this negative testimony in the *Libellus*. More than this, he initiated the removal of the images of Margaret's stigmatization in Dominican convents, including his own, so as not to perpetuate the story.[50]

As well as denying Margaret's stigmatization, the Hungarian Dominicans also provided Caffarini with another piece of precious information, they sent him the legend of Blessed Helen of Hungary, the *magistra* of Margaret, who was "indeed" stigmatized.[51] Historical research raised serious doubts about the authenticity of this account of the stigmatization of Helen that should have occurred in the 1230s, shortly after that of Saint Francis, but of which the legend that surfaced in 1409 is the only testimony.[52] But for Caffarini this earliest Dominican-patronized stigmatic fitted well into his documentation of precedents, just like the story of a thirteenth century Dominican friar, Walter of Strasbourg who, while contemplating a crucifix, received the pains of the stigmata though his wounds remained invisible; Caffarini cites the description from Gerard of Frachet's *Vitas fratrum* (c. 1265).[53]

---

[48] Raymond of Capua 1980, 185–87.
[49] Thomas Antonii de Senis "Caffarini" 1984, 121–266 [1974].
[50] Ibid, 171–76; Klaniczay, T. 1995.
[51] Fawtier 1913; Érszegi 1995.
[52] Deák 2005, 245–53; 2013, 162–68.
[53] Reichert 1896, 223.

Caffarini had thus, besides Catherine, two more Dominicans to put up against Saint Francis, and he made a comparative analysis of their special way of receiving the stigmata, and even had it illustrated.[54] More than this, he broadened the notion of stigmata to any kind of bodily injury received through Passion-centred penitential practice.[55] This brought Catherine into an advantageous position in comparison to Francis, since her stigmata was the culmination of an impressive series of other *signa*: diabolic vexations, bloody self-flagellation, reception of the Crown of Thorns, the stigmatization of one hand with the nail of the Passion, and the miraculous exchange of hearts with Christ.

Despite all his efforts, including when he organized in 1411 an irregular canonization hearing, the *Processo castellano*,[56] Caffarini could not achieve the initiation of the proceedings for Catherine. A prominent figure of the Dominican order, Giovanni Dominici spoke on her behalf in vain at the Council of Constance,[57] where important authorities, such as the Paris Chancellor Jean Gerson were strongly against this kind of female, mystical, ecstatic spirituality, closely related to such bodily signs.[58] Even in the Order of the Preachers there was a growing resistance against female mystics. Eberhard Mardach, Prior of the Nuremberg Dominican convent (a centre of the observant movement) wrote in 1421 a *Sendbrief von wahren Andacht,* in which he wrote of such religious women that "These things are not true signs of sanctity" (*Dise ding sind dennoch nit ware zeichen der heiligkeit*).[59]

Mardach's successor in Nuremberg, Johannes Nider had a similar attitude. He had a serious conflict when he wanted to reform in 1428 the Saint Catherine convent of Dominican nuns, and later, in 1437 in his great exempla-collection the *Formicarius,* a "bestseller" produced in the turmoil of the Council of Basel around 1435, he expressed very sceptical views on female ecstatics, their miraculous bodily manifestations and "fake visions".[60] For a cautious interpretation of the female visionary experience, he wrote according to the genre of the "discernment of spirits" (*discretio spirituum*)*,* a tradition recently revived by Nider's one-time teacher, Heinrich von Langenstein and Jean Gerson.[61]

Nider describes, for instance, an incident that happened just before the Council of Constance, in the nearby town of Radolfzell. A saintly recluse living there "often lay prostrate in a state of ecstasy, and when she came to herself, described the secret revelations that she had received … One day, they started spreading the news that the five wounds of Christ would appear on her hands, feet and side on a particular

[54] Thomas Antonii de Senis "Caffarini" 1984, 176–83; Moerer 2005.
[55] Thomas Antonii de Senis "Caffarini" 1984, 123–40.
[56] Ferzoco 2012.
[57] Krafft 2013.
[58] Elliott 2002.
[59] Williams-Krapp 1990.
[60] Tschacher 2000; Bailey 2002; Klaniczay, G. 2007.
[61] Caciola 2003, 274–319; Elliott 2004, 250–63; Klaniczay, G. 2007, 229–45; Blumenfeld-Kosinski 2015, 127–49.

day." A great throng of the curious gathered for the occasion; they found her lying on the floor of her cell, "motionless in her rapture, and quite beside herself", but the stigmata failed to appear, to the great consternation of all those who had believed in the woman's enigmatic teachings and revelations. Among those present was Heinrich von Rheinfelden (†1433), a Dominican friar and professor of theology, who took advantage of the occasion to preach a sermon about the dangers of believing in "foolishness" of this sort. Not much later, the fraudulent woman (*ipsa fictrix*) was obliged to appear before an ecclesiastical court; here she retracted her claims, and repented of her sins.[62]

Another story narrated by Nider is reminiscent of long-time Dominican scepticism towards Franciscan claims of ecstasy and stigmata. Magdalen of Fribourg (Magdalena Beutlerin) from the order of the Poor Clares became famous for her frequent raptures. Her most famous prophecy was pronounced before Christmas 1430, when she stated she would die during the following Epiphany. Her devoted followers could assist at this spectacle and thereby escape the tortures of Hell. Nider provides a vivid description of the failure, when the event arranged in the convent church, honoured by the presence of various secular and ecclesiastic notabilities, urban authorities, and also a professional physician whose role was to confirm whether Magdalen was dead or not. When she got out of the staged sarcophagus alive, her status in the eyes of the bystanders was lost.[63]

Yet, one has to be cautious with such sceptic and rationalist narratives. Nider's sarcastic account remains silent on the second half of the story that we know from another source. In a brief biography on her the same series of events is narrated in a positive, hagiographic tone, describing how she finally got out of the sarcophagus only because she had been insistently asked to do so by the Provincial of the order. The following day, "when the Passion of Our Lord was read … when they read, 'All things are complete; Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit', she cried out 'O woe, woe, how my foot pains me!' and her foot was shown to those who stood by. Then a wound broke out on her foot, from which fresh blood ran out onto the ground, and the same thing happened to her hands. This was seen by the people who had been sent by the city council as witnesses."

This biography then adds that, despite this miracle, "her holy, blessed life was scoffed at and denied by many sinful people, and it was often taken as a sign that she was a sorceress".[64]

It should be mentioned at this juncture that the most conspicuous confrontation of belief and doubt in the years when Nider wrote his *Formicarius* was around a visionary (though not a stigmatic): Joan of Arc. The apparitions she referred to (and strongly believed in) were instrumental in defeating the English and restoring the French kingdom. On the other hand, they were condemned as fake by an infamous expert opinion

---

[62] Nider 1692, 391–93 (III/11); cf. Klaniczay, G. 2007, 209–10.
[63] Nider 1692, 362–64 (III/8); cf. Klaniczay, G. 2007, 210–11.
[64] Greenspan 1986.

of the Paris University masters, and were called diabolically inspired by her judges[65] – Nider adhered to this latter qualification of her, he called her a witch (*maga*).[66]

Returning to the issue of the appreciation of Catherine's stigmata, they are passed over in complete silence by her confrere Nider, who otherwise praises her merits.[67] When in 1461 the Sienese pope Pius II (Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini) finally canonized Catherine, a controversy was immediately generated among the Franciscans, concerning her stigmata. The festive mass after the canonization, in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, was delivered by the Franciscan bishop Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce. After having read out the entire text on Catherine's stigmatization from the legend of Raymond of Capua, Caracciolo continued with the following malicious words:

> … on the basis of this vision of hers, in many places Saint Catherine had been depicted as receiving the stigmata from Christ. This was probably done with the intention of making the invisible things known by the visible, and by this painting indicate the real, uncontrollable pain – all this could probably be tolerated, despite the error which followed from this: to make believe that she had in fact received visible stigmata. I have seen and read several such writings praising this saint, but I was unable to find anything else in them than the pain she suffered from during her ecstatic rapture, without any further signs. And even if we want to call this pain by the name of stigmata, it does not contain nor imply the same miraculous conditions as the stigmata of Saint Francis … This does not diminish in any way the sanctity of Catherine.[68]

When a decade later a pope, Sixtus IV, came from the Franciscan order, this conflict worsened considerably. In the bull *Spectat ad Romani* of September 1472 he prohibited the representations of Saint Catherine "*cum stigmatibus Christi ad instar beati Francisci*" and even the mentioning of it in sermons, and this prohibition was repeated in 1475 and 1478.[69]

To prove the truthfulness of Saint Catherine's stigmata, in the 1490s a host of new stigmatized Dominican tertiaries appeared: a series of charismatic women of an unusual vigour, such as Osanna Andreasi of Mantova (†1505), Stefana Quinzani di Soncino (1457–1530). The greatest celebrity was Lucia Brocadelli (of Narni) (1476–1544), who lived for a while in Rome in the same house where her role model, Catherine of Siena had stayed more than a century earlier.[70] On 25 February, 1496, on Good Friday, in the city of Viterbo, stigmata appeared on her hands, feet and side. She later said she was publicly exposing her bleeding wounds to an admonition received from Saint Catherine, as a testimony to the veracity to her invisible stigmata. This event attracted

[65] Fraioli 2000.
[66] Nider 1692, 600–2 (V/8); cf. Klaniczay, G. 2007, 242–44.
[67] Nider 1692, 483–84 (IV/9).
[68] Cappelluti 1981, 505; Giunta 2012, 262; Bartolomei-Romagnoli 2013, 428–31.
[69] Giunta 2012, 267–68.
[70] Zarri 1990; 2001.

great publicity: investigating commissions were sent to her by Pope Alexander VI, and three years later, in 1499 she was smuggled out of the city of Viterbo (which prohibited her departure) by Duke Ercole I d'Este, to live beside his palace in Ferrara, in the Saint Catherine convent of Dominican *mantellatae* specially founded for her.[71]

At the same time, her stigmata were contested by many. Felino Sandei, a humanist friend of Ercole tried to dissuade him from believing in her stigmata in 1498: "I find that they are, sadly fraudulent, without any truth" (*trovo che è cosa finta e de gran tristicia, senza alcuna verità*). The bishop of Viterbo, who saw the bleeding wounds, expressed his doubts, whether they were "indeed from God". He referred to other witnesses who stated that many of the relic handkerchiefs stained with five drops of blood, allegedly from her stigmata, were stained rather from the blood from somebody's nose.[72] While already in Ferrara, new accusations arose against Lucia: some sisters of her convent asserted to have observed her through a keyhole in her cell, she was tearing open her stigmatic wounds with a needle. The four medical-inquisitorial investigations of the wounds of Lucia were intended to silence these doubts. Nevertheless, the same doubts re-emerged, when in 1505, after the death of Lucia's mighty protector, Ercole d'Este, Lucia's stigmata suddenly disappeared, the wounds healed. In those years, the strivings of "Savonarola's women" lost the battle within the Dominican Order: Lucia was constrained to full reclusion for the rest of her life (almost four more decades).[73] At the same time, the Franciscan Samuele Cassini published a long treatise in 1508 on the stigmata of Saint Francis, explaining why it was impossible that a "mulier, licet sanctissima" could receive stigmata.[74]

Stigmatic male Dominicans did not fare better either: in 1509 three Dominican friars were burnt in Bern at the stake for having fraudulently, by "diabolic instigation" painted fake stigmata on a fellow friar, Hans Jetzer.[75]

From these decades onwards, the problem of "simulated sanctity" (*affettata santità*) became a special category in the reorganized activities of the Roman and the Spanish Inquisition,[76] and with a broader circle of female mystics, *beatas,* stigmatics were frequently accused of faking these precious *signa*, often combined with the allegation that this happened through diabolic instigation and amounted to witchcraft. Peter Dinzelbacher provided a general overview of this problem.[77] The scandals concerning the Cordoba Poor Clares' abbess Magdalena de la Cruz (1487–1560), revered as a stigmatic, but subsequently condemned as a witch, was analysed by Maurice Garçon, Isabelle Poutrin, and Maria del Mar Graña Cid.[78] An equally notorious scandal exploded around the Dominican prioress, Sor Maria de la Visitación (b. 1551), the "Nun of

---

[71] Herzig 2013, 83–93.
[72] Folin 1998.
[73] Herzig 2008, 127–46.
[74] Cassini 1508.
[75] Zarri 2001, 101–4; Herzig 2013, 262–63.
[76] Zarri 1991; Schutte 1994; 2001.
[77] Dinzelbacher 1995.
[78] Garçon 1939; Poutrin 1993; Graña Cid 2002.

Lisbon", first becoming famous for her stigmata, and very influential in the court of King Philip II, then unmasked as a fraud by the Inquisition and condemned to perpetual seclusion.[79] Fake stigmatics were also condemned in Naples, such as Alfonsina Rispoli (1553–1611), analysed by Giovanni Romeo and Jean-Michel Sallmann.[80]

The history of the seventeenth-century Theatine abbess, Benedetta Carlini (1591–1661) became very popular with the book by Judith Brown, titled: *Immodest Acts. The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy.* Within the complex of visions, diabolic possessions and related reprehensible sexual practices with her cell-mate Bartolomea, a fellow nun assigned to be with her to protect her from the anxiety of diabolic vexations, she also claimed to be stigmatized. The trial held against her resulted in her removal from the rank of abbess and imprisonment for 35 years, until the end of her life. There were also three detailed testimonies from fellow nuns who observed her through the keyhole scratching and opening her stigmatic wounds – this tends to become an inquisitorial stereotype in these times.[81]

The generalized suspicion concerning female mystics and their bodily miracles did not prevent the emergence of cults based around some spectacular mystics and stigmatics: the Carmelite Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) with her transverberated heart,[82] another Carmelite, Maria Magdalena dei Pazzi (1566–1607) with her forty days visionary sequence,[83] the invisible stigmata causing spectacular suffering in the life of Marie del l'Incarnation (Madame Acarie) (1566–1618),[84] or the greatest stigmatic of early modern times, the Capuchin sister Veronica Giuliani (1660–1727), stigmatized five times, also receiving the instruments of Passion in her heart, the Crown of Thorns and many other insignia.[85]

From the point of view of the relationship of faith and doubt, we can observe an interesting process. On the one hand, there is a growth in institutional, inquisitorial, and rationalist control of such ecstatic forms of manifestation, like the stigmata, and, on the other, an increasingly explicit articulation of doubt which allows faith to impose itself by means of some spectacular breakthroughs where scepticism is refuted and defeated. Nineteenth-century examples, for which there is no space to discuss here, testify even more eloquently to this same process.

The most famous German stigmatic of the age, Anna Katherina Emmerich (1774–1824), an Augustinian nun secularized in Napoleonic times became a public celebrity after 1812, when the bloody marks of the Passion appeared on her body. She was, on the one hand, accused in the press of self-mutilation, and also as a victim of "animal magnetism" à la Mesmer, on the other, she had a deeply religious doctor Franz-Wilhelm Wesener, who observed her daily over six years and wrote a detailed medical

---

[79] MacInnes 2000.
[80] Romeo 1977–1978; Sallmann 1992, 57–116; 1994, 177–210.
[81] Brown 1986, 152–53.
[82] Billinkoff 2014.
[83] Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi 1996.
[84] Gimaret 2013.
[85] Courbat 1994; Duranti 2000; Cabibbo 2008.

diary of the miraculous bodily manifestations. More than that, the famous romantic poet, Clemens Brentano, who visited her in 1817, was so deeply impressed by her, that he spent the following seven years, until the death of Emmerich, at her bedside, recording her visions, and subsequently publishing them as new revelations.[86]

Louise Lateau (1850–1883) was a Belgian seamstress stigmatized at the age of eighteen. Her village house became a pilgrimage sanctuary because of her repeated Friday ecstasies, when she lived and re-enacted the Passion, with her stigmatic wounds breaking open, to heal again from Saturday to Wednesday, over fifteen years. Her wounds were closely observed, examined and documented by dozens of prestigious doctors (sceptics and believers among them), there was even a debate on the phenomena in the Belgian Royal academy.[87] Désirée Magloire Bourneville, a colleague of Jean-Martin Charcot at the Paris Hôpital de la Salpêtrière interpreted this as a typical manifestation of hysteria, "une malheureuse hystérique, martyr des fanatiques religieux".[88] A partisan and deeply religious doctor, Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, who came all the way to observe her stigmata from Clermont-Ferrand and was one of the first to publish a book on her, considered these stigmata as a response to the "*libre-penseurs*" of the age, and became an assiduous collector of all historical data on the stigmatized, compiling the first and to date most complete encyclopedia of stigmatics, amassing 321 cases.[89]

The story did not end at this point: the twentieth century added dozens of stigmatics to this impressive number, among them the Capuchin friar Pio da Pietralcina, known as Padre Pio (1887–1968), stigmatized in 1918, canonized in 2002, and becoming now the most popular Italian saint of our times. But the discussion of these contemporary phenomena is beyond our possibilities here. What we can conclude from our – foremost late medieval – historical overview is that doubt and faith went hand in hand in this field of extraordinary bodily manifestations of devotion. They continually reinforced and reinvigorated one another, in essence maintaining a dialogue through which they have preserved their position throughout history.

References

Actus 1995. *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum eis*. In Menestò e Brufani 1995, 2085–219.

Armstrong, Regis J., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds. 1999a. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. Vol. II. *The Founder*. New York: New City Press.

–. eds. 1999b. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. Vol. III. *The Prophet*. New York: New City Press.

Bailey, Michael D. 2002: *Battling Demons. Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP.

[86] Bouflet 1996, 81–88; 2004.
[87] Lachapelle 2004; Klaniczay, G. 2013a.
[88] Bourneville 1875.
[89] Imbert-Gourbeyre 1873; 1996 [1890].

Bartholomaeo de Pisa. 1906–1912. *De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu. Analecta Franciscana.* IV–V. Florentiae: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae.

Bartoli Langeli, Attilio, a cura di. 2002. *Gli autografi di frate Francesco e frate Leone.* Corpus Christianorum Autographa Medii Aeui V. Turnhout: Brepols.

Bartolomei-Romagnoli, Alessandra, 2013. "La disputa sulle stigmate." In Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, Luciano Cinelli, e Pierantonio Piatti, a cura di, *Virgo digna coelo. Caterina e la sua eredità,* 407–46. Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana.

Belting, Hans. 2010. "Saint Francis and the Body as Image: An Anthropological Approach." In Colum Hourihane, ed., *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art & History,* 3–14. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Benfatti, Solanus M., C.F.M. 2011. *The Five Wounds of Saint Francis.* Charlotte, NC: TAN Books.

Bériou, Nicole. 2015. "Saint François dans la Légende dorée et dans les sermons de Jacques de Voragine." In *Frate Francesco e I Minori nello specchio dell'Europa,* 279–313. *Atti del XLII Convegno internazionale. Assisi 17–19 ottobre 2014.* Spoleto: CISAM.

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 2014. *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious reform in a sixteenth-century city.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate. 2015. *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims. A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. 1999. "The Major Legend of Saint Francis." In Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short eds., 525–683.

Boureau, Alain. 1995. "Miracle, volonté et imagination: La mutation scolastique (1270–1320)." In *Miracles, prodiges et merveilles au Moyen Age,* 159–73. *XXVe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S. (Orléans, juin 1994).* Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.

Bourneville, Dr. 1875. *Science & Miracle. Louise Lateau, ou la stigmatisée belge.* Paris: A. Delahaye.

Bouflet, Joachim. 1996. *Les stigmatisés.* Cerf: Paris.

–. 2004. *Anne-Catherine Emmerick. Celle qui partagea la Passion de Jésus,* Paris: Presses de la Renaissance.

Brooke, Rosalind. 2006. *The Image of St. Francis. Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Brown, Judith. 1986. *Immodest Acts. The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1991a. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press.

–. 1991b. "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages." In Michael Feher, Ramona Nadaff, and N. Tazi, eds., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body,* 161–220. New York: Zone Books, Part Three.

Cabibbo, Sara. 2008. "Il 'meraviglioso fisiologico' di Veronica Giuliani fra modello francescano ed erudizione barocca." In G. Ingegneri, a cura di, *I cappuccini nell'Umbria del Settecento,* 169–84. Bibliotheca seraphica-cappuccina 82. Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini.

Caciola, Nancy. 2003. *Discerning Spirits. Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

Cappelluti, Gerardo. 1981. "S. Caterina da Siena in alcuni 'sermones' del secolo XV." In *Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi cateriniani, Siena–Roma 24–29 aprile 1980,* 482–522. Rome: Curia Generalizia O.P.

Cassini, Samuele. 1508. *De stigmatibus sacris D[ivi] Francisci et quomodo impossibile est aliquam mulierem , licet sanctissimam, recipere stigmata.* Pavia.

Cinelli, Luciano, Pierantonio Piatti, e Alessandra Bartolomei-Romagnoli, a cura di, 2013. *Virgo digna coelo – Caterina e la sua eredità.* Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Coakley, John. 1991. "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography." In Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe,* 222–45. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

Constable, Giles. 1995. "The Imitation of the Body of Christ." In Id., *Three Studies in Medieval Life and Thought,* 143–47. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Courbat, Monique. 1994. *Dico e ridico e non dico niente. Il fenomeno del diario in Santa Veronica Giuliani.* Siena: Cantagalli.

Csepregi, Ildikó, Gábor Klaniczay, and Bence Péterfi, eds. 2017. *Legenda Vetus, Acta Processus Canonizationis et Miracula Sanctae Margaritae de Hungaria – The Oldest Legend, Acts of the Canonization Process and Miracles of Saint Margaret of Hungary.* Central European Medieval Texts Series 9. Budapest: CEU Press.

Dalarun, Jacques. 2002. *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi.* St Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute.

– ed. 2006. *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi. New Studies, New Perspectives.* St Bonaventure. New York: The Franciscan Institute.

– éd. 2010. *François d'Assise, Écrits, Vies et Témoignages.* Paris: Éditions franciscaines & Éditions du CERF.

–. 2013. "À cette époque, le bienheureux François avait des cicatrices aux mains et aux pieds et au côté." In Klaniczay , a cura di, 2013, 43–93.

–. 2016. *François d'Assise en questions.* Paris: CNRS éditions.

Davidson, Arnold. 1998. "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or, How St. Francis Received the Stigmata." In Caroline A. Jones, Peter Gallison, and Amy Slaton, eds., *Picturing Science, Producing Art,* 101–24. London: Routledge.

Deák, Viktória Hedvig. 2005. *Árpád-házi Szent Margit és a domonkos hagiográfia. Garinus legendája nyomán* [Saint Margaret of Hungary and the Dominican hagiography. On the traces of the Garinus legend]. Budapest: Kairosz.

– 2013. *La légende de sainte Marguerite de Hongrie et l'hagiographie dominicaine.* Paris: Cerf.

Dinzelbacher, Peter. 1995. *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit.* Zürich: Artemis.

Duranti, Maria. 2000. *Il "sentimento" tragico dell'esperienza religiosa: Veronica Giuliani (1660–1727).* Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane.

Elliott, Dyan. 2002. "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc." *American Historical Review* 107: 26–54.

– 2004. *Proving Woman. Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages.* Princeton: Princeton UP.

Érszegi, Géza. 1995. "Delle beghine in Ungheria ovvero l'insegnamento di un codice di Siena." In Sante Graciotti e Cesare Vasoli, a cura di, *Spiritualità e lettere nella cultura italiana e ungherese del basso medioevo,* 63–75. Firenze: Olschki.

Fawtier, Robert, éd. 1913. "La vie de la bienheureuse Hélène de Hongrie." *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 33: 4–23. [Repr. in AA SS Nov IV, Bruxelles, 1925, coll. 267–76.]

Ferzoco, George. 2012. "The *Processo Castellano* and the canonization of Catherine of Siena." In Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle 2012, 185–203.

Folin, Marco. 1998. "Finte stigmate, monache e ossa di morti. Sul 'Buon uso della religion' in alcine lettere di Ercole I d'Este e Felino Sandei." *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 11: 181–244.

Fraioli, Deborah A. 2000. *Joan of Arc. The Early Debate.* Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer.

Frugoni, Chiara. 1993. *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate. Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto.* Torino: Einaudi.

Garçon, Maurice. 1939. *Magdeleine de la Croix abbesse diabolique.* Paris: Sorlot.

Gardner, Julian. 2011. "Giotto at Pisa: The Stigmatization for San Francesco." In Id., *Giotto and His Publics. Three Paradigms of Patronage,* 17–46. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Gimaret, Antoinette. 2013. "Corps marqués et stigmates invisibles dans les biographies spirituelles du XVIIème siècle." In Klaniczay, a cura di 2013, 239–59.

Giunta, Diega. 2012. "The Iconography of Catherine of Siena's Stigmata." In Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, eds. 2012, 259–94.

Graña Cid, Maria del Mar. 2002. "La santa/bruja Magdalena de la Cruz. Identidates religiosas y poder femenino en la Andalucía pretridentina." In *La Mujer (II). Actas del III Congreso de Historia de Andalucia,* 103–20. Cordoba: Publicaciones Obra Social y Cultural CajaSur.

Greenspan, Karen. 1986. "Magdalena Beutler." In Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature,* 350–55. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Guibert de Tournai. 1931. *Collectio de scandalis Ecclesiae.* Ed. A. Stroick. *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 24: 33–62.

Herzig, Tamar. 2008. *Savonarola's Women. Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

–. 2013. *Christ Transformed into a Virgin Woman. Lucia Brocadelli, Heinrich Institoris, and the Defense of the Faith.* Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.

Heullant-Donat, Isabelle. 2013. "Puorqoui enquêter sur la stigmatisation de François d'Assise? Sur *l'Instrumentum de stigmatibus beati Francisci* (1282)." In Klaniczay, a cura di 2013, 93–124.

Hewlett, H. G., ed. 1886–1889. *Rogeri de Wendower liber cui dicitur Flores historiarum ab anno Domini MCLIV. Annoque Henrici Anglorum tegis secundi primo.* 3 vols. Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi Scriptores 84. London.

Imbert-Gourbeyre, Antoine. 1873. *Les stigmatisées. Louise Lateau de Bois-d'Haine et Palma d'Oria.* I–II. Paris: Victor Palmé.

–. 1996 [1890]. *La Stigmatisation.* Édition établie par Joachim Bouflet. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon.

Jacobus de Voragine. 1926. *Sermo III de stigmatibus S. Francisci.* In Leonhard Lemmens, ed., *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi,* 113–14. Ad Claras Aquas. Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae.

Klaniczay, Gábor. 2007. "The Process of Trance, Heavenly and Diabolic Apparitions in Johannes Nider's *Formicarius.*" In Nancy van Deusen, ed., *Procession, Performance, Liturgy, and Ritual,* 203–58. Ottawa: Claremont Cultural Studies.

–. 2009. "On the Stigmatization of Saint Margaret of Hungary." In Miri Rubin, ed., *Medieval Christianity in Practice,* 274–84. Princeton: Princeton UP.

–. 2013. "Louise Lateau et les stigmatisées du XIXème siècle entre directeurs spirituels, dévots, psychologues et médecins." In Klaniczay, a cura di 2013, 279–320.

–. a cura di. 2013. *Discorsi sulle stimmate dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea – Discours sur les stigmates du Moyen Âge à l'époque contemporaine,* 7–386. Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà 26. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.

Klaniczay, Tibor 1995. "La fortuna di Santa Margherita d'Ungheria in Italia." In S. Graciotti e C. Vasoli, a cura di., *Spiritualità e lettere nella cultura italiana e ungherese del basso medioevo,* 3–27. Firenze: Olschki.

Kleinberg, Aviad M. 1992. *Prophets in Their Own Country. Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Krafft, Otfried. 2013. "Many strategies and one goal: The difficult road to the canonization of Catherine of Siena." In Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Gabriela Signori, eds., *Catherine of Siena, the creation of a cult,* 25–46. Turnhout: Brepols.

Lachapelle, Sofie. 2004. "Between Miracle and Sickness: Louise Lateau and the Experience of Stigmata and Ecstasy.*" Configurations* 12: 77–105.

Lewis, Susanne. 1987. *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica majora.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

MacInnes, Ian. 2000. "Stigmata on Trial: The Nun of Portugal and the Politics of the Body." *Viator* 31: 381–98.

Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi. 1996. *I quaranta giorni.* Con una nota di Angelo Morino. A cura di Maurizia Rolfo. Palermo: Sellerio editore.

Matthaeus Parisiensis. 1872–1883. *Chronica majora.* 7 vols. Ed. Henry Richards Luard. Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi Scriptores 57. London: Longman.

Menestò, Enrico, ed. 1984. *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco.* Perugia e Firenze: Regione dell'Umbria/ "La Nuova Italia" Editrice.

– a cura di. 2009: *Santa Chiara di Montefalco monaca agostiniana (1268–1308) nel contesto socio-religioso femminile nei secoli XIII–XIV.* Spoleto: CISAM.

– e Stefano Brufani. 1995. *Fontes Franciscani.* Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola.

Michetti, Raimondo. 2004. *Francesco d'Assisi e il paradosso della* Minoritas. *La* Vita beati Francisci *di Tommaso da Celano.* Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo.

Moerer, Emily Ann. 2005. "The visual hagiography of a stigmatic saint: drawings of Catherine of Siena in the 'Libellus de Supplemento'." *Gesta* 44: 89–102.

Mohan, G. E., ed. 1948. "Petrus Thomae on the Stigmata of St. Francis." *Franciscan Studies* 8: 284–94.

Muessig, Carolyn. 2008. "Performance of the Passion: The Enactment of Devotion in the Later Middle Ages." In E. Gertsman, ed., *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts,* 129–42. Aldershot: Ashgate.

–. 2012. "The Stigmata Debate in Theology and Art in the Late Middle Ages." In Celeste Brusati, Karl Enenkel, and Walter Melion, eds., *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400–1700,* 481–504. Leiden: Brill.

–. 2013. "Signs of Salvation: The Evolution of Stigmatic Spirituality before Francis of Assisi." *Church History* 82: 40–68.

Muessig, Carolyn, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, eds. 2012. *A Companion to Catherine of Siena.* Leiden: Brill.

Nider, Johannes. 1692. *[Formicarius] De visionibus et ac revelationibus.* Helmstedt.

Penacchi, Francesco. 1904. "Saggio del Processo per la canonizzazione di san Francesco (le stimmate)." *Miscellanea Francescana* 15: 129–97.

Petrarca, Francesco. 1868. *Lettere senili.* Firenze: Le Monnier.

Petrus de Dacia. 1896. *Vita Christinae Stumbelensis.* Ed. Johannes Paulson. Gotoburgi: Wettergren & Kerber. [Repr. Frankfurt a. M.: P. Lang, 1985.]

Pomponazzi, Pietro. 2011. *De incantationibus.* Ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni. Firenze: Olschki. [*De naturalium effectuum admirandorum causis, sive De incantationibus liber,* 1520.]

Poutrin, Isabelle. 1993. "Les stigmatisées et les clercs. Interprétation et repression d'un signe – Espagne XVIIe siècle." In Geneviève Demerson et Bernard Dompnier, *Les signe de Dieu aux*

XVIe et XVIIe siècles. Clermont-Ferrand: Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Blaise Pascal.

Raymond of Capua. 1980. *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena.* Trans. Conleth Kearns. Wilmington, Del: Glazier.

Reichert, B. Maria, ed. 1896. "Fratris Gerardi de Fracheto O.P." *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum.* Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica 1. Leuven.

Robson, Michael J. P. 2015. "Francis and the Friars Minor in the monastic chronicles of Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris (1217–59)." In *Frate Francesco e i Minori nello specchio dell'Europa,* 81–120. *Atti del XLII Convegno internazionale. Assisi 17–19 ottobre 2014.* Spoleto: CISAM.

Rodgers, S. and J. E. Ziegler. 1999. "Elisabeth Spalbeek's Trance Dance of Faith: A Performance Theory Interpretation from Anthropological and Art Historical Perspectives." In M. A. Suydam and J. E. Ziegler, eds., *Performance and Transformation. New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality,* 299–355. Houndmills and Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Romeo, Giovanni. 1977–1978. "Una 'simulatrice di santità' a Napoli nel'500: Alfonsina Rispoli." *Campania sacra* 8–9: 159–218.

Ruhberg, Christine. 1995. *Der literarische Körper der Heiligen. Leben und Viten der Christina von Stommeln (1242–1312)*. Tübingen und Basel: Francke.

Sallmann, Jean-Michel, ed. 1992. *Visions indiennes, visions baroques: les métissages de l'inconscient.* Paris: PUF.

–. 1994. *Naples et ses saints è l'âge baroque (1540–1750).* Paris: PUF.

Schmucki, Octavian. 1991. *The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi: A Critical Investigation in the Light of Thirteenth-Century Sources.* New York: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University.

Schutte, Anne Jacobson. 1994. "'Piccole donne', 'grandi eroine': santità femminile 'simulata' e 'vera' nell'Italia della prima età moderna." In Lucetta Scaraffia e Gabriella Zarri, a cura di, *Donne e fede,* 277–301. Rome and Bari: Laterza.

–. 2001. *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Simons, Walter and J. E. Ziegler, 1990. "Phenomenal religion in the thirteenth century and its image: Elisabeth Spalbeek and the Passion cult." In W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Women in the Church,* 117–26. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

–. 1994. "Reading a saint's body: rapture and bodily movement in the vitae of thirteenth-century beguines." In Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies,* 10–23. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Thomas Antonii de Senis "Caffarini". 1974. *Libellus de supplemento, Legende prolixe virginis beate Catherine de Senis.* Eds. Iuliana Cavallini and Imelda Foralosso. Rome: Edizioni Cateriniane.

Thomas of Celano. 1999. "The Life of Saint Francis." In Regis J. Armstrong and J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents.* Vol. I. *The Saint,* 180–310. New York: New City Press.

Trexler, Richard. 2002. "The Stigmatized Body of Francis of Assisi: Conceived, Processed, Disappeared." In Klaus Schreiner und Marc Müntz Hrsgs., *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen,* 463–97. München: Wilhelm Fink.

Tschacher, Werner. 2000. *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437. Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen im Spätmittelalter.* Aachen: Shaker.

Vanderbroucke, François. 1957. "Discernement des esprits." In Marcel Viller et al. dir., *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité. Ascétique et Mystique. Doctrine et Histoire.* III: 1254–66. Paris: Beauchesne.

Vauchez, André. 1968. "Les stigmates de Saint François et leurs détracteurs dans les derniers siècles du moyen âge." *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 80: 595–625.

–. 1990. "Les théologiens face aux prophéties à l'époque des papes d'Avignon et du Grand Schisme." In Id., éd., *Les textes prophétiques et la prophétie en Occident (XIIe–XVIe siècle),* 577–88. Rome: l'École Française de Rome.

–. 1991. "La nascita del sospetto." In Gabriella Zarri, a cura di, *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna,* 39–51. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.

–. 2012. *Francis of Assisi: The life and afterlife of a medieval saint.* New Haven: Yale UP.

Vidal, Fernando. 2007. "Miracles, Science, and Testimony in Post-Tridentine Saint-Making." *Science in Context* 20: 481–508.

Vita Elizabeth. 1886. *Vita Elizabeth sanctimonialis in Erkenrode.* In *Catalogus codicum hagiographicum bibliothecae Regie Bruxellensis.* I:362–78. Brussels.

Warr, Cordelia. 2007. "Re-reading the relationship between devotional images, visions, and the body: Clare of Montefalco and Margaret of Città di Castello." *Viator* 38: 217–49.

Williams-Krapp, Werner. 1990. "'Dise ding sint dennoch nit ware zeichen der heiligkeit'. Zur Bewertung mystischer Erfahrungen im 15. Jahrhundert." *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 80: 61–71.

Yarom, Nitza. 1992. *Body, blood, and sexuality. A psychoanalytic study of St. Francis' stigmata and their historical context.* New York: Peter Lang.

Zarri, Gabriella. 1990. *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500.* Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.

– ed. 1991. *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna.* Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier.

–. 2001. "Lucia da Narni e il movimento femminile savonaroliano." In Gigliola Fragnito e Mario Miegge, a cura di, *Girolamo Savonarola da Ferrara all'Europa,* 101–16. Firenze: SISMEL.

Péter Tóth G.

Swindlers, Lunatics and "Losers"
On the Margins of the Fight against Superstition
in Hungary under Emperor Joseph II (1780–1790)

At the end of the reign of Queen Maria Theresa it seemed that the enlightened abso-lutist state no longer had any patience with witch-hunting in law, or with superstitions in religion and with beliefs born of ignorance in the everyday life of the people. None-theless, numerous cases demonstrated the survival of such "superstitions" – as they called them then – and the societal demand (or necessity) that made magical activities lucrative for some and that kept beliefs related to them alive. Thus, the "fight" against superstition had not come to an end; on the contrary, it only began with Joseph II's accession to the throne. From a contemporary perspective, battles, fought on sev-eral fronts and with countless weapons of intellectual persuasion, were taking place at the end of the eighteenth century when the creaking of the old order indicated the structural transformation of the state. Some of these fronts were of particular importance, such as the escalation of polemics around religion both inside and out-side the Church; the judicial doubts of the law, especially criminal law that occasion-ally decided over life and death and that determined the norms of social coexistence; the increasing role physicians played with the arrival of the Enlightenment, includ-ing dilemmas about public health; and the emergence of new structures of the public sphere, as well as the bickering of its protagonists.[1]

In 1781 Jakob Plenck (1735–1807), professor of medicine from Buda published a handbook of forensic medicine, entitled *Elementa medicinae et chirurgiae forensic.* He examined in this book the magical crimes of his time from a medical police perspec-tive, primarily in terms of the applicable law. His work went into a second edition in 1786, and an extended German edition in 1793, both of which became the most used textbooks of public medicine in Hungary. Since magical crimes had disappeared from the everyday practice of criminal law, or rather, they had been transferred to the field of medicine and medicine enforcement, the typology laid down in this book pro-vided a useful aid for the official management of the magical phenomena continu-

---

[1] Hajdu 1982, 172–207.

ing to appear among the common people. Plenck's work dedicated a chapter to the signs of magic (*signa magiae*) and to the categorisation of magical acts. In this chapter, he explained that in compliance with prevailing medical explanations there must be a distinction between: (1) "real" magic (*magia vera*); (2) "pretended" or simulated magic (*magia simulata*); (3) "artificial" magic (*magia artificialis*); (4) "illusory" magic (*magia imaginaria*); and finally (5) "attributed" magic (*magia imputata*).[2]

Although Plenck discussed the matters of witchcraft, spirit beliefs, the revenant dead and vampirism as cases delegated to the Holy See, leaving it with, and referring it back to the field of theology instead of that of secular law, in every case he noted the medical and judicial interpretation of these. Accordingly, he discussed the treatment of the diabolically possessed and cases of diabolical magicians. He claimed that the magicians and those who were diabolically possessed (*magia et daemonia vera*) should be treated by priests; the simulating, fake demoniacs (*magia et daemonia simulata*) should be put in prison; the sick, mentally deranged demoniacs, those who suffered from convulsive hallucinations, melancholy, mania and female hysteria (*hypochondria, melancholia, mania, hystaeria*) should be admitted into mental asylums. That is to say, Plenck essentially separated the clerical and medical spheres and gave the right to intervene to physicians and medical police, who in these cases were the representatives of the law.[3]

This study examines the cases that concern magical activities during the reign of Joseph II in Hungary, according to the categories defined by Plenck. It transpires from the testimony of the files that ended up at the judicial and medical forums that the authorities continued to be in doubt as to how to treat magical activities. Despite enlightened anti-superstition ideas proposed from above, the common people still continued to see magical activities as criminal matters and insisted on their treatment as such, while it remained difficult to establish bewitchment and magic as facts with the available judicial tools.

Plenck's five categories delineate a zone in-between the roles of criminal and victim as well as between the two poles of magical activities, in which we can find equally the punishable criminal character and the innocent person who had to appear in front of the tribunal (but who in the absence of a crime could not be given a punishment.) In the intermediate positions, we find the swindler who used magic (or its appearance) for actual fraud and deserved punishment; as well as the quacks who used magic as a tool, who might be punished for their dubious activities as well as the lunatics of "illusory" magic who made themselves believe what others would not believe.

Here I will investigate three groups from among the above-mentioned categories: I will primarily present those groups that were categorized as falling under the purview of criminal courts despite the fact that the Enlightenment had cast doubt upon the "reality" of crimes that were related to popular beliefs, magic and superstition. In other words, I will present the cases in which magical activities remained under the

---

[2] Plenck 1786, 128–33.
[3] Ibid., 133–36.

jurisdiction of criminal courts precisely as part of the fight against superstition. Thus, despite the diminished prestige of magic, its loss of meaning, and the strong doubts about witchcraft, they did not disappear, but rather they were redefined. Besides criminals of "real" magic, I will discuss the swindlers of "pretended" magic, the mentally unstable "lunatics" of "imagined" magic, as well as the marginalised "losers" of the system.

The Beginning of the End

In the winter of 1789, the ailing Emperor Joseph returned to Vienna. Belgium was in revolt, the Prussians had made an alliance with the Turks against him, the Hungarians were discontent. The Hungarian nobility demanded redress for their grievances and the restoration of the laws that had been in place during the time of Queen Maria Theresa. The dismantling of traditional public administration generated enormous indignation and discontent, which was only aggravated by the unsuccessful war against the Ottoman Empire. Among the nobility – as a sign of protest – it became fashionable to use the national language and national ethnic dress, as well as to protest imperial measures. As Joseph's death was approaching, a general malaise took over the entire empire. The ailing emperor made a radical decision on 28 January 1790. With one desperate "stroke of a pen" he withdrew all his earlier decrees, except for the ones about serfdom and about religious tolerance, and he restored the Hungarian Constitution to its 1780 state. He died on 20 February 1790, in the belief that his life's work had collapsed.[4]

In the months following the emperor's death, several satirical pamphlets were written personally mocking Joseph. The timing was not a coincidence because the General Assembly of the Estates called for June 1790 was full of expectations. The motivations behind the publication of the pamphlets were varied, but above all they were a reaction to Joseph's policies. One of the satirical poems published on 29 February 1790 in Vienna, for instance, discussed the origin of the, by then, deceased emperor as the "apostle of *Luciper*". The anonymous author praised the emperor's mother, but considered Joseph a degenerate, "godless offspring", who would hasten Judgement Day, the Antichrist himself. Joseph was the archenemy, the principal devil, the "altar raider", the "mercenary of Hell" who disgraced the Church, who subverted public order, moreover, who removed the hope of the future by dissolving monastic orders and, by extension, their schools. Therefore, struck by the judgment of God and as a fulfilment of the Church's excommunication curse he had to end his life disfigured by syphilis. In a harsh and unsympathetic tone, the author wished to amplify the emperor's death by adding otherworldly suffering and punishments of the most terrible hellish kind.[5]

---

[4] Barta 1978; 2012; H. Balázs 1989.
[5] Hajdu 1982, 479–81, No. 10/A; Hajdu 1983, 5.

Social unrest escalated to a point that the hatred of Josephinism resulted in absurd reactions. For instance, in several provinces in the empire, the house numbers painted on buildings on the orders of Joseph were scraped off because they allegedly attracted Evil and thus endangered the residents of such houses.[6] In the north of Hungary, referring to the drought as divine punishment, there were several incidents of "witch-bathing", that is, people suspected of witchcraft were put through a water ordeal. A clerk, Imre Vitéz related one such incident in a letter to the famous Hungarian writer, Ferenc Kazinczy, on 10 June 1790:

> They are bathing witches everywhere … and the judges go through village by village and take the women for bathing. They claim that they command the elements. Everyone is praying in the diocese of Eger for a positive outcome of the General Assembly. This, in our eyes, is exactly like bathing witches.[7]

Imre Vitéz was nominated royal commissioner on 4 December 1789, to locally enforce the emperor's ordinances. Due to the death of the emperor, however, he never began his work. On 20 April 1790, with the withdrawal of the imperial ordinances, the office he fulfilled lost its purpose. Vitéz regularly corresponded with Kazinczy's and often discussed current political issues with him. At this point, some of the counties were openly expediting new royal elections because Joseph had earlier broken the imperial pact with the estates and went openly against the Hungarian constitution. They also demanded that at the upcoming General Assembly of the Estates the relationship between the new emperor and the nation be laid upon new and clear foundations.

After an intermission of a quarter of a century, the Hungarian Parliament was convened on 6 June 1790. First in Buda, then they settled in for a longer session in Pozsony (Pressburg, Bratislava). This happened at the same time Vitéz reported to Kazinczy on the witch-bathing in the Eger diocese. At this time, the diocese was ruled by Bishop Károly Eszterházy who – out of loyalty to Rome, rather than to Vienna – rejected every change concerning the Catholic Church proposed by Josephinism. Eszterházy went sharply against the politics of enlightened absolutism; he resented the directive of independence from Rome and the shift towards a secular state. At the General Assembly of 1790–1791, as the leader of the Roman Catholic party, he opposed the renewal of the recognition of the rights of Protestants and openly demanded the repeal of the entire Patent of Toleration. It was, perhaps, no coincidence that Eszterházy saw the power of the Church in the revival of public Catholic processions banned by Joseph, especially considering the effect of processions on the common people. During the time of the drought, in cooperation with secular authorities, the Bishop surely did not object to the practice of witch-bathing considered as public exorcism, although he did not support it openly. The processions, being mass events organised by the Church, provided opportunities for believers pleading for rain to pronounce their

---

[6] Miskolczy 2015, 74.
[7] Kazinczy 1891, II:70–71, No. 315.

prayers; in other words, an opportunity for the revival of the forms of religious liturgy banned by Joseph II, and for the demonstration of the bishop's political intentions. The bishop had a chance to show the force of his party with organised mass events. And Eszterházy used this opportunity cleverly. He opened up space for the repressed religious needs of the public, handled the emotions perturbing public order resulting from the drought while also fulfilling his political ambitions.[8]

Such things happened not only in the north-eastern region of Eger; there were similar reactions after the death of the emperor in Central Hungary. In June 1790, along the Danube, the conservative forces also set themselves in motion. Since this part of the country was also struck by severe drought, the Dunapentele magistrate of Fejér County convened the "Association of Scholars", founded by the County's elite, in order to analyse the reasons for the natural disaster. When the authorities inquired about the criteria for the identification of witchcraft, the answer was the following: the drought was caused by a witch who "weighs seven pounds".[9] Therefore, every woman of the municipality was publicly weighed. The news spread quickly from Pentele inhabited mostly by Hungarian Catholic settlers. The rapporteur from Székesfehérvár of the *Politisches Journal* related the incident to the Hamburg-based journal on 29 June. Thus, in the 1790 September issue, besides the news from Russia, Poland and Munich, the German-speaking readers could read about the seemingly absurd incidents of Hungarian witch-weighing.

In the period between the death of the emperor and the inauguration of the new monarch, it seemed as if the entire public administration had been thinking "without a head". So, in legally uncertain times local political forces seized control, seeing an opportunity for a fast restoration. To this end, they considered every instrument deployable that Joseph II and his predecessor Maria Theresa had banned in the name of the principles of the Enlightenment, but which had proved to be effective in previous constellations of power. This way, they could probe questions without consequences, questions that were raised by political uncertainty and reinforced by the drought that according to many constituted a sign. This explains why the news of the witch-weighings and -bathings seemed plausible to the Hungarian and the European public.

The Hungarian figures of the Catholic Church might have been influenced by events coming from abroad. The first news of the imprisonment in Rome of Count Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo, 1743–1795), the magician and necromancer, proving the still active and real power of the Holy See's Inquisition, reached Hungary in January 1790. This incident is a good example of the ambivalent attitude of the Church to magic, which was stimulated by the Enlightenment and, in its wake, the French revolution. Banning and burning Cagliostro's works at the stake only escalated the public excitement developing around his person. The Hungarian public had the same reaction. Although the average reader did not read his works, his life was an

---

[8] Sugár 1965; Antal 2007, 48–49.
[9] *Politisches Journal* (Hamburg), 29 June 1792, 733.

open secret. The inner circles of the Church were actively concerned about scandals that they considered to be a threat to the Church itself. The Vatican informed the highest representatives of the Church about dangerous individuals and their banned books. Meanwhile public opinion had to be satisfied with morsels of information from newspapers.

The most interesting are, perhaps, the letters in which Bishop Károly Eszterházy was informed of Cagliostro's books being condemned to be burned at the stake, or an earlier one informing the archbishop of Esztergom, József Batthyány, about the details of the count's imprisonment.[10] Eszterházy received letters on 7 and 16 April and 3 May from his agent in Rome, Giorgio Merenda, who wrote to him explaining that the Pope convicted Cagliostro to be burned at the stake with his wife, and then out of mercy, changed the punishment to lifelong imprisonment. The reason for this unusually severe punishment was Cagliostro's book on Egyptian freemasonry (*Maçonnerie Egyptienne*). The offices of ecclesiastical and state censorship considered his work so harmful that the burning of the books took place publicly in the street. But was Giuseppe Balsano really such an important personality that news of him would reach the Bishop of Eger practically the same day? What could have motivated Eszterházy's agent, to add a set of books to his urgent letter with a warning to the recipient? He himself provided the answer: he was sending a secret copy of the burnt work to Eszterházy, one of the leaders of the Hungarian opposition against Joseph II's religious reforms. He had to inform Eszterházy that the book he was sending had already been indexed, and its author was a pariah excommunicated by the Holy Inquisition. This information, in the eye of Eszterházy, confirmed the strength of the Church. Throughout Joseph II's reign, Eszterházy had maintained a close and regular relationship with the Pope, despite (or rather because of) growing Josephinist aspirations to control state-church relations.[11]

The news, however, had a different impact on wider public opinion. The Vienna-based newspaper, *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* (War and Other Notable Stories) discussed the arrest of the count and his inquisition procedure in several articles. The first news report was published in the 22 January 1790 issue:

> … no one was able so far to find out where he came from, and from where he gets all that money to finance his travels. … By taking part in secret activities he gave away information about himself that gave rise to various opinions of uncertain origins. Word has it that he conversed with souls, that he is a devil, the Antichrist himself, an illusionist, a charming sorcerer; and that he was already alive when the wedding at Cana took place, he was even present at the event.[12]

---

[10] Bónis 1964, 349, 392.
[11] Antal 2007, 48–49.
[12] *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* [War and other notable stories], 22 January 1790, section II, book 6, 108–12.

Cagliostro claimed his performance to be of Egyptian origin; he referred to himself as the "Grand Kofta" representing the independent masonic lodge he had founded. In the 1780s he could make people believe that he was ruling the spirit world, that he was able to produce gold, had the power to give people back their youth, and that his disciples would live for 5557 years if they did a six-week cure every fifty years following his instructions. Cagliostro was born Giuseppe Balsamo in 1743 in Palermo, in Sicily. He used to perform séances with his wife all across Europe; he conjured spirits with the help of a young virgin and mirrors.[13] In 1785, he was accused of having participated in a conspiracy against the French queen Marie Antoinette (the sister of Emperor Joseph II), in the "Affair of the Diamond Necklace". Despite having cleared himself, he had to go. The count, relocated to England, predicted the outbreak of the French Revolution, as a "response" to which the French revealed Cagliostro's concealed peasant origin. Then he fled to Rome, but he was arrested by the men of the Inquisition in 1789 for his freemason past. Hungarian readers could read about the end of his trial on 29 April 1791:

> The final verdict of Cagliostro was pronounced on 7 April. The committee, constituted of cardinals and judges whose task was to investigate and judge his case, sentenced him to death, but his Holiness the Pope changed the fatal punishment to eternal captivity. The location of his captivity became the castle of Saint Leo.[14]

Károly Eszterházy, the bishop of Eger, had already received this information two weeks earlier with the help of his agent in Rome. The agents basically fulfilled two functions: on the one hand, as delegated rapporteurs they sent back the most recent news and the newest papal ordinances. On the other, their task was to investigate relics and treasures for their commissioners. Bishop Eszterházy considered Saint Charles Borromeo (1538–1584) as a role model; therefore, he had his sacred relics and portrait transferred to Eger. Since he had been working his whole life on restoring the leading role of the Catholic Church and to reconsolidate Hungarian Catholicism, it is not surprising that his contemporaries called him Saint Charles Borromeo the Second. Through Bishop Eszterházy the Hungarian clergy was immediately informed, and a few weeks later Hungarian public opinion also learned about the trial of Cagliostro, the new "Antichrist", the outcome of which proclaimed the glory of the pope and the Church.[15]

Cagliostro died in prison in August 1795. Even though at his death they ordered a public prayer, they denied a church ceremony for his funeral because he died an excommunicated, unrepentant sinner. The conservative forces within the Church were only able to benefit from this fact for a short time. In 1789, on the orders of

[13] Findel 1909, 306–9; Seligmann 1987, 300–5; Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 147–51.
[14] *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* [War and other notable stories], 26 April 1791, section IV, book 33, 507.
[15] Ibid., 20 May 1791, section IV, book 40, 628.

1 Advertisement for a séance of Phylidor, magician and stage conjurer (Paul de Philipsthal),
creator of the first phantasmagoria show, performed in Vienna on 13 April 1791
Contemporary print (Wien: S. Oettermann und S. Spiegel,
Bio-Bibliographisches Lexikon der Zauberkünstler [Offenbach am Main, 2004], 263)

General Napoleon Bonaparte the French captured Pope Pius VI and brought him to
Valence in France, where he died in captivity on 29 August 1799. Bishop Károly Eszter-
házy did not live to witness this outcome: he died in Eger on 15 March 1799.

The writer and publicist István Sándor (1750–1815) published his essays between
1796 and 1815 with the title *Sokféle* ('various'). In his writings, Sándor revisited the
1780s and the 1790s and recalled the most famous magicians, tricksters, illusionists of
Vienna and Buda, who seem to have followed in the footsteps of Cagliostro, whom he
also named in the article. These performers appeared as alter egos of Cagliostro, and
entertained the eager public by scaring them. Sándor also mentions the Jewish magi-
cian Philadelphia who appeared in the court of Maria Theresa, as well as Jonas the

cartomancer, Georg Schröpfer who performed *laterna magica* and Paul Phylidor, the magician from Augsburg who was very popular in the 1790s.[16]

Georg Schröpfer (1738–1774) was a freemason, occultist illusionist, famous in his time, who performed in Vienna and Leipzig. On several occasions he arranged spiritualist séances in his "*manège*" of Vienna around 1770 sometimes lasting twenty-four hours. Not incidentally, he also appeared in the court circles of Maria Theresa. During his shows the drinking of punch and use of narcotic smoke was ubiquitous.[17] The inebriated audience probably saw the misty smoke figures as ghosts in the darkened room.[18]

Paul de Philipsthal alias "Physicus Phylidor" (1760?–1828) performed in Vienna in the 1790s, he was an illusionist and an actor who pursued the 'infamous Schröpferesque ghost illusions' (*Schröpferesque Geisterscheinings*). István Sándor saw Phylidor about five times around 1791 and wrote about his shows enthusiastically.[19] The former actor also showed up in Hungary. His *Opticum theatrum* was seen by József Keresztesi (1748–1812), a Lutheran pastor from Bihar County, in Buda on 20 September 1790, around the same time that the Assembly of the General Estates reconvened to discuss the post-Joseph II era.[20] Philidor's theatre was in Josephstadt, next to Auersperg Palace, where the walls were covered by black drapes from the outside and were decorated with white, glowing skulls recalling Masonic symbols. Inside, the "magical spheres" already set the mood, and when the images projected on the billowing smoke "moved" – the shadows of the past, such as Maria Theresa, Emperor Joseph, Transylvanian Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II (1676–1735) or even the incubi of the witches' Sabbath, appeared – the women in the audience fell down in a faint in the arms of their companions.[21]

István Sándor's articles not only describe the world of magicians who had become illusionists in an amusing way, but also tell us of the demand that first appeared among the court elite, and later among the urban bourgeoisie. And this demand was the intensified interest in communicating with the dead, which was well reflected in the increasing number of spiritualist séances. During the time of the "fight against superstition" overseen by Joseph II, the growing distance from beliefs and magical customs coexisted with a new type of societal fascination with such beliefs. The elite was partly discovering it and publicly rejecting it; partly rethinking, recreating the superstitious topics stirred up in the debates of the Enlightenment. While they were openly making fun of magical practices, in secret they still practiced them. Several scientists were researching the harmful or, by then, fabulous beliefs and customs appearing among the common people; journalists were searching for topics in the dark corners of the

---

[16] Ipolyi 1987 [1854], 444.
[17] Liesegang 1986, 17; Rauschgatt 1995, 12; Heard 2006, 57.
[18] Sándor 1796, IV:72–76, No. 35.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Keresztesi 1868, 318–19.
[21] In 1793 Phylidor already worked in revolutionary Paris, but because of his diabolic game and ghost-raising he also ended up in London. Liesegang 1986, 17; Rauschgatt 1995, 12; Heard 2006, 57.

public sphere or in the scandalous past of the elite and of celebrities; meanwhile the uncertainty of everyday life, the fears and inevitable life situations still presented the individual with very real challenges.

Reading the list above gives the impression that Joseph II's fight to eliminate superstition had almost a greater effect and counter effect on Hungarian society than Maria Theresa's edicts to prohibit witchcraft trials during her reign. The period following the death of Joseph, especially the few months from February to November 1790, were uncertain enough for his contemporaries not to be able to formulate an impartial judgment about his decade-long reign. Many of his followers became disillusioned and abandoning their role of actively shaping politics and public life, became solitary thinkers, while the opponents of Joseph's policies gained ground.

Thus, we can see that the anti-superstition fight had a great impact; discourses about superstitions had equally high stakes among the higher echelons of society and on the micro-levels of everyday life. The cases discussed below, which concern the superstitious customs of the "common people" are embedded in this broader discourse. I will talk of the "victims" of the fight against superstition who remained unintentionally in the increasingly marginal, marginalising zones of the magical world, and who became the losers rather than the winners, of the elite's change of perspective regarding popular beliefs. In other words, I will primarily describe the fate not of those who, upon the prohibition of witch persecutions were no longer threatened by the fears of the public and the judges of the tribunal, but the fate of those who remained under threat despite the ban. Firstly, I speak of the people who saw an opportunity in the changing social structure of the "superstitious world" and were hoping to profit as "cheating" magicians; and who were punished by the law when they were caught. Secondly, I discuss those, considered "lunatics" by their contemporaries, who tried to continue the discourse of an already "bygone era" by using witchcraft accusations before the tribunals, as it used to be before witch-hunting was prohibited; and who failed to recognize the fact that the rules of social coexistence were already dictating different things. Thirdly, I will discuss the "losers" of magical activities who were pushed into the marginal category of the "superstitious" as defined by the Enlightenment due precisely to their birth and legal status, and were thus crowded out of the civilised world of common sense. I will outline the last case through the example of late-eighteenth-century Gypsies in Hungary.

The Swindlers of Magic

The "dragon-pulling incident in Csökmő" took place sometime at the beginning of 1787, an event that became famous as a broadside in the nineteenth century as a satirical story poking fun at villages. The village of Csökmő is located in South Eastern Hungary, in Békés County. Under Maria Theresa's reign it was a serf village paying taxes to their lord. The settlement was unable to produce the tax assessments despite their best efforts. This is when Ferenc Csuba (also Ferkó or Ferke in the sources) appeared on

the scene; he initially claimed to be the companion of *táltos,* then a real *táltos.*[22] From 1794 on he had the reputation of a *táltos* who had tricked and damaged many with his treasure-digging and money-seeing activities. According to nineteenth-century poetic narratives about the Csökmő incident, he was called a "seeing blind beggar", which suggests that his "blindness" was also bogus, serving the act of illusion.[23]

Csuba hid larger animal bones in the swamp on the outskirts of the village, then lured the judges of the village to a specific location claiming that there, at the "dragon's ranch", they would find buried treasure. The judges started digging. They were very excited to find the "dragon bones" because they took this as a favourable sign. Csuba, however, forbade them to continue the work, claiming that the treasure was guarded by another, still living dragon. For five hundred forints, he volunteered to tie up the beast with a rope. The shrewd swindler took the end of the rope into the bush and tied it to a tree. He hung empty cans on the branches of the tree so that they would make a howling sound in the strong wind. Csuba made the magistrates of the village stand on the other end of the rope with the instruction to pull on it whenever they heard the dragon's sound. The wind rose and the cans started to howl, but the judges were so terrified that they rather ran away. Only a man called Jenei stayed in his place, but he was also too scared to pull the dragon out from the swamp all by himself. Csuba sent him back to the village to spread the word that the upset dragon would destroy the village. He promised, nonetheless, that he, Ferkó Csuba, would stay put as long as he could, acting as a "dragon shepherd". The following day, however, he disappeared with the five hundred forints he had been given.

The story became public knowledge from the 1820s on in Debrecen, Nagyvárad (Oradea) and the vicinity of Kecskemét, and on the market squares of Bihar and Békés counties. Manuscript copies were included in the curriculum as educational material thanks to the Calvinist College of Debrecen. Ferkó Csuba's story became the exemplar of the "dumb", "stupid" and most of all "superstitious" country bumpkin. Apparently, the appearance of a compelling and shrewd individual was enough for the dragon to step out of the world of tales and imagination into the tangible, real world; and, through the figure of our protagonist, enough for reality to become part of amusing stories. The case, however, had a real judicial foundation, which places our swindler between 1787 and 1800. His criminal trial was conducted by the Békés County tribunal according to the report dated 11 September 1789; but before his trial the judges from Szeghalom collected a large quantity of evidence from the humiliated witnesses.[24]

There is nothing surprising about Békés County peasants being fooled by Csuba, since in the same century, about twenty-thirty years earlier, the educated county judges were still burning witches in Füzesgyarmat and Szeghalom. Given that the population

---

[22] In the past, the "real" *táltos* were magicians who could influence the weather and could "see" treasure.

[23] Banner 1926, 1–3.

[24] Dömötör 1934.

of the region was living in deep poverty, seeking treasure had a considerable audience, Csuba's calculations paid off. The kinds of things he tried to do in order to extort money from people are well reflected in the protocol taken on 30 January 1788 in Vésztő. It transpires from this that he had been banned from begging in Szentes already in 1787. After that, Csuba chose to look for a new profession of larger calibre. Despite having been condemned to sixty lashes with a stick, he did not break. The tale of having found treasure seemed to be a good venture, which is also proved by the fact that he got a trained partner, Ádám Szűcs from Szentes, who convinced the credulous people by fabricating fake certificates. In Vésztő, to appear more convincing, he pretended to be "God's servant" ("preacher officer"). Whenever he found a suitable "victim" he upped the ante and claimed to be a "member of the *táltos* order". We can find out about this "order", in which Csuba claimed membership, from the protocol of the Békés County trial on 30 January 1788:

> The *táltos* gather every year on the day of Saint George and on that of Saint Michael, and line up in five groups and hold a tribunal there, and those who do not carry out their obligations are punished. The five groups have five kinds of obligations. Which are healing, money seeing, preaching, begging and farming. He was one of the money seers.[25]

Whenever Csuba thought that he could make more of an impression as a *táltos*, he took on that role later as well. In the statement of facts (*species facti*) of 9 May 1794 one of the victims, a man from Derecske, described how they held him up on the road with the following words:

> My friend, I can do good for you, because I am a real *táltos* and I was an apprentice of other *táltos* for six years.[26]

Csuba also changed his religion to fit his interests. At his first interrogation, Csuba claimed to be a Calvinist; in the protocol recorded in 1794, however, he said he was a Catholic.[27] He surely needed to appear Catholic before the Calvinists and Calvinist before the Catholics for his new dealings, thus the "preaching" role of the *táltos* also sounded more credible. He also had the opportunity to present himself as an illusionist "physician" at certain fairs, to heal the people and to enhance his own reputation as a *táltos* and as a healer.

The certificates dated 17 June 1788 written in Nagyvárad (Oradea) to Sámuel Jenei in Furta that later became part of the judicial evidence, were written at the beginning of Csuba's activities as a swindler. The letters served to convince the targeted victims

---

[25] Hajnal 1878, 59.
[26] Nagy 1957, 302.
[27] Ibid.

and to advertise his money seeing. With the letters, Csuba wanted to give the impression of being able to find buried treasure with his secret knowledge.[28]

Csuba was in prison from August 1789 until he finished his sentence in the autumn of 1791.[29] His case was tried by the local court on 25 August 1790, and at the court of appeal on 7 May 1791. The last trial produced its verdict on 7 May, according to which, taking into consideration the time he spent on remand, he was sentenced to be jailed for three years and, counting from the day of the verdict, he was to be beaten monthly, ninety lashes with stick each time. Lacking sufficient funds, the court did not establish indemnification for his victims.[30] In the dungeon of Gyula, Csuba was not broken; on the contrary, he came up with new plans. One of his fellow convicts, Balázs Imre, became his accomplice. After his release, he committed fraud again with the cover story of money seeing in Derecske and Berettyóújfalu. Therefore, the judges of Békés called for the re-capture of "blind" Ferenc Csuba on 16 August 1792.[31]

From today's perspective, one might recognise in his person the poor man's Count Cagliostro who, following the example of the masonic lodges reserved for the elite, was going to establish the secret society of *táltos,* which was more familiar to the common people. He built his *táltos* career with "marketing tools", careful of details. As the tollkeeper of gullibility, he was a well-known figure of his age, who later even became a popular character in pulp literature. Through him, we might also get an idea of contemporary public opinion relating to him, or rather in relation to the role he had "invented". The "superstitious" beliefs activated by his character shed light on the duality of how the public considered something plausible that the judicial representatives regarded as fraud. Apparently, the beggar as a character living on the margins of society, through sheer force of personality, could become a successful figure who galvanized emotions, fear and greed, at least until he was unmasked as a "swindler". Such luck in the superstitious universe, however, was only momentary. Besides charismatic characters like him, there were many others in the 1780s who had no hope of advancement.

Almost at the same time as Csuba's activities, a docket was produced relating that an individual called Alajos Diós appeared on New Year's Eve, 31 December 1789, in Kecskemét claiming to have come from the "Crimean Khatane". A citizen named József Tető reported a complaint about him at the town magistrate, claiming that when he was away from home because of a pig killing, the said person appeared at his house and frightened his wife "as a *táltos*". The *táltos* threatened the woman by saying that if she did not give him food and drink he would bewitch her. Without waiting for an answer "he made himself master of the house and made her bring him food and wine". The woman was only saved from the violent beggar by the arrival of her husband, and the intruder was finally captured with the help of the authorities. Diós then

[28] Ibid., 298–300.
[29] Ibid., 301.
[30] Ibid., 301–2.
[31] Ibid., 302.

confessed that he only pretended to be a *táltos* because he was hungry and his threats helped him to get food and beverage. He was sentenced to fifteen lashes with a switch and was sent back to his original place of residence, Gyöngyös.[32]

The above-mentioned cases show that the incidents of fraud based upon *táltos* beliefs were devoid of any sacrilegious aspect. This kind of belief and approach to magic no longer qualified as a sacrilege, as it had up until the 1760s, it was considered as simple fraud or illusionism; cases of "pretended magic" (similar to what was illustrated by Michel Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization*). Such occurrences exemplified not sin, but immorality and stupidity; they were simply instruments of gullibility and misdirection. In this case, the communal management of the offenders and the social solution of the phenomenon were unequivocal: the gullible should be educated, and the illusionists punished. The punishment, including incarceration and corporal punishment, could only be administered with a pedagogical intent.[33] Precisely because the magical act was reclassified as an offence of fraud and not a category of sin in the eye of the elite, it was downgraded to become the subject of ridicule. And their success among the broader public could only last as long as they were taken seriously.

The Lunatics of Magic

The characters of the previous examples chose freely how they wanted to shape their lives relying on contemporary beliefs. There were people, however, perhaps even the majority, who talked about witchcraft or their experiences of malefactor demons and diabolical individuals, not as a sovereign decision, but rather as "prisoners" of their own magical worlds and especially of their fears. On 15 March 1782, Konrád Frekk, a tanner from Bátaszék, and his wife made a desperate testimony before the notary of the market town Tolna in Southern Hungary, György Szelle, and his juror, Mihály Majer:

> My lords, we are repulsed to even tell you this but we are forced by necessity and fear to relate the damages we suffered. Our money, food, flour has all been lost from our house, our white geese apparently perished, we could never find out where all of our things went. But now this Gypsy girl confessed to us where it all went. You only have to call for her, she will not deny anything because she claims to be registered with the Association of Witches.[34]

The said Gypsy girl was no other than Konrád Frekk's foster daughter whom they had brought up as a 'new citizen' (*neocolona*), "neo-Hungarian", separated from her parents by force, in return for a small compensation from the County. In reality, Éva

---

[32] Iványosi-Szabó 1998, 323.
[33] Foucault 1989, 160.
[34] Szilágyi 1987 504.

2 Representation of the Witches' Sabbath in Rudolf Zacharias Becker Bavarian educator's educational book (1788, 39/307) and its Hungarianized version by János Kömlei (Rudolf Zacharias Becker, *Szükségben segítő könyv* [Helpful Book in need] [Pest: Stáhel Jó'sef és Kilian könyváros, 1790], 39/350, 46/388)

Frekkin was cheap labour and a servant in the household of the tanner. One of the children who were resettled with non-Gypsy parents between 1773 and 1790 to make them forget their Gypsy identity and their families. Maria Theresa issued an ordinance concerning Gypsies on 22 February 1773. The goal was to separate twelve-year-old Gypsy children from their wandering Gypsy parents and ensuring that they should switch lifestyles, forget their mother tongue and become proficient in tilling the land. The most important objective was to turn them into useful subjects of the ruler. The re-education of Éva was probably unsuccessful; although her former Gypsy identity had faded, her "neo-Hungarian" identity had not yet developed at the time of our story. The above quote, however, suggests that Éva did – at least on a narrative level – belong to a community, and accordingly, had her own identity. To get to the bottom of this, the authorities also saw it fit to launch an investigation, since Éva's "Association of Witches" seemed to be a highly suspicious, even dangerous criminal gang.

The magistrate of the market town, after having heard the accusations of the parents, arrested Éva Frekkin so that she could confirm the authenticity of the story about the thefts and the unnatural perishing of animals before the tribunal. The girl did just that, gave a detailed account of her actions, not failing to mention that she had been encouraged to destroy her landlady by the adult neighbours and village acquaintances: they promised her a "pretty dress" in exchange for stealing, "when she grew up". The harassments inciting crime, as it transpires from the account, were not limited to stealing money and food. Éva, as her foster parents "suspected", was in fact part of the "Association of Witches" that targeted poor and rich, powerful and weak alike.

According to Éva's account, the company travelled huge distances, they even visited the German settlement from which Éva's German foster parents hailed. Éva herself "went to" cause harm at the homeland of her foster parents in order to annoy

them and undermine their self-confidence and thus call attention to her grievances against them. The frivolous feasts of the witches spread from the stable of the foster mother to the chambers of other houses, the local manor house's pantry, even to certain military installations, such as the barracks and the gunpowder tower. While their self-confidence grew, fear spread all over the neighbourhood.

Éva's vision journeys and smaller side-trips to loot and steal with the witches always started out from the girl's home; their aim was to do damage, especially to ruin her foster parents. Besides killing animals and spoiling food they turned the residence of the Catholic family, stripped of its sacraments, into a witches' den where life became unliveable as Éva readily acknowledged it:

> Then they entered into the house of my foster mother, they had me take away everything from there, they opened the locked armoire. We took anything that we liked. They made me pour out the holy water, they had me pour the water of the Three Wise Men in the middle of the street, and pour simple water to replace it so that there would be no holy water in the house.

The calvary of the German settler family had only begun. They had to face the greatest tragedy: losing their biological child who was bewitched by the witches (and admittedly by Éva) so that even holy water could not help her.[35] The Association, according to Éva's account, also encountered the "Evil Spirit" itself who appeared before them with a white face, flame-coloured wings, goat legs, wearing a green velvet dress and with a chain around its waist. Satan conversed in German – a language unknown to the girl – and encouraged the company to participate in sexual acts. The young girl Éva was not spared this sexual orgy. The Evil did "that" to her as well, what he did "to anyone of them".

The first thing to capture the attention of today's reader after hearing Éva's story is perhaps not the witchcraft aspect but the marginal situation of the child within the family. The teenage girl is present, she takes care of her dying foster brother, she bears the accusations of her foster parents and the neighbours of causing their material ruin, in her nightmares she is fighting the adult women of the village who harm her, because they incite her to destroy her foster parents against her will. But from another perspective, the story is also about the discovery of sexuality. It is unknown whether the things said in court were suggested by the parents in their despair, blaming their foster daughter for the death of their child, or whether this is how the girl wished to share with the public her suffering, hardships, her feelings of rejection and vulnerability. It is certain, however, that to both parties, the victim's foster parents and the girl who caused moral and material damage, the public narration of their accounts was of particular importance.

Both parties were only able to settle the serious conflict within the family by involving the public. The public discussion of the incident, however, had to be communi-

---

[35] Szilágyi 1987, 504–8.

cated in a form meaningful to a wider audience. The bewitchment and witchcraft narratives apparently provided a very suitable framework for this. The magistrate of the market town Bátaszék and later the county court sitting in Szekszárd were of a different opinion. They accused the girl of gossiping, confabulation and lying. But the investigating magistrate also tried to calm down the victims:

> It is only a "fable", if she says so, you do not have to believe it. In today's world people will laugh at her if she said something about witches.[36]

And finally, the judge only had advice to give Éva as well:

> … perhaps you are only dreaming, and you do not pray before going to sleep and that is why you have foolish dreams. You should just go on and pray, you will see, that you will no longer have those silly dreams!

The case was eventually dismissed and the girl held in county jail was released. The magistrate of the market town and the tribunal had a very sceptical attitude towards both the *maleficium* narratives of the tragedies related by the parents and the girl's visions about the witches' Sabbath. The incident had another questionable aspect that undermined the status of the authorities conducting the proceedings. Even thirty years earlier the tribunals should not have handled such cases as criminal cases, but still this is what they did. It was as if the judges had recognised – as could the reader – that despite the ban on witch-hunting, village communities still needed the conflict resolution afforded by the social institution of witchcraft and the usefulness of witch narratives in explaining misfortune.[37]

According to Michel Foucault, by the second half of the eighteenth century a whole series of magical acts and sacrilegious behaviour were seen as pathological, first from a medical, then from a legal point of view. One would think, Foucault suggests, that this happened when the given culture no longer recognised the effectiveness of magic and certain sacraments. The "shift" to the pathological sphere did not happen immediately, but as part of a lengthy transition.[38] Essentially, the Bátaszék incident was also part of the process in the course of which the participants of the event regarded witchcraft from different interpretative angles, and accordingly experienced different dimensions. The foster parents socialised in the beliefs and fears of witchcraft had seen and experienced entirely different aspects of reality than the educated representatives of the authorities who doubted such beliefs, while the young girl professed the same beliefs as her foster parents she might also have been subconsciously relying on their fears when using witchcraft discourse as a threat. This was not yet the time when a conflict between an individual and the family would become a private mat-

---

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Foucault 1989, 160.

ter and/or manifest itself as a psychological issue. Only from the nineteenth century on would this problem result in a family conflict considered to impact public order,[39] attended to by institutions, the establishments of mental asylums and by mechanisms encouraging the confinement of these individuals. In the case of Éva Frekkin, the hellish family situation was related in the "language" of magic and witchcraft. The tragedy of the Gypsy girl was that, although many understood this "language", fewer and fewer spoke it. And those who understood it, approached the issue from the perspective of the narrative and not from that of faith.

Incidents of domestic violence becoming the secret of certain family members, just as the classification of love magic as madness that threatens public order, must have been the result of a long process. The fact that this process was present in Hungary in the 1780s, and can be traced through certain judicial files, is demonstrated by the above examples, and by those that follow.

The "Losers" of Magic

The unique tragedy of Éva Frekkin, the protagonist of the above-described example, was that she lived in a world that she barely understood herself, and which she could only describe with the hellish visions of witchcraft. Her life story, however, was not so unique. She shared this fate with thousands of other Gypsy children who were assigned to new parents between 1770 and 1800. The period of Joseph II's reign carries the weight of a genocide-like trauma affecting the entire Gypsy population.

In 1782 the authorities of Hont County arrested a large group of Gypsy suspects for burglary. They all admitted to the break-ins and to having committed further minor incidents of theft. Over the course of the investigation they also unexpectedly confessed to having committed a murder. The County tried to find the body of the victim, but the *corpus delicti* was never discovered. Another unexpected turn of events was when the suspects, "without any coercion", explained the "disappearance" of the corpse by saying that they dismembered, cooked and ate their victim. A hysterical process similar to a blood-libel accusation began; the County captured an alleged Gypsy criminal gang led by György Sárközi. The arrested suspects admitted to further, earlier cases of murder, the circumstances of which were not investigated. Once again, they did not find the bodies and, once again, the Gypsies confessed to having eaten their victims. Based on almost a hundred and thirty confessions, the arrested individuals were found guilty. Forty-one accused among them were sentenced to death on 10 August 1782: three men were sentenced to being quartered, six men to the breaking wheel, and sixteen to be hanged. Sixteen women, who allegedly participated in these acts and were the cooks of the cannibal feasts, were sentenced to decapitation. Those whose lives were spared were sentenced to several years of imprisonment with hard labour, and the children of the executed were given to foster parents.[40]

[39] Porter 2002, 42–43.
[40] Vajna 1907, II:268.

The memory of this horrific incident must have contributed greatly and hastened the later abolition of capital punishment and to the consolidation of criminal legislation based on the principle of incarceration. This incident shed light on the superstitious fears prevalent within the administration of justice. It appeared that the noble prerogative of the Hungarian county elite to continue the legislative procedure were more important than the enlightened views of the emperor, according to which, capital punishment, torture or absurd accusations such as cannibalism had no place.[41]

In an attempt to normalise the situation, Joseph II issued a patent – initially, to test its impact, only in the Transylvanian Principality – to regulate the nomadic Gypsy population. His considerations were humane, with some restrictions, nonetheless, they sought to achieve the full assimilation of the "Gypsy nation" (*natio*).[42] In his later patents issued in Hungary Joseph II prohibited the public nakedness of Gypsy children (*purdé*) and the sharing of a bed among opposite sex children. He forbade the presence of Gypsies at fairs; he even threatened with caning those who spoke the Gypsy language. He issued ordinances about the census of Gypsies, about submitting them to religious, linguistic and work-related local regulations intended to force them to perform agricultural work, and also about the education and clothing of their children. The 7 December issue of the newspaper *Magyar Hírmondó* also reported on the ordinance as breaking news.[43] Since the calming of tensions was very slow, there were newer and newer "Gypsy regulations".[44]

The issue of the Roma population was not only a "hot" topic in tribunals, the Council of Governors (*Helytartótanács*) meetings or at the court. Public opinion and scholarly societies were also preoccupied with them. In 1783 Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann, a professor from Göttingen, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, published a volume on European Gypsies. The monograph, the first of its kind, discussed the group of people about which rulers (such as Maria Theresa and Joseph II) got excited with a certain admiration and acceptance, yet at times with a lot of sarcasm and dismissiveness: "*the Gypsies are a people of the East, and they have an eastern way of thinking*" – he wrote in his introduction. He also emphasised that since they are reluctant to adapt to anything new, they "steal", "do commerce", "do not work", live from fraud and tricks, fortune-telling and selling amulets.[45]

It is typical of Grellmann's work that he borrowed mostly the negative ideas from his main source, the book of Francesco Griselini on the Banat of Temes (1780). He presented Gypsies as a people with no religion, while Griselini emphasised precisely that they always joined the majority congregation in a given settlement.[46]

The scholarly work of Griselini wished to aid the success of the colonisation of the Banat and of the assimilation of Gypsies, mentioning the elimination of superstitious

[41] Vajna 1906, I:311.
[42] *Magyar Hírmondó*, 7 December 1782, 756–57.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Kassics 1825, II:176–82; Miskolczy és Varga 2013, 21.
[45] Grellmann 1783, 72–73.
[46] Griselini 1780, I. 207–8, 225–26; Marjanucz 2013, 40.

customs was central to its message. But Grellman approached the subject of his inquiry with the arrogant and icy hatred of a civilised burgher. He thought it was a pity that in Europe no one else followed the – sometimes humane, sometimes quite severe – Gypsy ordinances of Joseph II. This group of people – wrote Grellmann – "*are in such ignorance that they barely deserve to be considered human*". Gypsies are descendants of Cain and therefore are "Jews" – was his rather theological than enlightened conclusion.[47] Grellmann, unlike the Hungarian nobility, was a supporter of forced civilisation; although later he remarked with a certain sarcasm and regret:

> Here, Gypsies are what they had been, here they are smiths, there they are horse dealers, or over here they are musicians, over there they are thieves and fortune-tellers, but wherever they are they are useless half-humans. I keep saying: Gypsies are the caricature of Hungarians.[48]

Grellmann blamed the failure of the imperial Gypsy policy on the Hungarian nobility when he recalled Joseph II's scornful question upon visiting Hont County as to whether the "cannibals" were at home. According to Grellmann he should have asked:

> … is this the land of the gullible people who believe in cannibalism and execute people out of gullibility?[49]

Grellman wrote with the arrogance of a "civilized man" about Hungarian nobles and Gypsies alike. He did not recognise the humanity of either. Or rather, what he recognised were the "ignorant" and "superstitious people" that he so much despised, who were unable to improve their lot.[50]

Therefore, it is not beside the point that one of the last instances of the judicial "docket production" related to magical activities was in the form of a circular letter sent from Vienna on 11 June 1785 calling upon, among others, the captain of Jászkun District to report and, if necessary, to arrest and exile in the most decided manner the trickster (*fascinatores*), cheating and magician Gypsies (*zingaros*) living in the region. This was basically the last of the imperial ordinances that discussed at all the criminal category labelled "magical crimes" (except for the ones about quackery). Although the ordinance was directed against Gypsies (or, more precisely, against one of their activities), it is not incidental that it regulated that very activity separately as well.[51]

---

[47] Grellmann 1783, 72–73.
[48] Miskolczy és Varga 2013, 27.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Linzbauer 1856, III:149–50, Nr. 908; Miskolczy 2015, 82.

The Fight against and for Superstitions

The failed attempts of the clergy, led by Pope Pius VI, to influence Joseph II's reform of the Church also had a stimulating and emboldening effect upon political literature. Following European trends –as an example of the structural changes the public sphere was undergoing and as a precursor of the French Revolution—political satire appeared as a successful genre not only in Europe but in Hungary too. Under the impact of Josephinism and the relaxation of censorship some writers and journalists occasionally felt emboldened. While in official and censored journals (*Magyar Hírmondó, Magyar Kurir*) they could only call attention to the abuses known to occur within the Church or promote the ordinances of the emperor aimed at Church reform, on the pages of underground journals, bypassing censorship, they attacked religion itself, perhaps without reflecting on the fact that religion could also ensure the peace of mind of the public. These – today we would call them "samizdat" – publications occasionally went beyond the intentions of the emperor and could result in unpleasant situations in Hungary even before the French Revolution. But at this time, they often played into the hands of the monarch, as they influenced the general population against the noble estates. For instance, the peasant revolt of Horea and Cloşca in Transylvania was a reminder to the West about the possible harm the angry masses could cause. This is why many identified the Enlightenment as the main cause of the peasant revolt. This is also why Joseph II's reign was later treated with so much disdain among those who were aspiring to public peace, because they blamed the emperor for the bloody episode of the 1784 peasant revolt.

However, before the French Revolution, many considered the satirical publications attacking the Church and religion as mere polemics. Several among the authors of these writings saw religion as the main impediment to the spread of the Enlightenment. The satire, "*Izé, purgátériumba való utazása*" [The "thing"s' journey to the Purgatory], was one of the most frivolous literary products of the time. It was presumably translated from the German by Sándor Szacsvay, the editor of the journal *Magyar Kurir,* in Vienna. Joseph II believed that the role of the press was to promote the emperor's ordinances. Moreover, the supervision and evaluation of the state administration (the activities of public administrators) was also the press's responsibility. Szacsvay's work – in keeping with this expectation – was permeated by his commitment to Josephinism. Two decades after his retirement from journalism he said the following:

> A good journalist promotes the objectives of the monarch and his government; he not only publishes his wise ordinances, but calls out those who make a mistake against him and praises those who follow him.[52]

The witty and clever language of the "anonymous" author of "*Izé, purgátériumba való utazása*" surpassed that of his contemporaries. The attitude, with which he attacked

---

[52] Kókay 1979, 90.

Catholic doctrines, however, was considered insulting by his peers. The sarcasm he used as a weapon managed to provoke the sentiments of even those who encouraged the reformation of religion in the spirit of Enlightenment. The narrator (that is, the author) makes a journey to Hell and to Purgatory with Saint Peter's passport. The gates of Hell are guarded by a Jesuit who sends our protagonist straight to Hell (since he died without confession and without being given the Last Rites) but with the privileged passport of Saint Peter he still gets into Purgatory. At its gates, there is a huge brawl underway. Those who try to enter by force are people who had devoted a lot of resources to monasteries, altars and masses, thereby often receiving absolution, because they paid good money for it, in other words, they diligently practiced all the sacred acts. Unfortunately, this is not enough, this would not save a mortal from Hell. Purgatory – the walls of which are constructed from papal bulls and letters of indulgence – is swarming with priests, as is Hell. The popes are all there as well; moreover, they are subjected to even worse torture by the devils than the ordinary souls. But there exists a mighty ruler on Earth (this would be Joseph II) who dissolves monastic orders, takes their goods, eliminates the abuses of religion, and therefore there is a risk of Purgatory and Hell becoming empty.[53]

While the original of "*Izé*" was written in German, the article "*Zakkariásnak a pápa titkos iró-deákjának Rómaitól költ levelei*" [The letters from Rome of Zachary, the secret scribe of the Pope] – which might also have been authored by Szacsvay – was translated from an Italian pamphlet. Zachary was the secret scribe of the Pope who, after observing the impact of the Enlightenment in the Austrian provinces, tried to convince his friend, Joseph II, the wayward emperor, with letters written from Rome.

The language of the article, printed in Győr and most likely bypassing censorship, was intentionally plebeian. The author demonstrates his witty logic by claiming to be the "secret" scribe of the Pope so that all of his statements have to be interpreted in the opposite sense. He pretends to be horrified by the troubling consequences of the Enlightenment; but he does so with the clear intention of convincing the readers of the opposite by making them complicit in outwitting the censors. In one of his letters, for instance, he reproached Joseph II for liberating the press to such a degree that faithlessness could "spread increasingly". Then he attacked those who wanted to abolish confession in the name of the Enlightenment.[54] Zachary blamed all the calamities on the "cursed" Enlightenment, for instance, that the images of saints are "now only considered as the works of a worthless illustrator whose work makes a mockery of the art of drawing", or that the Purgatory is on its way to ruin and therefore people do not make offerings at the holy mass which will inevitably lead to the collapse of the Church.[55] Finally, Zachary gives the following advice to Joseph II:

---

[53] Szacsvay 1787; Ballagi 1888, 169, 201, 611.
[54] Ballagi 1888, 172.
[55] Ibid., 173.
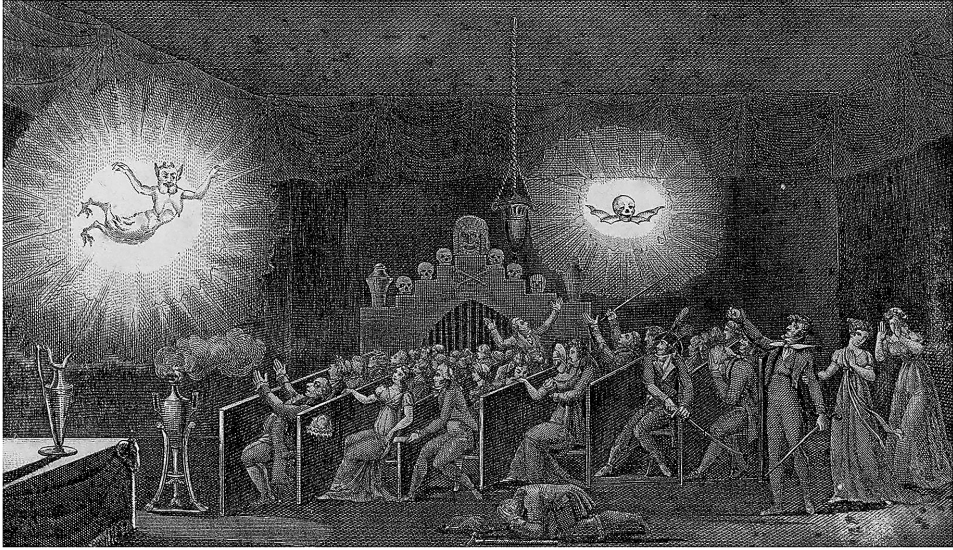
3 Lecture by Étienne-Gaspard Robert (1763–1837) alias "Robertson", Belgian physicist, stage magician and the best known developer of phantasmagoria-spectacle in Paris in 1797 (*Gravure de Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques et anecdotiques du physicien-aéronaute E. G. Robertson: connu par ses expériences de fantasmagorie, et par ses ascensions aérostatiques dans les principales villes de l'Europe: ex-professeur de physique au Collège central du ci-devant départment de l'Ourthe, membre de la Société Galvanique de Paris, de la Société des arts and des sciences de Hambourg, et de la Société d'émulation de Liége*, 1831)

> You should send Enlightenment into exile from your Empire; put monks back to their monasteries; build them more monasteries; hang presents on the altars; give many gifts to the churches; let the belief in superstitions grow to its full strength and, according to the old, ingrained mistaken dogma, subject yourself to the Holy Pope.[56]

With these thoughts we have arrived back to where we began our discussion: to the embarrassing questions of the 1790s and to the arguments attacking and defending Joseph II and his policies. The above political pamphlet galvanised the anti-Josephinist nobility into action. Antal Mária Szaitz (1746–1792, known by his monastic name: Leo), a friar of the Order of Servites, actively publishing in the court of Count Károly Eszterházy under the pseudonym István Máriafi, exposed the anti-Church authors one by one. Máriafi presented his work as if it had been written in Paris and Berlin; however, in reality the book was financed by the bishop of Eger and the

---

[56] Szacsvay 1786; Ballagi 1888, 171; Kókay 1979, 89–96.

printing house was also in Eger.[57] This liberal-minded author, who was initially recep-
tive to the idea of state reforms, eventually rejected Joseph II's Church policies, with
the backing of the bishop of Eger, Count Károly Eszterházy and primate of Eszter-
gom, József Batthyány.[58] The author of the above satire, Szacsvay, was also exposed
by Máriafi. What he did not reckon with, however, was that pillorying the satires and
their authors would only bring greater popularity to them than the original authors
had ever hoped.[59]

The fight against superstition and the "superstitious" Church, thus, became a cen-
tral topic of the clergy and its circles, an important point of reference of the polem-
ics taking place in a semi-public sphere. This is also why, despite all their atavism,
the news of witch-bathing and witch-weighing taking place in the summer of 1790
appeared to be stories of key importance that shed light on the situation and mutu-
ally discredited both sides of the polemic. The key figures of the Church – perhaps
the most charismatic of them all being Count Károly Eszterházy and his circle –, by
invoking the common people, wanted to preserve all that the Josephinist policies
wanted to do away with: public processions, networks of monastic and clerical insti-
tutions established with Baroque splendour and operating with the force of specta-
cle, the unconditional worship of relics, the grand pilgrimages and the potential for
clerical propaganda underlying the cult of Mary. This was perhaps the reason why the
clergy wanted to hold onto the canonical and/or secular legal instruments that could
demonstrate the power of the Church, such as the news of the semi-legal incidents
of witch-bathing executed by noble judges (iudex nobilium, Stuhlrichter). From the
perspective of Church propaganda, it almost seems indifferent whether these were
"fake" or real events. It was important to keep up appearances, that is, for the Church
– or rather what was left of it – to remain a stable stronghold regardless of what hap-
pened to Joseph II's state.

6 Open-ended Answers

Joseph II's reign lasted nine and a half years commencing with great expectations and
ending in panic. An ambitious career that began from such a height rapidly nosedived
for Joseph II. He relied a lot on the solutions of the state apparatus of the model states
of his empire, while he tried to eliminate those elements of the local legislative regu-
lations and the state apparatus that he found unsuitable. One of the reasons for his
downfall was precisely that, although he could win over a considerable number of sup-
porters to Josephinism, he basically never made an effort to find supporters for him-
self. Using his reign for the public good was an article of faith for him.

---

[57] Máriafi 1785, I; Máriafi 1788, II; Máriafi 1789, III.
[58] Máriafi 1789, III:44–45.
[59] Ballagi 1888, 172.

In the name of enlightened absolutism Joseph II focused on creating a uniform system of law, instead of the fragmented, mosaic-like structure of particular (urban, local) law then prevailing. As a foundational principle of the state he tried to establish and run the justice system and legislation as a uniform system applicable to all taxpayers. At the end of the eighteenth century, the legal uncertainty of feudal criminal law, the wide discretion of the judge could no longer be harmonised with either the ideas of absolutist monarchs or with enlightenment ideas. Therefore it was necessary to limit judicial arbitrariness and, not incidentally in order to protect all taxpayers, to consolidate the judicial system. The idea that the judge cannot apply any other punishment (*nulla poena sine lege*) than what the law prescribed appeared for the first time in 1764 in a publication of an Italian lawyer, Cesare Beccaria, "On crimes and Punishments" *(Dei delitti e delle pene)*. Aspects of customary law had to be detached from the structure formed by laws; and then as much as possible rules regulating the current practice had to be integrated into this structure.[60] Moreover, a basic principle came into being according to which only acts criminalised by law could be punished (*nullum crimen sine lege*).

Beccaria's book basically provided the foundation for the establishment of the principles of modern criminal law, which took shape first through the Austrian (1787), later through the French (1791 and 1810) and then the Bavarian (1813) codification. The Josephinist system applied in Hungary and Transylvania, however, was only in effect for three years between 1787 and 1790. Under the reign of Leopold II the legal institutions were once again appropriated by the authorities of the estates; although they did not return entirely to the earlier, "stricter" principles of criminal law.[61] From 1791, all traces of torture disappeared from judicial practices for good. The length of detention decreased and the penitentiaries, workhouses and prisons, in general, were more interested in rehabilitating the convicts than in breaking them.[62] The legal categories and definitions of magical activities were transformed, as was their meaning and the punishments assigned to them. Under the impact of the Theresan and Josephinist ordinances, magical activities – just like crimes against God, from 1784 – were no longer considered crimes, but insanity or false imaginings, or illness. From here on, fraud was punished with monetary compensation for the victim and corporal punishment; diabolic possession and superstition were treated in lunatic asylums; blasphemy related to an alleged pact with the Devil entailed corporal punishment; and quackery was handled with verbal admonition, fines, or in extreme cases, with corporal punishment.

Joseph II issued patents to introduce the new criminal law. The great merit of the Penal Code, made for the hereditary provinces and revised for the Kingdom of Hungary, was the abolition of capital punishment, the permanent elimination of torture, and the establishment of operating conditions for correctional facilities and prisons

---

[60] Gángó 1993.
[61] Varga és Veres 1989, 111.
[62] Vajna 1906, I:8–23.

subordinated to the state. Since Joseph II withdrew the law book before he died it did not have a significant impact on legal practice – it is another matter that the new General Assembly of the Estates convened after his death would not have maintained it anyhow. Or it did, perhaps, after all, if we consider the laws Leopold II approved at the General Assembly.[63]

It was troubling that the deep strata of religion – no longer understood very well by the elite – but stirred up by the Enlightenment, remained exposed and vulnerable. According to Pierre Chaunu, it was under the civilisational pressure of the representatives of the Enlightenment that those forms of local religiosity that the elite considered "excessive" or rejected were pushed out from the cities and allowed to continue on the periphery, on the edge of the woods and swamps.[64] This was precisely where Ferke Csuba, Éva Frekkin and their peers conducted their activities. This is also what Robert Mandrou discussed when, in relation to witchcraft, he wrote about the change in the "mental structures" (*structures mentales*) of enlightened judges; that is, when the elite, keeping its distance, was no longer answering to the desires and wishes of the common people.[65] Chaunu, however, also noted that it was exactly when it seemed that civilisation had burned all bridges connected to magical and diabolical territories that new communities appeared in the centre, which although they rejected earlier traditions of religiosity, were fed up with and tired of the Enlightenment and were open to new spiritual movements. Mystics, "degenerate" Catholics, Quakers, adventurers in the northern cities of Europe could come together in associations founded by Swedenborg and other "seekers" (Francke, Count Zinzendorf, Hamann, Oetinger, Klopstock) where they could browse and interpret the Holy Scripture freely and the members conversed with the dead, similarly to the witch of Endor or the magicians of the Bible.[66] In Southern and Central Europe Mesmer tried to place classical astrology under the aegis of Newton and organised mesmerising and mystical séances. Freemasons and Rosicrucians, representatives of increasingly popular spiritual currents moved from the court lodges to bourgeois salons.[67] Cagliostro and the magicians following in his footsteps stirred up the circles of public opinion sensitive to spirituality.[68] These new spiritual currents must have had a fertilising effect on the old-new beliefs and customs of common people. Only from a judicial perspective were these "swindlers" of magic crooks. In the undiscovered places where they could continue to operate they had followers and fans who sought their company with an almost religious faith, until they got caught.

And what happened at the tribunals and on the margins of civilisation? Although the central authority within the Habsburg Empire did put an end, in an authoritative manner, to witch-hunting in the 1770s, it did not repeal the legal measures that allowed

[63] Hajdu 1985, 332.
[64] Chaunu 1998, 235.
[65] Mandrou 1968.
[66] Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 174–89.
[67] Chaunu 1998, 236.
[68] Mund 2007.

the initiation of litigation, if no other way, then by civil lawsuits. Central instruction also failed to forbid that the suits involve the civil world in the procedure. Thus, even after the said ordinances, witchcraft cases could appear before a court of law.[69]

Maria Theresa's and Joseph's attitude towards Gypsies (and "foreigners" in general) has not really changed either. The integration of this nomadic group of people into society by administrative fiat remained an unresolved issue. In their case, the tribunal continued not to question the factuality of charges of undesirable magical activities. In any case, by comparison with the rest of the population they were disproportionately represented in courts of law for various criminal offences. Following the passing of regulations forbidding persecution, the number of Gypsies among those accused of witchcraft, magic, money-seeing or illusions was significantly higher than earlier. It did not make things easier for them that the accusations, due to the limitations placed on the regulations and the lack of judicial assistance, had less at stake. Thus, the social prestige of popular superstitions, beliefs and magical practices referred to in the trials decreased and certain accusations became ridiculous.[70] In this regard too, Gypsies fell victim to the transformations of the judicial attitude towards magical activities. In the eyes of the authorities this group of people was still a community of childish, inept and socially immature simpletons. In their view Gypsies represented "crooks", "illusionists", and often "swindlers", but they were also characterized as "delusional" and mentally retarded.[71]

Some magical activities still remained in the category of criminal law. These were mostly described as "fraud"; this is the most common accusation found in the cases brought to court in the 1780s. Among the ones issued for Bohemia we find only one ordinance in which the Royal Chambers discussed something that was left out of the *Kriminalgerichtsordnung* when the judge was faced with the dilemma of how to handle crimes of magic, witchcraft and fortune-telling – *Zauberei, Hexerei, und Wahrsagerei* – if the current criminal law no longer discussed it. The ordinance issued on 19 May 1787 likened witchcraft and fortune-telling to political crimes, and assigned them to the criminal category of "fraud".[72] The judgment of magic, treasure-digging, money-seeing remained unchanged as well, since they might have entailed the illegal exposure of graves, desecration of dead bodies and the use of human bones for magic. They could equally justify the strict prohibition with the impact of medicalisation on attitudes to dead bodies and illness or with the transcendent fear of epidemics, as well as with moral reasons.

The "fight" to eradicate superstitions at the time of the Enlightenment sheds light on a process of cultural reconfiguration in which cultural erosion and social decay could be observed simultaneously with the assumption of new roles by the state and its intentions of building social equality. The policies of Joseph II were characterised

---

[69] Tóth G. und Krász 2016, 243–44.
[70] Ibid., 244–48.
[71] Grellmann 1783, 72–73; Kreuz 2016, 182.
[72] Kropatschek 1789, 14:901–2.

by this same duality. In his time, for instance, social "checks" inhibiting persecution were already in place. Thanks to the long-term impact of education there was an increase in the number of people who thought sceptically of the fears stemming from beliefs, or even completely dissociated themselves from them. Scientific critique was encouraged and the inadequacies of the law eliminated. With the help of the authorities and the renewed Church the anxiety of the once persecuting communities also appeared to be appeased. At least this was the intention of the monarch. Meanwhile, the state was only marginally able to fulfil its duty of providing public health care. A large proportion of the population was excluded from the network, the law still distinguished between privileged people and those with no prerogative. The state was unable to adopt the role of a unified service provider in the fields of justice and education, while the Church had already reduced and reorganised its networks earlier active in these fields.

The conflicts the policies of Joseph II solved or were thought to have solved resulted in at least as many new ones. Joseph's religious policy turned the clergy against him, the language regulations alienated the wider public and the administrative reforms and abridgments of privileges antagonized the entire political elite. Consolidation, both in the fields of international and national politics, was left to his brother, his successor on the throne, Leopold II, who accomplished the task successfully during his short reign and who re-established the constitutional foundations of Hungary. Perhaps not with as much fanfare as before, nevertheless this consolidation also had an anti-superstitious edge; however, from this point on the issue was pushed to the margins of public life.

References

Antal, Beatrix. 2007. "Eszterházy Károly és Róma [Charles Eszterházy and Rome]." *Heves Megyei Levéltár közleményei* 18: 21–54.

Ballagi, Géza. 1888. *A politikai irodalom Magyarországon 1825-ig* [Political literature in Hungary until 1825]. Budapest: Franklin.

Banner, János.1926. "Csuba Ferenc és a csökmői sárkány [Ferenc Csuba and the dragon of Csökmő]." *Békési Hírlap*, 3–17 January 1926.

Barta, János. 1978. *A nevezetes tollvonás. II. József visszavonja rendeleteit* [The infamous stroke of a pen. Joseph II revokes his ordinances]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

–. 2012. *A kalapos király emlékezete: II. József és Magyarország* [The memory of the "hatted king": Joseph II and Hungary]. Debrecen: Didakt.

Bónis, György. 1964. *Útmutató az Esztergomi prímási levéltárhoz* [Guide to the archives of the Primate of Esztergom]. Levéltári leltárak 24. Budapest: Művelődésügyi Minisztérium Levéltári Osztálya, Levéltárak Országos Központja.

Chaunu, Pierre. 1998. *Felvilágosodás* [Enlightenment]. Budapest: Osiris.

Csűrös, Ferenc. 1908. "A csökmői sárkány" [The dragon of Csökmő]. *Debreceni Független Újság Naptára* 1908: 42–47.

Dömötör, Sándor. 1934. "Debrecen és az Alföld. A csökmői sárkány históriája" [Debrecen and the Great Hungarian Plain. The story of the dragon of Csökmő]. *Debreceni Szemle* 7 (September): 318–29.

Findel, Josef Gabriel. 1909. *Geschichte der Freimaurerei und ihr Einflvßs auf die geistige Kultur in Deutschland am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts.* Prag.

Foucault, Michel. 1989. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* London: Routledge.

Gángó, Gábor. 1993. "Beccaria Magyarországon (Cesare Beccaria: Bűntett és büntetés c. könyvéről)" [Beccaria in Hungary (about Cesare Beccaria's *Crime and Punishment*)]. *Holmi* 5 (7): 1045–53.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. 2008. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Grellmann, Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb. 1783. *Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprunge.* Dessau and Leipzig.

Griselini, Franz. 1780. *Versuch einer politischen und natürlichen Geschichte des temeswarer Banats in Briefen an Standespersonen und Gelehrte. Erster Theil.* Wien: Krauß.

Györffy, István. 1921. "Csuba Ferenc táltos körözése" [The search for Ferenc Csuba]. *Ethnographia* XXXII: 136.

H. Balázs, Éva. 1989. "A nyolcvanas esztendők drámája" [The drama of the eighties]. In Ember Győző és Heckenast Gusztáv, szerk., *Magyarország története 1686–1790.* Budapest: Akadémiai, IV/2. 1023–1123.

Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek [War and Other Notable Stories]. Eds. Demeter Görög and Sámuel Kerekes. 12 February 1790, section II, book 11, 208; 22 January 1790, section II, book 6, 108–12; 26 April 1791, section IV, book 33, 507; 20 May 1791, section IV, book 40, 628.

Hajdu, Lajos. 1971. *Az (1795-ös) magyar büntetőkódex-tervezet* [The (1795) Hungarian draft penal code]. Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi.

–. 1982. *II. József igazgatási reformjai Magyarországon* [Joseph II's administrative reforms in Hungary]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

–. 1983. *A közjó szolgálatában. A jozefinizmus igazgatási és jogi reformjairól* [In the service of public good. About the administrative and legal reforms of Josephinism]. Nemzet és emlékezet. Budapest: Magvető.

–. 1985. *Bűntett és büntetés Magyarországon a XVIII. század utolsó harmadában* [Crime and punishment in Hungary in the last third of the eighteenth century]. Nemzet és emlékezet. Budapest: Magvető.

Hajnal, István. 1878. "Békés város 1714-től 1800-ig. Olvastatott [1876] jul. 29-én. Békésen [The town of Békés between 1714 and 1800. Read in July 29, 1876 in Békés]." In Zsilinszky Mihály, szerk., *A Békésvármegyei Régészeti és Mívelődéstörténelmi Társulat Évkönyve* 1876/7. Békés-Gyulán: Békésvármegyei Régészeti és Mívelődéstörténelmi Társulat, III:36–60.

Heard, Mervyn. 2006. *Phantasmagoria: The Secret History of the Magic Lantern.* Hastings, N.Y.: The Projection Box.

Ipolyi, Arnold. 1987. *Magyar Mythologia* [Hungarian mythology]. Reprint. Budapest: Európa. [Pest: Heckenast Gusztáv, 1854.]

Iványosi Szabó, Tibor. 1998. *A kecskeméti magisztrátus jegyzőkönyveinek töredékei II. (1712–1811)* [Fragments of the protocol of the magistrate of Kecskemét]. Forrásközlemények II. Bács Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltárának kiadványa. Kecskemét: Bács Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat.

Kassics, Ignatius. 1825. *Enchiridion seu extractus benignarum normalium ordinationum regiarum: circa praecavenda vindicandaque quaevis in regno delicta, corrigendos, tollendosque diversos abusus et excessus, conservandam proin securitatem et tranquillitatem publicam, tenendumque rectum politiae ordinem, sub … Tom. II. 1780–1790.* Pestini: Typis Nob. Matthias Trattner de Petróza.

Kazinczy, Ferenc. 1891. *Kazinczy Ferenc levelezése II. 1790–1802* [The correspondence of Ferenc Kazinczy]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.

Keresztesi, József. 1868. *Krónika Magyarország polgári és egyházi közéletéből a XVIII század végén. Egykorú eredeti naplója* [Chronicle of the civic and ecclesiastical public life in Hungary at the end of the eighteenth century. Original contemporary journal.] Budapest: Ráth Mór.

Kókay, György, szerk. 1979. *A magyar sajtó története I. (1705–1848)* [History of the Hungarian press]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Kreuz, Petr. 2016. "Die späten Hexenprozesse in den böhmischen Ländern und auf dem Gebiet der heutigen Slowakei." In Wolfgang Behringer, Sönke Lorenz (†), und Dieter R. Bauer, Hrsgs., *Späte Hexenprozesse. Der Umgang der Aufklärung mit dem Irrationalen,* 167–203. Hexenforschung, Band 14. Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.

Kropatschek, Joseph. 1789. *Handbuch aller unter der Regierung des Kaisers Joseph des II. für die Kaiserlichen und Königlichen Erbländer ergangenen Verordnungen und Gesetze in einer Sistematischen Verbindung, anthält die Verordnungen und Gesetze vom Jahre 1787.* Vol. 14. Vienna: Verlegt bei Johann Georg Moessle K. K. privil. Buchhändler.

Liesegang, Franz Paul. 1986. *Dates and Sources. A contribution to the history of the art of projection and to cinematography.* London.

Linzbauer, Xaver Franz. 1856. *Codex sanitario-medicinalis Hungariae ab incunabulis Regni usque ad nostra tempora, studio et opera … congestus.* Tom. III. Budae: Typis Caesareo-Regiae Scientiarum Universitatis.

Magyar Hirmondó. 1782. *A' pozsonyi Magyar Hirmondó. Pozsony: Patzkó Ferentz Ágoston Könyvnyomtató mühelyébenn.; 1782dik esztendöbenn, Karátson havának 7dik napjánn, Szombatonn költ 95dik levele.* [The *Magyar Hírmondó* of Bratislava. Bratislava: In the workshop of book printer Ferentz Ágoston Patzkó. His letter written in the year 1782, on the seventh day of the month of Christmas, on a Saturday], 756–57.

Mandrou, Robert. 1968. *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVIIe siècle. Une analyse de psychologie historique.* Paris: Plon.

Máriafi, István [Antal Mária Szaitz]. 1785. *Igaz magyar. Azaz az igaz magyaroknak Máriához, az ő nagy aszszonyokhoz, és nagy pátronájokhoz való különös ájtatosságáról és a' mostani újságokrúl. Az igaz és nem-igaz magyarokról általlyában írá Máriafi István.* Vol. 1. [True Hungarian. That is, about the special devotion of true Hungarians to Mary, their grande dame, their great patron and about the current news. Written by István Máriafi about the true and untrue Hungarians in general. Volume I]. Paris and Berlin [Eger]: [Püspöki Ny.]

–. 1788. *Igaz magyar. 2. rész melly szóll Sz. Istvánrúl, és egy kitsinyt a' régi, 's mostani Sz. István tagadókrúl is* [True Hungarian. Part two, which is about St. Stephen, and a little bit about the old and current deniers of St. Stephen]. Paris and Berlin [Eger]: [Püspöki Ny.]

–. 1789. *Az Igaz Magyarnak III. része. Szent István a magyaroknak igazi megvilágosítója. Írá Máriafi István.* 3. kötet. [Part three of True Hungarian. Saint Stephen the true enlightener

of the Hungarian people. Written by István Máriafi. Vol. III]. Paris and Berlin [Eger]: [Püspöki Ny.]

Marjanucz, László. 2013. "Franz Griselini Bánság-képe" [Franz Griselini's Image of the Banat]. *Aetas* III: 24–43.

Miskolczy, Ambrus. 2015. "Felvilágosodás és babonaság" [Enlightenment and superstition]. *Valóság* 58 (May): 67–86.

Miskolczy, Ambrus és Varga E., Árpád. 2013. *Jozefinizmus Tündérországban* [Josephinism in Fairyland]. Budapest: Tarsoly.

Mund, Katalin. 2007. "Hol húzódnak a tudományosság határai: Franz Anton Mesmer lila köpenye" [Where are the limits of scholarship: Franz Anton Mesmer's purple cloak]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Maszk, átváltozás, beavatás. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben*, 29–48. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről V. Budapest: Balassi.

Nagy, Gusztáv. 1957. "A csökmői sárkány története a korabeli okiratok tükrében" [The story of the dragon of Csökmő in light of contemporary documents]. *Ethnographia* 68: 292–305.

Plenck, Joseph Jakob. 1786. *Elementa medicinae et chirurgiae Forensis.* (editio secunda) Viennae: apud Rudolphum Graeffer [1781].

Politisches Journal. 1792. *Politisches Journal nebst Anzeige von gelehrten und andern Sachen. Jahrgang 1792. Herausgegeben von einer Gesellschaft von Gelehrten.* 29. Juni.

Porter, Roy. 2002. *A téboly (a boszorkányperektől a pszichoterápiáig)* [Madness. A Brief History (from witch trials to psychotherapy)]. Budapest: Magyar Világ [Oxford UP, 2002].

Rauschgatt, Doris. 1995. "Laterna magica – die illuminierte Welt." In Ernst Kieninger und Doris Rauschgatt, *Die Mobilisierung des Blicks. Eine Ausstellung zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte des Kinos.* Exh. cat. Wien: PVS Verleger.

Sándor, István. 1796. *Sokféle. Negyedik darab* [Various. Fourth piece]. Győr: Streibig Pichler.

Seligmann, Kurt. 1987. *Mágia és okkultizmus az európai gondolkodásban* [Magic and occultism in European thinking]. Budapest: Gondolat [*The History of Magic,* Pantheon Books, 1948].

Sugár, István. 1965. "Az egri melegvízű fürdők története I. (1448–1790)" [History of the warm-water baths in Eger]. *Agria – Az Egri Múzeum Évkönyve – Annales Musei Agriensis* 3: 119–44.

Szacsvay, Sándor. 1786. *Zakkariásnak, a' pápa titkos iró-deákjának Az Austriai tartományokban lett vallásbéli meg-világositásról, Rómából költ levelei az ő barátjaihoz ki-adattattak egy eretnek-által* [The letters written from Rome of Zachary, the secret clerk of the pope, to his friends, on the religious enlightening happening in the province of Austria, which were published by a heretic]. Vienna: s. n.

–. 1787. *Az – Izé – purgátoriumhoz-való utazása. 1786. Sz. S. (A szerző nevének kezdőbetűi.) S-r., 64 lap. / [Szacsvay Sándor]: Az – Izé – purgátoriamba-való utazása. (A szerző nevének kezdőbetűi a második kiadás címlapjáról hiányzanak.)* [The travel to the Purgatory of "the thing" with the initials of the author – or without the initials on the second edition]. n. p.: s. n.

Szilágyi, Mihály. 1987. "Boszorkányperek Tolna megyében" [Witch trials in Tolna County]. *Tanulmányok Tolna megye történetéből* XI: 437–513. Szekszárd: Tolna Megyei Levéltár.

Tóth, Péter. 2005. "A varázsló cigány asszony a XVIII. században" [The magician Gypsy woman in the eighteenth century]. *Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megyei Levéltári Évkönyv* XII–XIII: 55–68. (Miskolc).

–. 2006. *A magyarországi cigányság története a feudalizmus korában* [History of Hungarian Gypsies in the time of Feudalism]. Budapest: A Bölcsész Konzorcium kiadása.

Tóth G., Péter und Krász, Lilla. 2016. "Die Dekriminalisierung der Magie und der Kampf gegen den Aberglauben in Ungarn und in Siebenbürgen 1740–1848." In Wolfgang Behringer, Sönke Lorenz (†) und Dieter R. Bauer Hrsgs., *Späte Hexenprozesse. Der Umgang der Aufklärung mit dem Irrationalen,* 225–48. Hexenforschung, Bd. 14. Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.

Vajna, Károly. 1906. *Hazai régi büntetések* I [Old Hungarian punishments]. Budapest: Lőrintz János Univers Könyvnyomdája.

–. 1907. *Hazai régi büntetések* II [Old Hungarian punishments]. Budapest: Lőrintz János Univers Könyvnyomdája.

Varga, Endre és Veres, Miklós. 1989. *Bírósági levéltárak, 1526–1869* [Judicial archives, 1526–1869]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Dániel Bárth

Enthusiasm and Rationality
Changes in Catholic Ecclesiastical Thinking
on Exorcism in the Second Half
of the Eighteenth Century

Exorcism between Faith and Doubt

The history of Christian exorcism has been accompanied by doubt from the very beginning. Since the very first exorcism performed by Christ, uncertainty surrounded the practice. This ambivalence can be traced to two sources: one, the medieval debate concerning the differing forms of diabolical possession and how to discern between them (*discretio spirituum)* and two, the complex distinction between magic and (real) religion.[1] Amidst the immense intellectual transformation of the past two millennia one can only cautiously and conditionally point out any caesurae in thinking related to Christian exorcism. Although from the point of view of demonic possession and exorcism there is no real caesura between antiquity and the Middle Ages, the majority of historians studying these phenomena tend to adapt the divisions common to political history, and treat the two periods separately. Almost everyone agrees that in the Western Church, the phenomena of exorcism treating diabolical possession saw significant changes from the early modern centuries on.[2] In the sixteenth and seventeenth century spectacular cases occurred across Europe (and through missionaries, increasingly across the world), a change brought about, at least in part, by the evolution of the demonological doctrines of the Church, the Roman Catholic response to the Reformation through missions, and in part by the spread of the persecution of witches.[3] Not only did the number of exorcisms increase during this period, but the underlying liturgical forms also offered a hitherto unknown variety of "weaponry" to priests fighting the Devil.[4] While in the western regions of Europe, the second half of the seventeenth century saw a fall in the practice, in the central, east-central and southern regions of the continent they continued to resort to exorcism on a massive

---

[1] Some of the important overviews of the topic: Böcher 1972; Twelftree 1985; Pócs 2001; Caciola 2003; Sluhovsky 2007; Scala 2012; Levack 2013.
[2] Ernst 1972; Almond 2004; Ferber 2004; Lederer 2005; Levack 2013.
[3] Clark 1997; Levi 1985; Ferber 2004; Waardt et al. 2005; Sluhovsky 2007.
[4] Franz 1909, II: 514–615; Chave-Mahir 2011; Probst 2008; Scala 2012.

scale. The German examples from the second half of the eighteenth century, especially the activities of the very popular Johann Joseph Gassner (1727–1779) and their social reception, signal the changes that led to the rise in scepticism displayed towards demonic possession and exorcism with the arrival of the Enlightenment, which meanwhile became a dominant ideology.[5] Rationalism influenced not only secular philosophical thought, but resulted also in a significant change of attitude within the inner circles of Catholic and Protestant churches.[6] The concept of the "Catholic Enlightenment", which is the focus of our study, is only seemingly contradictory: just as the concepts of faith and doubt are not exclusive opposites, the impact of the Enlightenment can be clearly recognised in eighteenth-century Catholicism.

Leading scholars working on German, French and English material have attempted to capture the concept and essence of the Catholic Enlightenment.[7] Some researchers are also interested in the problematics of the relationship between the intellectual movement itself and popular culture.[8] The topic of the present study belongs to the latter, narrower field. The main question is the attitude of certain groups within the clergy, in the second half of the eighteenth century, towards exorcism as the ecclesiastic remedy against demonic possession.[9] Were there differences in attitudes to the practice between the lower clergy and the leading dignitaries of the Church? How did the monastic clergy relate to this, in so far as they have always been more inclined to serve popular needs? How are we to interpret faith and doubt in the face of exorcism (and the underlying notion of demonic possession)?

We attempt to answer these questions through a Southern Hungarian case study. In the Franciscan friary of Zombor (Sombor) where a dozen friars lived, a certain friar named Rochus Szmendrovich came to the attention of his superiors between 1766 and 1769 by conducting exorcism procedures illegally and in an unorthodox way on local adherents of the Catholic and Greek Orthodox faith. I have written several articles and a monograph on this incident, however, the focus of the current paper is on the relationship of doubt and faith, which is not something I have hitherto considered.[10]

---

[5] Midelfort 2005; Levack 2013, 215–39.
[6] Cf. Bausinger 1992; Scharfe 2004.
[7] About the concept: Plongeron 1969; Kovács 1979; Klueting 1993; Schneider 1998; Lehner 2010; Bendel und Spannenberger 2015.
[8] Goy 1969; Hartinger 1985; 2003; 2004; Drascek 1997; Kimminich 1989.
[9] In certain regards in more detail: Bárth 2014; 2015.
[10] For more details of the story see for instance: Bárth 2005, 2008, 2014, 2015. The present study is partially based upon the data of these antecedents. A more abundant and more specific source reference and the bibliographical apparatus of the context of the events can also be found in these and in my book: Bárth 2016.

The Outline of a Story

The exorcist, healing and preaching activities of a Croatian friar are at the centre of this incident that took place in the second half of the 1760s. Rochus Szmendrovich,[11] was the "Illyrian festive preacher" of the Franciscan friary in the free royal town of Zombor (Sombor) in Bácska (Bačka) district. Our protagonist was born Petrus Szmendrovich around 1727 in one of the villages of Turpolje near Zagreb, Velika Mlaka. The descendant of the wealthy Szmendrovich family chose the modestly lucrative career path of a priest. He studied at the episcopal seminary of Zagreb and was consecrated as a priest in 1753.[12] He then worked at Slavonian parishes, first as a chaplain, then from 1756 as the parish priest of Sesvete, close to Požega.[13] It transpires from the visitations that he was a hard-working young parish priest[14] who, at the age of thirty-six, suddenly had the idea to leave his secular clerical career and join a religious order. Hesitating somewhat between the Jesuits and the Franciscans of Požega, he finally decided to join the latter: following one year of novitiate the order accepted him as a full member in 1763 at the Šarengrad friary of the order of Saint Francis.[15] This is when he chose Rochus as his name in religion. He stayed at Slavonian friaries, the last being Našice after which he ended up on the other side of the Danube, in Zombor (Sombor) in 1766, where, for three years, he served primarily the Southern Slav Catholic believers of the town. After the scandal, detailed below, he left the territory of the Kalocsa diocese and was sent back to friaries in the Zagreb diocese. He stayed in Diakovár (Đakovo) only for a few years.[16] From there he made a pilgrimage to Rome, after which he settled down in the village of his birth. In 1774 he asked the Episcopal See of Zagreb in a long letter to let him pursue his activities of teaching children and of dealing with the catechesis of adults in the region of Turpolje.[17] His superiors ordered him to return to one of the friaries of his order but he did not obey them. We know little about the last few years of his life, the only information available is indirect and comes from correspondence related to the foundations he had established. According to monastic registers, he passed away in 1782 in Drávaszentmihály (Mihovljan) near Čakovec; his body was laid to eternal rest in the crypt of the Franciscan church in Csáktornya (Čakovec).[18]

---

[11] For the family names I used the spelling commonly used in the sources. In the case of first names, I consistently maintained the Latin spelling throughout.

[12] Nadbiskupijski Arhiv u Zagrebu (hereafter: NAZ) B. III. 9. b. Liber ordinatorum (1752–1830), 11–13.

[13] Cf. Buturac 1977, 183.

[14] NAZ B. I. Kanonske Vizitacije 30/II. (1757) 369–81; 31/III. (1761), 192–99.

[15] From the rich literature on the Franciscan order's contemporary activities in Croatia and Bačka see for instance: Hoško 2001.

[16] MFL, documents of Kapisztrán Province, Tabulae… 1771–1773.

[17] NAZ B. II. Officium dioecesanum, Prothocollum 7. (1773–1774), 408; Acta Officii Dioecesani (Series Centralis) Fasc. XI. Anno 1774.

[18] MFL Syllabus Religiosorum Provinciae Bosnae quondam Argentinae… 1784.

What made this Croatian Franciscan stand out from among hundreds of other fellow friars, who shared the monotonous and challenging life of eighteenth-century monasticism? Our interest in tracking down the fragments of his biography was triggered by the rich documentation from the time of Szmendrovich's Zombor activities.[19] Firstly, from the source material of the investigation launched in response to the "inappropriate" method of performing exorcism, among these the lengthy letters written in the tiny handwriting of our Franciscan protagonist are especially significant; these letters provide an abundance of data to analyse the motivations, intentions and arguments of Szmendrovich. Also important ego-documents[20] are the letters and testimonies of primarily Roman Catholic Southern Slav burghers, which not only highlight the positive aspects of the Franciscan's activities, but also articulate "popular needs".

Due to his successful pastoral practice at his earlier postings, and, the healing-exorcising associated with it, the believers of Zombor approached the new priest soon after his arrival in the late autumn of 1766. The first patient taken to him was a local woman called Anna who suffered from demonic possession, at least according to those around her. The signs observed during the preliminary exorcism convinced Father Rochus of the genuineness of the possession of the woman. He began a two-week battle against the Evil inside the woman, during which he not only used the liturgical ordinances and prayers of the official and effective service-book (*Rituale Romano-Colocense*, 1738), but included several alternative handbooks and their various and semi- (and sometimes un-)official toolkit as well. His struggle and efforts were finally successful: the woman was rid of the demon called "Hassan" who had possessed her, her symptoms disappeared and her religious life resumed.[21] This sometimes inevitably loud ritual performed in the Franciscan church of Zombor attracted many. Among the bystanders there were Orthodox Serbs, as well as Lutherans.[22] Among the former, it was rumoured that they could expect the presence of the "efficient circumstances of grace" within the Catholic Church, or put simply: the presence of a "strong" priest who could successfully heal with a prayer. Of the several dozens of allegedly "possessed" Orthodox individuals seeking his help over the course of the winter he deemed many, nineteen in total, to be "genuine". Subsequently, he performed the ritual in groups, which attracted an even larger audience of Catholics and other faiths

---

[19] The nucleus of this is an approximately fifty-page, mostly Latin file of documents that was preserved among the documents related to Franciscans in the Kalocsa Archives of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa I. KÉL Church government files (1. a.) Ordines religiosi, Franciscans, Zombor 1761–1787.

[20] In relation to the concept cf. Schulze 1996.

[21] For more detail see: Bárth 2008.

[22] A strong diversity of ethnicities and religions characterised the eighteenth-century population of Zombor. – Muhi 1944. The largest group living in the town was that of Catholic Southern Slavs who were referred to with the contemporary denomination of "Illyrians". The rest of the population was mostly Catholic, as well as some Lutheran Hungarians and Germans, and Orthodox Serbs. The latter had twelve Orthodox priests and two churches at the time of this particular incident. – KÉL Vol. 1. e. Prothocollum Canonicae Visitationis Districtus Superioris Bacsiensis a. 1767, 215–46.

in the Franciscan church. Because of the crowds, he constructed a scaffolding from broken benches and made the possessed stand on them with candles in their hands. A reliable witness recalled seeing the crowds chant texts beginning with the words, "Get thee behind me, Satan, get thee behind me unclean spirit; may you be obliterated by the Passion of Christ, may his sacred blood crush you" in the "Illyrian" (Serbo-Croat) language. Some regarded the scaffolding as a stage and interpreted it as such in their reports to their superiors.[23]

We do not know exactly who denounced Father Rochus to the archbishopric of Kalocsa. However, certain high-ranking secular individuals and some of his fellow friars did not approve of this spectacle, which was increasingly centred on the charisma and growing popularity of the Franciscan who had taken a vow of humility. He personally explained it in his later letters as the jealousy of some of his colleagues. At any rate, in the early spring of 1767 the case came before the Consistory of Kalocsa, which ordered an investigation led by the competent dean.[24] The investigation established irregular practices and forbade Szmendrovich to perform such ceremonies in public. Nevertheless, they did authorise exorcisms if they were carried out in private, in the presence of two witnesses, and on condition that minutes recording the symptoms of possession were kept, which were then to be sent to Kalocsa where they had to be approved. A further condition stipulated that the ritual be performed exclusively from the official ceremonial book.[25] Over the course of the year, in August and September the first lengthy protocol arrived at Kalocsa, containing, among others, the description of the examination and the exorcism of a Catholic, Southern Slav woman from Szabadka (Subotica), a certain Lucia Markojevich.[26] The dozens of symptoms listed in the description (the possessed person understood and spoke Latin during the exorcism; twisted into unnatural body postures; "fell into a trance"; her eyes rolled back; she cried and laughed for a long time; suddenly blushed or lost all colour; kept seeing secret and hidden things; had an aversion to sacred objects; screamed, raged, tore her clothes, pulled out her hair, etc.) were supposed to convince the ecclesiastical authorities of the need for exorcism; for us, however, they also afford an opportunity to gain an insight into the foundations of thinking about demonology at the time.

The period between the autumn of 1767 and the spring of 1768 was quieter. Szmendrovich continued his activities as an Illyrian festive preacher, and only rarely came to the attention of his superiors. Father Rochus not only excelled as a preacher, but as a catechist both of the young and of adults. During his 1767 visitation, canon Gábor Glaser spoke admiringly of him for organizing catechist groups among Southern Slavic Catholics. Glaser acknowledged and included in the protocol that the list of "Illyrian" catechist groups of Zombor (*Distributio turmarum cathecheticarum nationis Illyricae*) was prepared by the goodwill of Father Rochus, and had been shown to him

---

[23] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor (8 April 1767).
[24] KÉL Vol. 1. e. Protocollum Consistoriale 1766–1969 (14 March 1767).
[25] KÉL Vol. 1. e. Protocollum Consistoriale 1766–1969 (29 April 1767).
[26] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor (August 1767).

on the occasion of his visitation. The canon's positive impression was further bol-
stered by the fact that the task accomplished in an exemplary manner by the friar was
far from easy. Recording on which streets the Illyrians lived was complicated by the cir-
cumstance of their houses being scattered, located randomly in the town, set among
the dwellings of those of other religions and nationalities.[27] In this same protocol they
mention negatively the abuses (*abusus*) of the "Illyrians" (the Bunjevci and the Šokci)
related to marital customs and certain traditions that should be abolished similarly
to other North Bácska settlements (such as Kolluth, Szantova, etc.). It was naturally
Szmendrovich who was commissioned by the "*visitator*" to list them. In the Zombor
protocol the abuses were mentioned after the section discussing the life and morals of
the believers. It transpires from the protocol that the Illyrians were not marrying off
their daughters, but were practically selling them. The luxurious feasts lasting for days
on the occasions of engagements, weddings and funerals caused serious financial dif-
ficulties and spiritual harm. "We commission – through the guardian – Father Rochus
to describe in detail and to catalogue accurately all this, and after receiving it we will
implement the appropriate treatment for that great evil." – says the protocol.[28]

There are no data concerning the efficiency of the Franciscan in this matter. How-
ever, the town magistrate later praised him for his preaching skills and catechist vir-
tues.[29] The friar also played his part in overseeing other pastoral duties. It can be
assumed from indirect sources that with his exceptional personality he also attracted
people wishing to confess. In later letters many lauded his talents as a confessor. The
local Franciscan history only mentions his name once: according to the entry on
10 November 1767, Szmendrovich provided spiritual consolation and thereby con-
verted a Greek Orthodox, Serbian convict named Stephanus Marinkovics, before his
execution.[30] Besides the obvious reason of his flair for exorcism, the charismatic friar's
other gifts probably also contributed to the admiration that surrounded him, but his
popularity and appeal lay unequivocally in the healing practice he pursued in secret.
The sources mention very few details about this; the letters of praise are also silent
about it, despite the fact that the practice was the basis of all the accusations made
against him. By healing activities, we are not only referring to the exorcism rituals;
but also to the clandestine prayers, the benediction practice of medieval origins that
the friar often performed to console believers struggling with physical problems. It is
not a coincidence that Rochus was extremely popular with relatives of the dying. The
majority of people asking for the last rites asked specifically for him. (Unlike his fellow
friars, he allegedly stepped into the house smiling and the patient felt better already
by the sight of him.) People also turned to him in case of serious illnesses. The friar
did not refuse these requests. He discussed his position on this in several of his let-

---

[27] KÉL Vol. 1. e. Prothocollum Canonicae Visitationis Districtus Superioris Bacsiensis a. 1767, 229.
[28] Ibid., 223.
[29] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor. The testimonial letter of the magistrate of Zom-
     bor (26 June 1769).
[30] Muhi 1944. 135.

ters, claiming that the Devil often possessed his victims disguised as seemingly obvi-ous diseases. As a result of these beliefs concerning the source of some diseases, the Friar's healing method frequently consisted of benedictions and exorcism.[31] Appar-ently, he only performed public exorcisms in severe cases of demonstrable diaboli-cal possession that was also manifested in mental symptoms. Therefore, the above mentioned spectacular exorcisms were the only visible manifestations of his otherwise secret, clandestine healing activities.[32]

The series of events that led to the ending of Szmendrovich's activities in Zombor began in the late spring of 1769. The news arrived at the Consistory of Kalocsa in May: the Franciscans in Zombor were exorcising again. This time a local man and a woman were the subjects of the ritual. Three fellow friars gave testimonial letters to confirm the diabolical possession of the two Catholic Slavs.[33] The archbishop József Batthyány also contributed to the case, ordering that the diabolical possession of these people should be confirmed in front of the Consistory and that they should be confined until the truth was discovered. The impatient tone of Batthyány's letter suggests that he was becoming increasingly exasperated with the activities of the "often mentioned" Fran-ciscan friar.[34]

The Consistory investigation, which made the final decision in the case, took place in the archiepiscopal capital in May 1769.[35] The sick man was carried in a coach: he lay with his eyes closed, twitching, choking, and grinding his teeth. After the county doctor had examined him, he opened his eyes and presented his lengthy and con-fused story. His name was Stephanus Mandich and he was from Slavonia. The woman named Anna Buday alias Balatinac also told her story of her diabolical possession in which she included the encounter with the Franciscan friar. After this, one of the canons of the Consistory made an attempt to exorcise her, but the woman showed no sign of being diabolically possessed during the ceremony conducted according to the regulations of the official Roman Ritual. When they asked her what she felt dur-ing the exorcism, she said that besides the usual strain on her heart she felt nothing. Next, it was the turn of Rochus – who thus far had only been a spectator at the event – to perform the exorcism. First, there were no visible signs; then in the second half of the ceremony, in the afternoon, she manifested some signs (distortion, seizures, grinding of teeth, screaming, trembling); nonetheless, the Church leaders were not convinced. They were already disturbed by the fact that the friar had performed this part of the exorcism in barely audible whispers. It was already evening by the time they started exorcising the man. He claimed that his hand was mysteriously restrained by some force whenever he wanted to cross himself. He also felt a terrible pain when he heard somebody praying. To confirm this they started to pray, first in Croatian

---

[31] Cf. Bárth 2010.
[32] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor.
[33] Ibid., Certificates (9–14 May 1769).
[34] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor. Batthyány József érsek levele (16 May 1769).
[35] See the records: KÉL Vols. 1. e. Protocollum Consistoriale 1766–1969 (18–19 May 1769).

and then in Latin. The man was squirming in agony from the pain. The members of the Consistory tricked him by gradually changing the text of the Latin prayer into a profane, unreligious text. The man naturally felt the same pain. His deception was uncovered.

The following morning, they heard two witnesses. The two women, Anna Ranich in her fifties and Anna Riberich in her forties, told them that the "possessed" woman threw herself on the ground from time to time, in a convulsive state and she foamed at the mouth. They considered these to be unequivocal signs of demonic possession. However, the Consistory issued a resolution establishing that the two allegedly possessed persons were in fact suffering from natural diseases. The man was insane (*maniacus)* and the woman epileptic. The pinpointing of the diseases was based on the official medical records of the examination conducted by the county doctor Henricus Kerschner.[36] However, this was not the reason why they rejected the possibility of diabolical possession. The members of the Consistory reached their conclusion based on the fact that the woman showed no symptoms that would have proven unambiguously the presence of harmful supernatural forces during either the exorcism by the Consistory canon or the threefold exorcism by the Franciscan friar.

The resolution did not favour the Franciscan. They declared that through the exorcisms he had violated the previous resolutions of the Consistory concerning him; the exorcism had incited a scandal among the Greek Orthodox; and the holy rituals had become a subject of ridicule among the people. For all this, he had to face a double punishment: they banned him from performing any kind of exorcism, and revoked his confessor's license. The leader of the friary went even further: he relieved him of all his duties as a priest and confined him within the walls of the friary.

The banning of their "favourite" friar from all interaction with his followers sparked an enormous upheaval in the town. The dignitaries launched a new, desperate assault to fight the resolution. The Consistory of Kalocsa received a great many testimonies and letters requesting and begging for the reinstatement of the monk. The honest and often passionate tone of the letters demonstrates just how fond the public figures of the town were of Father Rochus. In an interrogation protocol they mention ten cases related to him highlighting his activities in healing and comforting the sick. It also becomes clear from the document why his supporters bemoaned the banning of the friar from confessions.[37] On 17 June 1769 town notary Ignatius Parcsetics certified the protocol taken by two citizens, the aim of which was to prove the benign activities of the banned friar based on the testimonies. The ten people who testified were mostly members of the local Illyrian (Catholic South Slavs: Bunjevci) community. Although the descriptions do not allow us to identify the specific illnesses, the superficial accounts do afford us insights into the cases in which the believers were counting on the transcendent-oriented medicinal assistance of the monastic clergy. The descriptions include "fright"; "inner illness"; "tremors" with shaking of body parts,

---

[36] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor. Certificate of Henricus Kerschner (19 May 1769).
[37] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor (13–16 June 1769).

and eyes being rolled back; women's barrenness; children's "fright"; febrile seizure, etc. According to the testimonies, there was only one member of the friary who was able to heal these ailments successfully: Father Rochus. The faithful requested him specifically because they were convinced that if the friary sent someone else, he would not succeed. In several cases the stubbornness of the provost (i.e., that he would not let Szmendrovich go to the patients) resulted in fatalities. The testimonies give a very brief account of the friar's healing procedures: he prayed on the patient or over the patient. With regard to the treatment of the barren woman it turns out that the Franciscan emphasised to her the paramount role of divine mercy in resolving her severe problem. Following his advice, the woman fasted on three Wednesdays to honour Saint Martha (or Margaret); then recited the Lord's Prayer four times as well as four Hail Marys; finally she gave a general confession about her life and then piously took Holy Communion. Subsequently, she conceived and gave birth to her child.[38]

Their entreaties, however, had the opposite effect to what was intended. The Church leaders were only more convinced of the correctness of their decision to ask the superiors of the scandalously popular Franciscan friar to remove him. His transfer to another diocese was encouraged by the archbishop himself.

Possible Interpretations

There is a conflict at the centre of the above story: on the one side we find the Franciscan exorcist friar of enthusiastic character, energised by missionary zeal; and on the other a suspicious, rationalistic ecclesiastical magistrate touched by the spirit of Catholic Enlightenment. Our protagonist represents an attitude that characterised the missionary practices accepted or even encouraged during Ottoman rule and the restoration period following it. The basic instrument of evangelisation and conversion was the miracle, which usually became manifest at shrines or through the missionary sacraments (blessings, sacred objects and exorcisms).[39] In the second half of the century, however, ecclesiastic leaders limited the "arsenal" of popular missions to the catechism, preaching and the promoting of sacraments (especially confession, communion and confirmation). The Catholic Enlightenment reconsidered its attitude towards miracles and vigorously challenged "pseudo-miracles".[40] This attitudinal change had several known consequences: the process of approving shrines slowed down, the number of pilgrimages decreased (and pilgrimages became relegated to the field of popular religiosity), canonisation procedures lengthened, etc.[41] Parallel to this, the semi-official benediction practices, which had medieval foundations and

---

[38] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor (17 June 1769).
[39] Tóth 2001; Molnár 2005, 144–48; Sieber 2005; Johnson 2005; Lederer 2005; Samerski 2006; Mat'a 2006.
[40] Plongeron 1969; Goy 1969.
[41] Cf. Bárth 2015.

provided a wide store of benediction-malediction texts, especially in the early modern monastic practices, gradually disappeared for good.[42] As part of this process, previously popular and diversified manifestations of the liturgical forms of exorcism were also prohibited. An important step in this process of "purging" was the outlawing of the 1614 edition of the exorcist ceremonial book, the *Rituale Romanum*, followed by other popular alternative handbooks. The texts in which the role of the officiating priest was overemphasised disappeared from the official liturgy and the procedures that qualified as "superstitiosus" for their irrational nature and magical analogies were also banned.[43] These processes that had been ongoing for some time, eventually led to open conflict in the second half of the eighteenth century, when figures connected to the "counter-Enlightenment" emerged and resorted to earlier practices.[44] Rochus Szmendrovich, and his noted German counterpart, Johann Joseph Gassner, both used alternative handbooks that had been on *index* in the Vatican.[45] Their charismatic personalities contributed to their success; this also went against the view that the person of the exorcist should not become central. These two became celebrities in their respective milieus and the public nature of their interventions only reinforced this. There were crowds of curious bystanders present at these ceremonies. Their ecclesiastical superiors were particularly bothered by the spectacle they created: in the second half of the eighteenth century none of the church leaders wished to make churches venues for spectacles.[46] Especially not in the multiethnic and multi-confessional community of Zombor where the coexistence of Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers already created a certain amount of volatility. While the Catholic Southern Slav municipal leaders appreciated the missionary activities of the "strong priest", the church leaders did not see a place for such activities in an increasingly tolerant context. Rather, the members of the Consistory in Kalocsa were afraid that Catholic rituals would be mocked and ridiculed.

Partly, the conflict was due to changes in ecclesiastical thinking on demonology. In this respect the Catholic Enlightenment brought significant changes: the notion that demons and their earthly helpers (witches) could be the direct cause of illness or bewitchment faded and the impact of Evil was increasingly seen as the abstract idea of Satan's "temptations" (incitement to commit sin, falling into sin).[47] Parallel to this, the possibility of a *circumsessio*-type, "surrounding" demonic possession was taken less and less seriously.[48] Although the possibility of full bodily possession (*possessio*) was not excluded, its occurrence was only imaginable exceptionally (and under no circumstances were they conceived of as mass possessions). Szmendrovich and Gassner went

---

[42] Bárth 2010.
[43] Sluhovsky 2007.
[44] Drascek 1997; 2014.
[45] Midelfort 2005; Bárth 2014.
[46] Bárth 2014.
[47] Cf. Clark 1997; Muchembled 2003; Johnson 2005; Kittsteiner 1993; Lederer 2005; Wollscheid 2007; Davies 2009.
[48] On the Christian types of possession cf. Pócs 2001.

radically against the evolving view by detecting in dozens (or in the case of Gassner, in hundreds) of patients symptoms of the third form of diabolical possession, called *obsessio*, a forceful external attack, which targeted one specific individual; both were inclined to consider the great majority of these physical illnesses as directly or indirectly caused by demons. The key to their success was exactly this approach.[49]

The story is cloaked in different kinds of ambiguities. The strongest contrast was between local "*enthusiasm*" for the figure of the Franciscan exorcist and the "*rationality*" of the views of religious leaders who coldly rejected the attitude of the locals. It would seem logical to identify the opposition of "enthusiasm and rationality" with that of "faith and doubt". This could be easily confirmed by the dual nature of the attitudes related to diabolical possession: on the one hand, for Szmendrovich and his supporters the possession of certain women from Zombor and its vicinity was a fact and a palpable reality because they *believed* in it. Their ecclesiastical superiors (the dean and the local potentates), on the other hand, *doubted* the reality of possession and, from a rational perspective, they considered the cases to be illness or outright fraud. The county physician representing official science and the official ceremonial order of exorcism itself played a crucial role in unmasking these cases. The clash of these two sides could have only one outcome: the defeat of the Franciscan. It would be misleading to generalise too broadly the scepticism of the ecclesiastical leadership and to place them firmly in opposition to faith. This is obviously not a case of juxtaposing doubt with faith (in God and the demons) in general, but rather that of rejecting certain variants of faith or deviations from it. In fact, the Catholic Enlightenment sought to establish a superior and more elaborate religious experience (faith). The spread of the ideal of an individual, elitist, intellectual religious faith was paralleled by an increase in doubt about earlier religious forms and towards suspicious ("superstitious", "magical") rituals. In this case, the more elaborate the faith, the greater the scepticism. It is telling in many regards that while in the first half of the eighteenth century the ecclesiastical vocabulary still included the word "zeal" (*zelus*) in places, in the second half of the century it was increasingly replaced by prudence (*prudentia*) and learning (*studiositas*) when evaluating clerical virtues.[50] It is not a coincidence that Szmendrovich, in keeping with his missionary mentality, regularly refers to zeal in his letters. It was still during his days as a parish priest in Sesvete that the superior *visitator* when testing his knowledge in moral theology warned him that it was important to couple zeal with knowledge (*scientia*), because the two could only flourish together; zeal without knowledge could easily lead one astray or to exaggeration.[51] It was as if, in 1758, the perceptive recommendation had anticipated the conflicts to come a decade later.

---

[49] Cf. Bárth 2014.
[50] Cf. Gőzsy 2013.
[51] NAZ B. I. Kanonske vizitacije 30/II. 376.

The Multifaceted Nature of Reality and the *Persona* of the Historian

From the second half of the eighteenth century, public and unofficial procedures of exorcism were becoming less common in the everyday practice of western Christianity.[52] Nonetheless, within a closed and strictly regulated framework the ceremony itself has survived to this day. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only a few "scandalous" cases indicate that the practice continues to survive. Tabloid journalism and lay public opinion, especially because they were so successfully concealed, treated such cases, when they came to be exposed, as thrilling sensations.[53] Fatalities involving exorcised individuals sometimes resulted in criminal lawsuits followed with great interest by the public.[54] In the last decades of the twentieth century exorcism has become a popular topic of horror movies building on elemental fears. This is precisely why many were caught by surprise when in 1999, under the pontificate of John Paul II, a renewed version of the official Roman exorcist handbook was published.[55] It was an even greater surprise for public opinion that at the dawn of the twenty-first century the Vatican still had its official exorcist. Father Gabriele Amorth deployed his arguments in a bestselling series of books explaining the timelessness of the procedure, the recurrence of diabolical possession and the application of the ecclesiastical remedies.[56] In the past few decades in various corners of the Catholic world, from Italy to America the practice of exorcism – reflecting demand on the part of believers – has been revived in several places.[57] An increasing number of dioceses keep an officially appointed exorcist. There are several very serious theological discourses underlying the related internal debates of which it is perhaps sufficient to mention the questions raised about whether the Devil is a substantial reality or merely an abstract notion.[58] On the one hand, many caution against – and not without basis – the Church entering the esoteric-magical market. Would it not reduce the two-thousand-year-old practice, emulating Christ's example, to a circus act if the Church were to enter the same space that has become dominated in recent decades by neatly combed, suit-and-tie-wearing preacher-healers, as well as by an armada of esoteric healers capitalising on the opportunities provided by the internet to offer "exorcism" on demand? On the other hand, those who support the expansion of the practice (who are often at the same time representatives of "Catholic Charismatic Movements") urge the conversion of sinners and unbelievers, along with the reinforcement of faith and a traditional engagement with the Church. Among others, they explain the multiplication of demonic posses-

---

[52] Levack 2013; Scala 2012.

[53] Siegmund 1985; Wegner 2009; Schuller und Rahden 1993.

[54] The famous Klingersberg incident stands out in this regard, the fatal exorcism of the German student, Anneliese Michel in the mid-1970s: Kasper und Lehmann 1978; Fischer und Schiedermair 1980; Goodman 1980.

[55] For more on the context: Scala 2012.

[56] His most famous work: Amorth 1990.

[57] Goodman 1998.

[58] Haag 1974; Leimgruber 2004; 2010; Wollscheid 2007.

sion cases with the spread of esotericism built upon syncretic foundations and that of eastern practices qualified as magic (for instance yoga; but many others such as Satanist rock music, drugs, liberalism, etc.).

Historians often have the impression that "there is nothing new under the sun": we merely see the revival, further nuancing and continuation of old disputes. Anthropologists do not really deal with the supply side of exorcism because these structures are just as constant as the elemental human needs that arise every time the inexplicable (such as illness) needs an explanation. The patients have to believe in the treatment or the healer who heals them: be it official medical science, a therapist applying alternative methods, a village healer, a preacher or a priest. In the case of illness, everyone chooses a course of action, and the choice is based upon "faith" representing a relationship of trust.[59]

If we examine the story of the Franciscan friar of Zombor from a historical-anthropological perspective, we must be alive to the possibility of the infinitely multifaceted nature of reality. One can observe a sort of polemic in the literature discussing the history of demonic possession and exorcism.[60] Some make a sport of exposing ancient "frauds" by (mis)interpreting the position of "science" with extreme rationality.[61] Ruling out the existence of demons (and gods) and the reality of diabolic possession from the outset, they also consider the associated religious ritual to be a ceremonial manifestation of "false consciousness". The other extreme represents an exclusive internal view, which, as the "knower of secrets", assumes that this topic can only be studied credibly by historians (and anthropologists) who have already had personal experience (as exorcist, patient or observer) of similar mysteries. From this point of view, the reality of Christ's healing-exorcising miracles recorded in the Bible is an irrevocable fact; as for the historical cases, in line with an authoritarian mentality, they take the position of superior decision makers.[62] The most recent historical-anthropological overviews of the issue, however, – especially in the interpretation of early modern cases – emphasise the socio-cultural context in which certain needs along with responses to them emerge, as well as the performative nature of the actions and the importance of studying symbolic patterns.[63]

During the writing of my book on this case, I have walked into a trap countless times when my own rational and scholarly attitude made me prone to record only facts perceived by logical reason and treat them as historical realities. I found myself approaching events from the perspective of the official religious leaders. This was especially noticeable when interpreting the case of the above Consistory investigation (18–19 May 1769). I presented the two-and-a-half-day-long investigation of the

---

[59] Csordas 1994.
[60] Cf. Levack 2013, 22.
[61] In this regard, Lederer mentions especially the work of Walker (1981): Lederer 2005.
[62] A classic work in this regard from a practicing exorcist: Rodewyk 1963. Also cf. Twelftree 1985; Gutwenger 1992; Becker 1995; Probst–Richter 2002. With regard to Hungary: Szulovszky 2014 points in this direction.
[63] Outstanding in this regard: Levack 2013.

allegedly possessed woman and man from the perspective of the Consistory protocol, which established reassuringly that both individuals were suffering from natural diseases, and that Szmendrovich saw demons even when there were none.

Our scholarly habit based upon rationality disposes us to look for such reassuring end points. There is, nonetheless, another contemporary description of these same few days, which describes the events taking place before the Consistory in the context of the possessed woman's life story.[64] In this we read the following:

> … the woman from Zombor had been suffering from an illness for approximately twenty-six years, which occasionally tormented her accompanied by her muttering. In such cases she tore at her clothes and pulled out her own hair, she mauled her body with her fingers, and turned around like a wheel, she fell to the ground wounding her head. She often found herself in the tavern where she got drunk after scarcely drinking anything, and the other guests often beat her. Sometimes she ended up in neighbouring villages and her husband could not find her. She suffered from several painful illnesses; for instance, her entire body was covered with aching, burning blisters. She had no appetite, she barely ate or drank, but remained fat nonetheless. Meanwhile – without going into detail – the author of the document mentions that from time to time, she was scared by monsters appearing to her; she hated the church, she was at war with her husband and feared priests.

> Finally, this year (1769) she started to shout out, terribly, all kinds of wondrous things. Father Rochus recounted that several signs led him to believe that she was indeed possessed by Evil: namely, that she understood and spoke several languages and she uncovered several secrets. The latter was also confirmed by her neighbourhood women. The Father prayed over her for six days while he had plenty of time to test these signs. As a result of almost a week's work, he managed to calm down the woman (to everyone's relief); however, at this point the ban from the dean arrived, most likely prompted by accusations made by certain priests. Then the woman's state became even more tragic; she upset the entire town with her constant running around and shouting; she chased the Catholic and Orthodox inhabitants who fled their houses in fear, she often disturbed them at their tables. She pushed as many as three or four women who got in her way to the ground, stomped on them and ruined them until they turned black, until they started bleeding. In the night she did unsettling things, she walked the streets, she went from house to house, knocked on the windows accompanied by frightening screams, waking up the sleeping residents (both Catholics and Orthodox). In some houses she broke plates and cups. The neighbours, who were affected rather negatively by all this, sought out their spiritual father (i.e., the parish priest-guardian) three or four times who encouraged them to tolerate the ill woman and sent them

---

[64] KÉL 1. a. Ordines religiosi. Franciscans, Zombor. (Vita miserrima Annae Balatinac aliter Buday, 13 June 1769. Signed by Josephus Szontay).

away without consolation. Since the disturbances did not cease, the neighbours, once again, went to see the judge, but he rejected their request saying that it concerned the parish priest. Finally, they ran back to Father Rochus who, seeing that they did not get any help, gave them some sort of letter of recommendation to take to the Consistory (of Kalocsa). The woman did leave for the journey as a patient indeed, accompanied by two of her loyal neighbours and a man strongly suspected of being possessed. First, they went to the Virgin Mother of Hajós. Her companions related that the woman performed her usual torment, screaming and foolishness; she only calmed down in front of the Consistory, as if she were not the same person, even though she had to undergo varied tests. Her chaperons heard as she talked to the above-mentioned man and had a demonic consultation: "we should act and behave so that we don't give ourselves away, let's not show ourselves, you should pretend to be crazy and I will brace myself to be silent, and so we will trick the Consistory!" Later the woman, barely out of the sight of the consistory, within earshot of the other women, she muttered to them (using a masculine first-person singular form): "I would be foolish (*stultus*!) to give myself away so that they can fight against me, or commissioning someone else to fight against me and my many siblings who hide within human bodies. We would lose a lot if I presented myself here. It is easy to fight against them, but it is difficult to fight Rochus, it is hard to hide from him. I almost broke under the torture when he prayed over me before the Consistory; hearing his terrifying voice almost made me present myself; luckily the Consistory did not believe him." The women companions also related that on their way back the woman (and the demon within her, talking through her) continued the appalling acts and words. In Hajós she almost threw a Gypsy man into the river (saying: "my brother's inside of him, let him swim!"), then ran away declaring that she did not want to go home, she would rather go back to Kalocsa where they do not believe in its existence (i.e., in the demon's existence); there she could continue pretending "far away from poor black Rochus" whose traces stink from a distance. With that, she ran in the direction of Miske, and her companions being weary and exhausted were unable to follow her so they went home to Zombor. The unfortunate woman finally arrived home after seven days. She claimed that her illness took her first through Kalocsa to another Calvinist village, then back to Kalocsa, then she went to the Transdanubian region travelling through several villages, then, traversing Gemenc, she arrived to Gyűd. On her way, she was denied entry to the church everywhere. The priests of Gyűd later told a man from Zombor that the woman who left abruptly, almost flying away, was indeed possessed. She arrived home to Zombor in a terrible physical state. But she did not find any help there either because she was chased away from the church with a whip and they did not let Father Rochus to her to talk to her or to listen to her, and no other priest wanted to help her because they were afraid to go against the will of their superiors. So she was only chased and going around, she even aborted/killed her own conceived foetus, which was confirmed by obvious bloody stains that she left behind her wherever she went and the entire house was sullied by blood for several days.

Who could describe the poor woman's hunger and thirst after not eating and drinking for days; who could describe the anxious suffering and pain of her husband who was exposed to continuous harassment; who could describe the misery of her children, three sons and one daughter, who were quite young and who were terrified, scared by her, they could not eat or drink from the terror. One of them saw as their mother's face transformed and turned black, he was terrified by nightmares. At the complaints of the neighbours she was jailed for a while, but due to her screams and shouts (bringing up the wrongdoing of others) they had to let her go. Now she screams, weeps, alarms others in the streets and on roads (she scared several women and children). Schismatics and Catholics gather around her, some laugh others cry. Some pray while beating their chests, lamenting their sins wailing and shouting: "the Devil is really working among us!" There are further miraculous events that are difficult to explain. For instance, once a woman named Anna brought home five eggs that she gave to her husband, who cooked them for a long time but the eggs remained uncooked and raw; he then cooked them some more until their shells cracked, but they were still raw. What else is this if not a diabolical act? The author of the document does not enter in detail about several things; for instance, that she was found beside wells where she almost hung herself; she was so bloated she almost exploded and her throat was compressed as if it had been sliced and it became completely black.

This interpretation presents a very different reality: the reality of an especially lifelike and active (even talkative) variant of demonic belief. Which – we must admit – is quite disturbing. What does a historian, trained on source criticism, do? Submit the document to detailed critique: the handwriting is not that of Szmendrovich, in terms of content and vocabulary, however, it does seem as if he was involved somehow in its writing. The document tendentiously seeks to highlight the virtues of the Franciscan. The demonic belief reflected in the document is in perfect harmony with the elements shown in the letters of Szmendrovich. Which brings us to an explanation: this is Father Rochus's "internal" reality.

This reality, evidently, was in close correlation with the conceptions and experiences of local Southern Slav believers. Whether we believe it or not, in the 1760s faith in the reality of demons was not only based on the personal, everyday experiences of an "eccentric" Franciscan, but that of many inhabitants of the town. These occasionally took spectacular forms: human lives were ruined, matriarchs abandoned "normality", communities were frightened or scandalized by "abnormal" behaviour. The deviance experienced on the level of smaller or larger communities required an urgent and efficient solution. In this regard there was only one priest who offered an efficient remedy there and then to the possessed, their relatives, their neighbours and, ultimately, the entire town. It is not a coincidence that in the autumn of 1766, when Szmendrovich arrived to Zombor, these sort of cases found him quickly. His reputation preceded him. This, however, would not have been sufficient for his success. He had to carry out the first, successful exorcism publicly so that the result could be even

more spectacular. The two-week-long battle was seen by almost everyone who visited the Catholic Church. There must have been an entire series of stories that circulated about the demon leaving in the form of a black fly. The activities of Szmendrovich became the subject of public discourse. This is how the fanaticism began, at the peak of which, years later, the certifications authenticated by the town magistrate lauded his healing powers and virtues. Could a similar situation have come about if, similarly to the Franciscan, the majority of the locals had not believed in the direct power of demonic impact, if the resulting fears had not been an integral part of their everyday thinking? It is difficult to think so.

A historian interested in popular culture must always keep in mind the possibility of a "reading from below" in relation to every past event. A particularly rich set of source materials is needed in order to be able to discover such parallel realities. Through the letters of the exorcist Franciscan from Zombor and the accompanying documents inspired by him we encounter data that place the constructions of the reality, subsequently believed to be objective, in a peculiar light. Thus, the challenges of faith and doubt present not only the contemporary characters with severe dilemmas, but also the historians wanting to interpret this subject centuries later. The excitement occasioned by this type of contemplation is definitely the most rewarding part of this work.

Archival sources

KÉL: Kalocsai Érseki Levéltár [Kalocsa Archives of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa I. Kalocsa Archiepiscopal Archives].
Church government files (1. a.) Ordines religiosi, Franciscans, Zombor 1761–1787.
Vols. 1. e. Prothocollum Canonicae Visitationis Districtus Superioris Bacsiensis a. 1767.
Vols. 1. e. Protocollum Consistoriale 1766–1969.
NAZ: Nadbiskupijski Archiv u Zagrebu.
B. III. 9. b. Liber ordinatorum (1752–1830).
B. I. Kanonske Vizitacije 30/II. (1757); 31/III. (1761).
B. II. Officium dioecesanum, Prothocollum 7. (1773–1774).
Acta Officii Dioecesani (Series Centralis) Fasc. XI. Anno 1774.
MFL: Magyar Ferences Levéltár [Hungarian Franciscan Archives], Budapest.
Documents of Kapisztrán Province, Tabulae… 1771–1773.
Syllabus Religiosorum Provinciae Bosnae quondam Argentinae… 1784.

References

Almond, Philip C. 2004: *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary texts and their cultural contexts.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
Amorth, Don Gabriele. 1990. *Un esorcista racconta.* Roma: Edizioni Dehoniane.
Bausinger, Hermann. 1992. "Aufklärung und Aberglaube." In Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, Hrsg., *Glaube im Abseits. Beiträge zur Erforschung des Aberglaubens,* 269–90. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Bárth, Dániel. 2005. "Ördögűző Rókus testvér. Képek egy 18. századi zombori ferences életéből" [The exorcist Frater Rókus: Scenes from the life of an eighteenth-century Franciscan of Zombor]. In Őze Sándor és Medgyesy Schmikli Norbert, szerk., *A ferences lelkiség hatása az újkori Közép-Európa történetére és kultúrájára,* 1:271–87. 2 vols. Piliscsaba–Budapest, PPKE BTK and METEM.

–. 2008. "Papok és démonok viadala: exorcizmus a kora újkori Magyarországon" [The fight of priests and demons: exorcism in Early Modern Hungary]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Démonok, látók, szentek. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 59–68. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VI. Budapest: Balassi.

–. 2010. *Benedikció és exorcizmus a kora újkori Magyarországon* [Benediction and exorcism in Early Modern Hungary]. Fontes Ethnologiae Hungaricae IX. Budapest–Pécs: L'Harmattan and PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék.

–. 2014. "Demonológia és katolikus felvilágosodás a 18. századi Magyarországon" [Demonology and Catholic Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Hungary]. In Klaniczay Gábor és Pócs Éva, szerk., *Boszorkányok, varázslók és démonok Közép-Kelet-Európában,* 85–107. Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Közép-Kelet-Európából 1. Budapest: Balassi.

–. 2015. "Katholische Aufklärung und Volksfrömmigkeit im Ungarn des 18. Jahrhunderts." In Bendel und Spannenberger, Hrsgs., 2015, 79–101.

–. 2016. *A zombori ördögűző. Egy 18. századi ferences mentalitása* [The exorcist of Zombor. The mentality of an eighteenth-century Franciscan]. Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Közép-Kelet-Európából 3. Budapest: Balassi.

Becker, Elisabeth, Hrsg. 1995. *Der Exorzismus der Kirche unter Beschuß.* Stein am Rhein: Christiana.

Bendel, Rainer und Norbert Spannenberger, Hrsgs., 2015. *Katholische Aufklärung und Josephinismus. Rezeptionsformen in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa.* Köln, Weimar und Wien: Böhlau.

Böcher, Otto. 1972. *Christus Exorcista. Dämonismus und Taufe im Neuen Testament.* Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln und Mainz: W. Kohlhammer.

Buturac, Josip. 1977. *Crkveno-kulturna povijest Požege i okolice 1227–1977.* Zagreb.

Caciola, Nancy. 2003. *Discerning spirits. Divine and demonic possession in the Middle Ages.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

Chave-Mahir, Florence. 2011. *L'exorcisme des possédés dans l'Église d'Occident (X^e–XIVe siècle).* Turnhout: Brepols.

Clark, Stuart. 1997. *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Csordas, Thomas J. 1994. *The Sacred Self. A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Davies, Owen. 2009. *Grimoires. A History of Magic Books.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Drascek, Daniel. 1997. "Gegenaufklärung im süddeutschen Raum. Zur Transformation der spätbarocken Alltags- und Frömmigkeitskultur im letzten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts". Habilitation dissertation, München.

–. 2014. "Wie der Wunderheiler und Exorzist Johann Joseph Gaßner (1727–1779) den Teufel austrieb und dadurch die Gemüter seiner Zeitgenossen erhitzte. Vom Vordringen der Aufklärung und dem wankenden Glauben an die Macht des Bösen." In Klemens Unger, Karin Geiger und Sabine Tausch, Hrsgs. *Brücke zum Wunderbaren. Von Wallfahrten und Glaubensbilder. Ausdrucksformen der Frömmigkeit in Ostbayern,* 273–79. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner.

Ernst, Cécile. 1972. *Teufelaustreibungen. Die Praxis der katholischen Kirche im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.* Bern: Hans Huber.

Ferber, Sarah. 2004. *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France.* London and New York: Routledge.

Fischer, Klaus P. und Hartmut Schiedermair. 1980: *Die Sache mit dem Teufel. Teufelsglaube und Besessenheit zwischen Wahn und Wirklichkeit.* Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht.

Franz, Adolph. 1909. *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter.* I–II. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.

Goodman, Felicitas D. 1980. *Anneliese Michel und ihre Dämonen. Der Fall Klingenberg in wissenschaftlicher Sicht.* Stein am Rhein: Christiana.

–. 1998: *How about demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP.

Goy, Barbara. 1969. *Aufklärung und Volksfrömmigkeit in den Bistümern Würzburg und Bamberg.* Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Bistums und Hochstifts Würzburg XXI. Würzburg: F. Schöning.

Gőzsy, Zoltán. 2013. "A katolikus egyház normakommunikációs és mediátori szerepe a 18. században" [The Catholic Church's roles of mediation and of communicating norms in the eighteenth century]. In Bárth Dániel, szerk., *Alsópapság, lokális társadalom és népi kultúra a 18–20. századi Magyarországon,* 53–84. Budapest: ELTE BTK.

Gutwenger, Lisl, Hrsg. 1992. *"Treibt Dämonen aus!" Von Blumhardt bis Rodewyk. Vom Wirken katholischer und evangelischer Exorzisten.* Stein am Rhein: Christiana.

Haag, Herbert. 1974. *Teufelsglaube.* Tübingen: Katzmann.

Hartinger, Walter. 1985. "Kirchliche Frühaufklärung in Ostbayern. Massnahmen gegen Wallfahrten und geistliche Spiele in den Bistümern Passau und Regensburg am Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts." *Ostbairische Grenzenmarken. Passauer Jahrbuch für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 27: 142–57.

–. 2003. "Aufklärung und Säkularisation als Wendepunkte der Volksfrömmigkeit." In Anton Landersdorfer, Hrsg. *Vor 200 Jahren – Die Säkularisation in Passau,* 53–79. Passau: Dietmar Klinger.

–. 2004. "Die katholische Aufklärung und das Fürstbistum Passau." In Egon Boshof, Max Brunner und Elisabeth Vavra, Hrsgs., *Grenzenlos. Geschichte de Menschen am Inn. Katalog zur ersten Bayerisch-Oberösterreichischen Landesausstellung 2004,* 182–87. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet.

Hoško, Franjo Emanuel. 2001. *Franjevci i poslanje Crkve u kontinentalnoj Hrvatskoj* [Franciscans and the mission of the Church in continental Croatia]. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost.

Johnson, Trevor. 2005. "Besessenheit, Heiligkeit und Jesuitenspiritualität." In Waardt et al Hrsgs. 2005, 233–47. Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.

Kasper, Walter und Karl Lehmann, Hrsgs. 1978. *Teufel – Dämonen – Besessenheit. Zur Wirklichkeit des Bösen.* Mainz: Mathias-Grünewald.

Kimminich, Eva. 1989. *Religiöse Volksbräuche im Rädewerk der Obrigkeiten. Ein Beitrag zur Auswirkung aufklärischer Reformprogramme am Oberrhein und Vorarlberg.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Kittsteiner, Heinz Dieter. 1993. "Die Abschaffung des Teufels im 18. Jahrhundert. Ein kulturhistorisches Ereignis und seine Folgen." In Schuller und Rahden, Hrsgs. 1993, 55–92.

Klueting, Harm, ed. 1993. *Katholische Aufklärung – Aufklärung im katholischen Deutschland.* Studien zum Achtzehnten Jahrhundert 15. Hamburg: Meiner.

Kovács, Elisabeth, Hrsg. 1979. *Katholische Aufklärung und Josephinismus.* Wien: R. Oldenbourg.

Lederer, David. 2005. "'Exorzisieren ohne Lizenz…' Befugnis, Skepsis und Glauben im frühneuzeitlichen Bayern." In Waardt et al Hrsgs. 2005, 213–32. Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.

Lehner, Ulrich L. 2010. "What is 'Catholic Enlightenment'?" *History Compass* 8: 166–78.

Leimgruber, Ute. 2004. *Kein Abschied vom Teufel. Eine Untersuchung zu gegenwärtigen Rede vom Teufel im Volk Gottes.* Münster: Lit.

–. 2010. *Der Teufel. Die Macht des Bösen.* Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker.

Levack, Brian P. 2013. *The Devil Within. Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West.* New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Levi, Giovanni. 1985. *L'eredità immateriale. Carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del seicento.* Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1985.

Mat'a, Petr. 2006. "Zwischen Heiligkeit und Betrügerei. Arme-Seelen-Retter, Exorzisten, Visionäre und Propheten im Jesuiten- und Karmelitenorden." In Anna Ohlidal und Stefan Samerski, Hrsgs., *Jesuitische Frömmigkeitskulturen. konfessionelle Interaktion in Ostmitteleuropa 1570–1700,* 177–206. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

Midelfort, H. C. Erik. 2005. *Exorcism and Enlightenment. Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany.* New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Molnár, Antal. 2005. *Mezőváros és katolicizmus. Katolikus egyház az egri püspökség hódoltsági területein a 17. században* [Market town and Catholicism: The Catholic Church in the Ottoman-occupied territories of the diocese of Eger in the seventeenth century]. Budapest: METEM.

Muchembled, Robert. 2003. *A History of the Devil. From the Middle Ages to the Present.* Cambridge: Polity.

Muhi, János. 1944. *Zombor története* [History of Zombor]. Zombor: Kalangya.

Plongeron, Bernard. 1969. Recherches sur l'"Aufklärung" catholique en Europe occidentale (1770–1830). *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 16: 555–605.

Pócs, Éva. 2001. "Démoni megszállottság és ördögűzés a közép-kelet-európai népi hiedelemrendszerekben" [Demonic possession and exorcism in the popular cultures of East Central Europe]. In Ead., szerk., *Demonológia és boszorkányság Európában,* 137–98. Studia Ethnologica Hungarica 1. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Probst, Manfred. 2008. *Besessenheit, Zauberei und ihre Heilmittel. Dokumentation und Untersuchung von Exorzismushandbüchern des Girolamo Menghi (1523–1609) und des Maximilan von Eynatten (1574/75–1631).* Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 97. Münster: Aschendorff.

Probst, Manfred and Klemens Richter. 2002. *Exorzismus oder Liturgie zur Befreiung vom Bösen. Informationen und Beiträge zu einer notwendigen Diskussion in der katholischen Kirche.* Münster: Aschendorff.

Rodewyk, Adolf S. J. 1963. *Dämonische Besessenheit in der Sicht des Rituale Romanum.* Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch.

Samerski, Stefan. 2006. "Exorzistische Praktiken und apotropäische Schutzzeichen in Olmütz. Eine jesuitische Propaganda um 1600." In Thomas Wünsch, Hrsg., *Religion und Magie in Ostmitteleuropa. Spielräume theologischer Normierungsprozesse in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit,* 143–57. Berlin: Lit.

Scala, Monika. 2012. *Der Exorzismus in der Katholischen Kirche. Ein Liturgisches Ritual zwischen Film, Mythos und Realität.* Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet.

Scharfe, Martin. 2004. *Über die Religion. Glaube und Zweifel in der Volkskultur.* Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau.

Schneider, Bernhard. 1998. "'Katholische Aufklärung': Zum Werden und Wert eines Forschungsbegriffs." *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 93: 354–97.

Schuller, Alexander und Wolfert von Rahden, Hrsgs. 1993. *Die andere Kraft. Zur Renaissance des Bösen.* Berlin: Akademie.

Schulze, Winfried, Hrsg. 1996. *Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte.* Berlin: Akademie.

Sieber, Dominik. 2005. *Jesuitische Missionierung, priesterliche Liebe, sakramentale Magie. Volkskulturen in Luzern 1563–1614.* Basel: Schwabe.

Siegmund, Georg, Hrsg. 1985. *Von Wemding nach Klingenberg. Vier weltberühmte Fälle von Teufelsaustreibungen.* Stein am Rhein: Christiana.

Sluhovsky, Moshe. 2007. *Believe not Every Spirit. Possession, Mysticism and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Szulovszky, János. 2014. "Lehet-e a szellemi néprajznak keresztény tudományos megközelítése?" [Is there a Christian academic approach to folklore?] *Ethnographia* 125: 161–83.

Tóth, István György. 2001. "The Missionary and the Devil: Ways of Conversion in Catholic Missions in Hungary." In Eszter Andor and István György Tóth, eds., *Frontiers of Faith. Religious Exchange and the Constitution of Religious Identities 1400–1750,* 79–87. Budapest: CEU and European Science Foundation.

Twelftree, Graham H. 1985. *Christus Triumphant. Exorcism Then and Now.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Waardt, Hans de, et al., Hrsgs. 2005. *Dämonische Besessenheit. Zur Interpretation eines kulturhistorischen Phänomens.* Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.

Walker, Daniel P. 1981. *Unclean Spirits. Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries.* London: Scolar.

Wegner, Marcus. 2009. *Exorzismus heute. Der Teufel spricht deutsch.* Gütersloh: Gütersloher.

Wollscheid, Karl-Heinz. 2007. *Personifikationen des Bösen. Hölle, Teufel und Dämonen in der Bibel und in der christlichen Tradition.* Berlin: Rhombos.

Ágnes Hesz

Uncertainty and the Conceptualizations of Life after Death in a Transylvanian Catholic Village Community[1]

> "Well, there is a lot of interesting stuff I read in the Bible,
> but there are so many ways to interpret everything, aren't there?"

Introduction

In his 1995 Huxley Memorial Lecture entitled *A Kernel of Doubt* and delivered in honour of the English zoologist T. H. Huxley, who had coined the term "agnostic", Jack Goody argued that religious scepticism, rather than being the product of the European Enlightenment or the Renaissance, had long been present in every religion, dogmatic or non-dogmatic, with evidence going back, in some cases, as far as Antiquity. He attributed the ubiquitous nature of doubt, a natural concomitant of religion as he puts it, to the cognitive contradiction that arises from the fact that people have to express their experiences of the world with the help of language.[2]

Goody argued that – although doubt has always been present in oral cultures – it was literacy that contributed to its formation into a body of tradition. However, researchers exploring European folklore, mostly held to be an oral tradition, have also pointed out that a tradition of doubt may also emerge in connection with beliefs that mostly exist in orality. Timothy Corrigan Corell, for instance, examined attitudes concerning fairies and fairy magicians in Ireland and proved convincingly that such ideas had already been contested in peasant communities long before the enlightening efforts of lay and clerical authorities. The collections he studied contained a plethora of references suggesting that audiences were divided when it came to assessing the veracity of stories about fairies, and there were at least as many arguments levelled against people's accounts of fairies as in their favour. Moreover, expressions of doubt took similarly regular and recurring forms and employed the same motifs

---

[2] Goody 1996, 678–79.

as the corroborations of these beliefs.[3] Seeing the regularities in expressions of disbelief, several folklorists speak, paralleling the "tradition of faith"[4] about "the tradition of disbelief".[5] The two expressions essentially point to the same thing: disbelief is also part of the knowledge-base of a community, and its expressions are passed on in the same forms and on the same occasions, such as personal communication and the recounting of stories, as the narratives that confirm faith. In a work on the attitude of elderly urban women to their dead, Gillian Bennet describes how her informants were equally aware of beliefs relating to the dead and their refutations and they were well acquainted with the arguments and rhetoric of both attitudes. In other words, "rational" thinking and belief in the supernatural are present as two rival discourses that enlist arguments and narrative patterns that are passed down along the generations offering people a kind of cultural option.[6]

Despite the presence of such arguments in anthropological thinking, the problematic of doubt and disbelief appears less emphatically in works on religion, even though references to their existence are frequently made. This is not surprising, since traditionally the main interest of researchers was to see what people actually believed in. The goal was to collect and examine ideas and practices relating to the supernatural, and thus to explore religious systems regardless of whether they constituted a dogmatic religion or not.[7] As regards the historicist or reconstruction-focussed approach that has characterised Hungarian folklore studies, the research question itself renders it unnecessary to examine the attitude to religious knowledge, as ideas about the supernatural are equally well contained in statements that do not reflect active faith or deny the relevant claims outright.[8]

By contrast, problems of faith and faithlessness received heightened attention in works where religious notions were approached by the researcher from the point

---

[3] Corell 2005, 15.

[4] Hufford 1982, quoted by Corell 2005, 3.

[5] Bennett 1999, 33.

[6] Ibid., 39.

[7] Upon reading Hungarian collections of beliefs, it is remarkable, for instance, how rarely we come across accounts that contain rejection or even doubt concerning the ideas voiced. We must assume that such a predominance of ideas that substantiate the beliefs or at least refrain from evaluating the ideas in question are at least partly due to selection principles employed by the scholars and collectors (for more on this see Landgraf 2006). It is also quite probable that the technical conditions of collecting (the absence of sound recording or the need to economise on recording tape) also did not favour the publication of responses that contained negation or doubt – I thank Zoltán Nagy for pointing this out to me. Even less commonly does doubt appear in examinations of the practice of the Christian faith among rural populations.

[8] On the predominantly historical focus and atheoretical nature of Hungarian folkloristics see Vidacs 2005.

of view of belief in the supernatural.[9] The question took the form of exploring the extent to which verbal representation, the form of expression most readily available and accessible to researchers, reflects the interlocutor's actual state of faith. In other words, how far do informants consider the expressed conceptualizations credible and accepted by the community? Folklorists generally assumed that the degree of faith was closely linked to the genre of narratives, and that *memorats* – accounts of personal experience by the speakers or their close acquaintances – were the truest reflections of what people actually believed in. However, as it has become an axiom of folklore research that both the interview situation and the person of the researcher considerably influence the quality of the material obtained, answering these questions becomes more complex. Folklorists analyse the narrative context and investigate the explicit and implicit layers of the texts in order to understand the relationship of the informants to the supernatural.[10] Academic writings that probe into the faith content of such belief texts usually speak of two possible attitudes: speakers either believe in what they are relating and consider it true, or they reject it. There also exists, however, a third attitude which, in my judgement, appears less emphatically in most analyses and this is the sense of uncertainty, in other words, doubt or scepticism.[11] Speaking of the tradition of faith and doubt, Gillian Bennett marks out two cultural options and says that narrators are free to choose between the two standpoints. What often happens, however, is that they do not or cannot choose, either during their verbal account or, one may assume, during their internal, non-verbalised reflections over the supernatural.

  I myself met with this uncertainty during my fieldwork that began in 2003 and aimed to explore the richly interwoven relations between the living and the dead.[12] In the first few months of my stay I was quite unnerved by the high degree of uncertainty that most of my informants displayed when speaking about their ideas on the dead and the other world. In this paper, I explore this uncertainty and apparent ambivalent

---

[9] In Hungarian research into popular belief, the first comprehensive and theoretically oriented exploration of the connections between belief system and text was Zoltán Fejős's study of 1985 (Fejős 1985). In the past few decades, scholars connected to the Department of Ethnography at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj (Romania) published the most on questions of the representation of beliefs – often also touching upon problems relating to the belief content of texts, albeit to varying depths. (While a full inventory is impossible, see e.g., Keszeg 1999; Czégényi 2001). For a work dedicated expressly to the appearance of faith and doubt in the texts see e.g., Emese Bartha-Balog 2001. Éva Pócs has also addressed the problem of expressions of belief or disbelief and narrative genres: see Pócs 2008.

[10] See e.g., Bennett 1999; Bartha-Balog 2001.

[11] I would like to emphasise at this point that expressing doubt and scepticism is not tantamount to denying the verity of a religious dogma or notion, it only means that the individual is unable to prove its truth content.

[12] The site of my fieldwork was a settlement in the Eastern Carpathians with a population of 5227, the majority of whom were Hungarian Roman Catholics. As the region has been populated both by Hungarian and Romanian settlers from the eighteenth century, several villagers I worked with had Orthodox/Greek Catholic kinship relations. As the result of the collapsing socialist industry in nearby cities where many of the villagers had been employed before, most families earned their income by raising cattle and selling (often illegally logged) timber at the time of my research.

attitude to knowledge about the supernatural. I will present the villagers' continuous attempts to interpret questions relating to death: on what bases, with what kind of logic do they (or do they not) envision existence after death; how do they talk about the various conceptualizations about the dead and the afterlife springing from a variety of sources; and what kinds of verbal strategies do they employ in this process of trying to convince themselves and others? Finally, I also seek to answer the question whether the uncertainty evident in our conversations is also present at the level of religious practice and whether it effectively influences individuals' actions and conduct.

Methodological Considerations

When dealing with matters of faith and doubt, the question becomes unavoidable whether the anthropologist/ethnographer is at all able to ascertain the actual state of faith of her interlocutors and to find out whether or not her informants truly believe in what they are relating. This extremely complex epistemological problem has been one of the central issues of research in the anthropology of religion that I only wish to touch upon very briefly here. The most extreme stance on the question holds that all a researcher can find out for certain is that the community in question adheres to a particular dogma, but not whether its members actually believe in it, since dogmatic knowledge and ritual practice can exist without faith.[13] This position is based on the approach according to which faith is an "internal state", a kind of personal spiritual factor that is unattainable and unknowable for the outside observer.[14] Others, however, think that anthropologists who have lived with a community for considerable lengths of time can identify with convincing methodological consistency which are the dogmas that are deferred to merely as a formality and which are respected from inner conviction. This is possible when we are able to observe and compare people's behaviour and the various manifestations of religious notions over a long period of time and in a wide range of different situations.[15] Besides this, the methods mentioned in the introduction from the areas of linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis can help the researcher explore people's attitudes to various beliefs, at least as they are valid in the given situation. In short, we do in fact have methodological devices that allow us to explore faith, summed up as the totality of various cognitive

---

[13] This is the view held by Leach according to his critics (for more on this see Southwold 1979, 628–29), who argued in the late 1960s debate surrounding the dogma of virgin birth, that the Australian peoples who believe in this dogma according to certain anthropologists, are aware of the biological nature and facts of conception (Leach 1966, 40). According to his critics, Leach thereby suggests that they do not consider the dogma valid.

[14] To go even further, this concept of faith is primarily characteristic of modern, predominantly personal Catholic Christian belief, as was pointed out by Talal Asad (Asad 1983), and thus cannot necessarily be applied to describing the religious practise of other cultures, or even, the entirety of the Catholic Christian world.

[15] Southwold 1979, 637–38.

approaches, and by applying these approaches methodically, we may be able to get closer to an understanding of the nature of religious belief.[16] My knowledge regarding the notions held by the people of this village concerning the dead and the other world mostly come from semi-structured interviews recorded a number of years ago – a fact which does indicate the limitations of the material and its analysis. In today's anthropological/folklore studies it goes without saying that the material collected is the joint product of the interlocutor and the anthropologist which is largely determined by the dynamics of the relationship of the researcher and those "being studied", not to mention the effect of the personality of the researcher. This is of particular significance for my own choice of topic, since the object of my investigation – uncertainty concerning the notions in question –, is one that may in many cases be seen to be the result of the interview situation itself. Thus, for instance, we cannot ignore the possibility that my informants showed doubt concerning notions about death because they were aware of the differences in social prestige associated with the worldview seen as rational and educated, and, the view which accepts the existence of the supernatural, and thus wished to distance themselves from the material they were relating. In such cases then it is not so much a question of not believing or not believing so much in certain concepts, but rather of wanting to project an image about themselves that they thought would meet the approval of the listener.[17] During my fieldwork I came across several situations that implied the presence of such a motivation, for example several times my interlocutors first rejected the possibility of communicating with the dead, yet somewhat later related a specific story in which a dead person appeared in a dream or in some other fashion, without any noticeable sign of doubt. However, I hasten to add that explicit rejection of these beliefs combined with their implicit acceptance may not necessarily be addressed to the anthropologist, rather it may at least in part be due to the fact, often emphasised in the anthropology of religion, that the religiosity of specific individuals never constitutes a consistent, seamless system free of contradictions.[18] Religious manifestations, whether they be verbal or non-verbal, are always dependent on their context, and thus denying or discarding an idea in one situation does not mean that the idea is negated in general; just as a statement indicating the acceptance of an idea does not mean that it is accepted absolutely. During my fieldwork I had the opportunity, even outside the interview situations, to observe the apparent inconsistencies of individual religious ideas/conceptualizations. Thus, the contradictions observable in the conversations with the anthropologist cannot automatically be classified as consequences of the interview situation.

The sense of uncertainty observed in the material may also stem from the fact – and this is again a consequence of the interview situation – that during our conversations I encouraged my interlocutors to reflect on matters they had not been in the habit

---

[16] Ibid 632.
[17] Cf. Bartha-Balog 2001, 54.
[18] For more on this see e.g., Davies 1997; Lewis 1986; Geertz 1960; Huntington and Metcalf 1991, 86–90; Knuuttila 2001, 21; Southwold 1979, 632; on this community see: Hesz 2008; 2012b.

of pondering before, or asked them to verbalise knowledge that they would not have put into words for themselves. It is important to consider that knowledge concerning the supernatural exists and is passed on not only in verbal or quasi-linguistic systems but also in embodied practices and emotional registers.[19] All of the latter is hard to express through linguistic means, and informants do not usually feel the need to do so.[20] This is clearly observable in the following interview excerpt.

> *And how do you imagine heaven?*
> Well, heaven, according to the Scriptures, the way we read it in the Bible and everywhere, where heaven is and that it exists, I think I don't know what to say, how I could imagine it. Well, on the right-hand side of God sit the good people, that's how they tell you, and there on his left stand the evil ones and… I don't know what to say, how I would imagine it, like a kind of … well, not a …, not like a landscape out there or whatever; I don't know how I'd imagine it… like a place where all the good ones are sitting in a circle and pray as if, well, just like in the church, like you do when you are part of the congregation. This is how I could imagine it, I don't know … [F 33][21]

The uncertainty that she states repeatedly and explicitly, and her use of the conditional all indicate that my interviewee, although aware of the conceptualizations of heaven available in the community, and relying on them under the pressure of having to provide an answer to the anthropologist, is not really in the habit of thinking about this question, nor does she have an idea of this part of the otherworld that she could accept without reservations.

However, the uncertainty evident in the interview cannot in all cases be attributed to the reaction given to the anthropologist's presence. During my stay, I witnessed several conversations of the villagers about the dead and life after death, showing recurring dilemmas that some of them had, both in or outside of interview situations. This convinced me that the question of life after death was in fact preoccupying people and the doubt they demonstrated actually revealed, in many cases, that they were not convinced of either the truth or the falsity of the conceptualizations available to them. During a conversation involving several participants, I was able to record how a middle aged woman and her young female friend disputed with some passion whether the dead were constantly present among the living. The woman believed they were, and supported this view with a dream experience, while her conversation partner seemed sceptical all along and insisted on the view that the dead only visited home around All Saints Day (known as "the day of the dead").[22] The topic repeatedly resurfaced many

---

[19] Mitchell 1997, 79–80.
[20] On the nature of religious knowledge as something impossible to verbalise see for example Losonczy 2012.
[21] At the end of each excerpt, I include the gender and age of the informants. I include my own interventions in square brackets. The personal names in the texts are all pseudonyms.
[22] For a more detailed description of this case, see Hesz 2012b.

times when we met this young woman, even, when we were talking with her not long after her father's death. She was palpably pre-occupied with the question, but still could not make up her mind what to believe:

And do you feel he can see what all of you are doing?
I don't know, I think a lot about this, whether he really is visiting home or whether he can see us or … I don't know. I don't know. They say that three days before the Day of the Dead the dead are at home. But then I don't know. [F 24]

In light of the above, I think that if on methodological grounds we were never to "take seriously" such expressions of uncertainty, (i.e., if we did not suppose that there were genuine doubts underlying them), we would be committing a similar error as when disregarding the possible effects of the fieldwork situation on our results or our informants' difficulties in verbalising certain kinds of knowledge.

Traditions of "Faith"

In the present study, I examine attitudes toward conceptualizations of various domains of the otherworld, the otherworldly life of the dead and the relations of the living to the dead, as well as toward the rites surrounding them. I do not have sufficient space here to describe these notions and rites in detail, but some characteristics of the tradition of faith need to be discussed, nonetheless. In this community, conceptualizations and practices relating to the dead follow the teachings and protocols of the Roman Catholic Church, supplemented, to some extent, with the traditions of the Orthodox, formerly Greek Catholic, community present in considerable numbers, as well as with local vernacular ideas and practices. Thus, "the tradition of faith" actually consists of at least two traditions that contradict each other in certain questions and differ in their mentality and their evaluation by society. Vernacular ideas and resulting ritual practice show a far more "down-to-earth" and materialistic image of the otherworld than do the teachings of the Church. These meet a number of needs which clerical practice does not cater for, such as communication between the living and the dead or the protection of the living from the returning dead.

On the level of local practice, official and vernacular traditions constitute a single system in the functional sense, i.e., together they define what individuals think about the afterlife and what sort of rituals are required to guarantee a dead person's ascent to the otherworld. At the same time, due to the Church's long-standing fight against "superstition", the locals are quite aware of the difference between the two traditions and the negative evaluation of vernacular notions. Characteristically, however, they draw the boundary between official teachings and "superstition" elsewhere than the representatives of the Church do and the official or vernacular status of a notion is not paramount in their evaluation of the truth-value or correctness of individual conceptualizations or rituals.

Thus, multiple cultural options and the occasional conflicts between the knowledge acquired from members of the clergy and from the community frequently force people to make choices already within the tradition of faith, regardless of whether they follow the Church teachings in drawing the line between acceptable and unacceptable ideas and practices or not. Added to this is the presence of what we might call the rational, scientific discourse within the community, which in some respects puts into question the credibility of religious notions even in the eyes of people who claim to be religious.

Forms of Doubt

Although I observed a range of attitudes to the conceptualizations of life after death from acceptance to rejection in the community, I found that the majority of opinions fell somewhere between the two in the range I refer to as uncertainty or doubt. Talking of questions of the otherworld, most speakers emphasised that life after death was unknowable:

> I have pondered this so much, how it is all going to be and nobody knows, because no one has ever come back to report to us what it is like over there. [F 77]

Conceptualizing the other world as unknowable is in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church that mention, among other things, that the union with God in heaven of those partaking of salvation is something that is impossible for the human mind to comprehend, or imagine, and that "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, … nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him".[23] Several of my interlocutors alluded in our conversations to the Church's view on the unknowability of the otherworld. This is how one woman put it, for instance, when she expressed doubt regarding ideas about the possibility of the return of the dead:

> They say about the dead that their souls come home. But no one has seen that. … We've heard it too, but never seen it, they said no one knew the secret of God, not even the saints in heaven, well, then we cannot know it, either. [F 57]

The most commonly voiced argument is, however, the one used in the first quotation – namely that no one has come back yet from the other world.

> How it's all going to be over there, when the time comes, in the other world, nobody knows. No. Neither you, nor I, 'cause no one has come back from there yet to let us know what we are going to be stepping into. [F 81]

---

[23] 1 Corinthians 2,9, NRSVCE.

Besides this formulaic, axiomatic statement that is almost always made in conversations about the afterlife – which is not at all limited to this village – the members of the community can also rely on such stories and dreams, rooted in legends, which support the idea of the unknowability of the afterlife or in some cases the denial of the notion of the return of the dead. One old woman related, in support of this idea that she and her husband had agreed in vain that whoever died first would tell the other how he or she was faring in the other world: the communication never took place, even though a number of years had now passed since her husband's death.[24] Another woman recounted that a dead relative who appeared to her in her dream, was not allowed to talk about the otherworld:

> Then they brought him home and they buried him, we buried him. And in the evening when the funeral was over, that night I dreamt about it.
> *Yes.*
> I dreamt about him. And I asked him, tell me, Godfather, what is the otherworld like.
> *Yes.*
> I dreamt about you, so you can tell me what the otherworld is like. And he said to me, you know what, Veronka, he said, don't you go asking about that, because I cannot tell you because I am not allowed to tell you. When you come here, too, that's when you'll find out what the otherworld is like. And so he just faded away again gently, he was just the way he had been in his coffin and the sound just came out. His voice through his mouth, so I was going to ask him some more to tell me what it was like in that other world. And whether his soul was suffering, and he said, leave it off, my dear, don't ask, because one day you'll end up here, too, and then you will see what the other word is like. [F 50]

Thus we can argue that the idea that one cannot know anything certain about the otherworld is a part of the cultural knowledge about the otherworld and life after death. At the same time, both the teachings of the Church and the divergent tradition of vernacular religion offer a plethora of ideas based on which individuals can formulate their knowledge of the otherworld. Even though the teachings of the Church speak about the otherworld being fundamentally unknowable, during its existence the Catholic Church has mediated a whole range of different ideas about it, sometimes formulated in specific terms, at others put in more abstract formulations, and used a whole list of devices to do so. In this community, the most direct channel for the transmission of such knowledge capable of reaching the highest number of people were catechism classes and the sermons offered regularly during mass. In addition, religious pictorial representations of various parts of the otherworld and of individual judgement after death are widely known among members of the community (often

---

[24] For belief legend parallels see Körner B. VII. 35 (Körner 1970, 71).

from Orthodox sources), just as are a wide range of stories on life after death from a very rich religious chapbook tradition often inspired by the Church. When speaking about the otherworld, locals often explicitly referred to the Church or the Scriptures as the source of their knowledge, just as they did to "the old people", "our forebears", or quite simply to communal knowledge. However, the fact that they almost always name some kind of a source, "this is how we learnt it from our forebears", "according to the Holy Scripture", "we only know it from the priests", "they say", indicates a degree of separation from whatever is being said. This, once again, is a sign of uncertainty about the ideas offered, even if one does not specifically go into analysing their truth value. What frequently happens, however, is that directly after describing the beliefs they attach doubt to their verifiability, placing all that was said into quotation marks, as it were, even if they are based on clerical teachings.

> *What is the soul?*
> Well, that's how they say it, isn't it, that his soul has departed, when someone dies, yes, they say, his soul has left, but then one can't ever know …The Scripture, or whatever, the laws, they say that the soul goes to heaven or goes to hell, if you were a sinner or not, but then no one has seen that, no one knows, it is just … the way they say it. [F 80]

Or:

> *And do you imagine in some way where people go after they die?*
> A: When they die? Well, I can't, if you get me. I cannot imagine it and I am often sad that I can't.
> B: No one has come back from there to tell us … [they laugh]
> A: Well, no, but who knows what it's like. There are, you know, pictures here and there, we have one where if they have a sin, there is a fire burning, so they burn. [B: in hell] in hell, you know, and that's how. And that is so terrible, don't you know, and then afterwards, well, who knows, you cannot know, only the Good Lord knows, but not people like us who walk on earth. So there. [A: F 71; B: M 74]

The attitude of uncertainty regarding teachings and conceptualizations of the otherworld also appears in the choice of words. As the above quote shows, villagers use a number of different words to describe their attitude to these ideas. Commonly used phrases include "this is what we hold" "this is how we say it" or use of the same expressions with an indefinite pronoun. Less frequently, they will say "this is how we learnt it", "this is what we've read", "this is what we've heard". Even less common is the phrase "this is what we believe", while sometimes, probably as a result of the phrasing of my questions, the formula "this is how I imagine it" also appears. Earlier I mentioned how reference to the source of information, implied in the use of verbs such as *we learnt, we read, we heard,* served to indicate the speaker's attitude to what is being said. The Hungarian verb *tart* ('to hold') has numerous semantic fields, two of which may appear

in the present context. 1. to preserve the authenticity, influence and power of a tradition, belief or news, 2. to think, judge or consider someone or something to be of a certain nature or quality.[25] A synonym to these semantic fields may be the verb *hisz* ('to believe'),[26] which has the following meanings relevant to our subject matter: "1. to believe something to be true, in accordance with the truth, 2. to consider somebody or something to be existing without it being verifiable, 3. having faith in God, 4. being trustful or hopeful of something".[27] The word "believe" thus partly means that we accept something as true, but partly conveys that this conviction is based on information that cannot be validated – and this last connotation also applies to the word "to hold" (*tart*) and to their common synonyms such as *gondol* ('to think') and *vél* ('to deem').[28] An even greater distance from truth and reality is suggested by the phrases *így mondjuk* ('this is how we say it'), *így mondják* ('this is how they say it'), particularly if we take into account those explicit statements that declare that talk, or the act of talking about something, is not identical with reality: *az csak egy beszéd* ('it is only talk'), *a beszédbe így van, de ki tudja, hogy van* ('this is how they say it, but who knows how it is'). We can see that when speaking about conceptualizations of the otherworld, the villagers only use phrases that in some way refer to the lack of evidence, unlike the verb *tud* ('to know') which, however, occurred almost exclusively in the negated form in our conversations.

In summary, we may conclude that the sceptical attitude of the informants concerning conceptualizations of life after death is the result of their having accepted the basic tenet of the teachings of the Church, according to which, we cannot have verifiable knowledge about the otherworld. In other words, it seems that given the choice between a tradition of disbelief and a tradition of faith, they choose the latter, but this does inevitably contain a certain degree of doubt and the acceptance of the limitations of human understanding. Although this is probably the case for some individuals, I am also convinced that the situation is more complex than this and the use of linguistic devices indicating doubt represents more than hollow, formulaic repetition. The situation is more complex in that an already divided tradition of faith, which often contains mutually contradictory ideas, is not accepted or rejected in equal measure by all. Some tenets are held to be true by almost all, while others are accepted only in certain situations; there are some that are never accepted and yet others that are usually treated with doubt. Whether we may discern some clear tendency in this respect is something I attempt to answer at the end of the paper. At this point, I would like to draw attention to another aspect of this complex situation. Namely, that most people do not accept passively the positions that follow from teachings or tradition, rather they continually attempt to interpret them: they seek to find answers, points of reference and arguments and at times compare their insights with those of others to help them make up their minds.

[25] Csábi 2003, 1312.
[26] See: Czuczor és Fogarasi 1864, 1599–1600.
[27] Csábi 2003, 524.
[28] Eőry 2007, 521, 1728.

We can observe several different strategies locals follow when formulating their opinions from relying on earlier experience and first-hand knowledge to conclusions based on scientific or religious learning. When evaluating various beliefs and rites people commonly juxtapose them with obvious empirical evidence. Thus, for instance, speaking of the widespread practice of putting a candle in the hand of a dying person at the moment of death, a middle-aged woman explained to me the religious origin of this rite according to which, the candle grants the deceased eternal light in the other world. She instantly added that she did not know whether all of this was actually necessary, as many people die without candles and "something happens to them too". Others are inspired to engage in similar reflexion by observing different customs related to the dying in other communities. One young woman, during our conversation about local death-related rites, wondered about what happens to people who die in cities where no rosary, candle or personal objects are placed in their coffins. Her sister-in-law replied, with considerable self-reflexion and, in the act, demoting the customs in question to the rank of superstition, relativizing it by pointing out that they were not observed everywhere thus casting doubt on the truth claim of the conceptualizations they imply.

> Well, the way I thought of this, Zsófi, is that you know, we know this superstition and we keep to it, but those who don't keep to it, God granted them different, so … [F 36].

Another young woman, once again talking about a lack of consequences after not observing the ritual, referred not just to principle, but first-hand personal experience when she declared that the custom of keeping the electric lights on for six weeks after death in a dead person's house was a superstition – or more accurately, its local explanation was. This quotation is also interesting because it clearly reflects my interlocutor's uncertainty.

> *And why do you say you do this [keep the lights on]?*
> That the soul keeps returning … [text unintelligible]
> *You don't believe in it?*
> [laughing] I don't know.
> *But do people say that you can hear it or see it or anything like that?*
> Well, I have never seen it. Or is it to … er … so that the light should shine for them? I think that is just superstition. I don't know; this is how you inherit it from your forebears, but… When my father-in-law died, nobody stayed in the house, and we left the little light on, but then I don't know if one week went by or three, we saw that the lightbulb had been knocked out and the light was no longer on, and we did not do anything after that. So from that time on it wasn't burning and I did not see anyone or hear anyone, nor did I see anything in my dreams, to say that that was wrong, so I think it is a superstitious thing. [F 35]

Besides fairly straightforward conclusions like those above, there are also examples of someone actively comparing different pieces of knowledge coming from diverse sources and thus coming to accept or reject certain views. The old woman speaking in the following interview excerpt, for instance, used her empirical observations and the generally accepted idea in the community according to which the human soul is akin to breath, to conclude that the otherworld was on earth, among the living, in a form that we could only indirectly perceive. She told me this after she had come back to my question with a quip that the otherworld was in America, because after all that was what we had on the other side of the earth. The question of the location and characteristics of the otherworld clearly intrigued her and she repeatedly expressed the views cited below during a series of conversations we had, sometimes in the presence of others. The reactions of the audience suggested that her opinion was not unknown to them. The excerpt below is a quote from a one on one conversation.

> Well, er …, the other world is when we die and our soul … our soul, well, it is where it goes. The way I imagine it is that we are here in the air. Isn't that right? I imagine that we are here in the air. Because the soul is like the air. We don't see the air, we don't see the soul. This is how I imagine it. So… this is it and this is how it must be.
> *And does that mean that the dead are now here with us?*
> Yes, here, yes.
> *And can you sense somehow that they are here, or do they give some kind of a sign?*
> Well, they don't give a sign, but it is likely that they are here. What we see in our dreams, those are ghosts, too. Those are also souls, this is how I imagine it, because it is true that even animals dream. For I have noticed, that a little baby calf will be sleeping and then it will go "eeeeh, eeeeh", just like humans, crying like. Well, that is how they work away in their dreams, too. That they also dream. This is how I imagine it, how I think about it. [F 67]

Later in the same conversation, we returned to the issue after my interlocutor told me that during her father-in-law's funeral there was a strong wind, which, in her interpretation, signalled that her father-in-law was returning home. At this point, she produced a further argument to justify the idea that the dead were living amongst us in the air: she reasoned that there would be no room for the otherworld and the tremendous number of people who had died in the past anywhere else.

During a conversation on a different occasion, the woman's husband even referred to science to substantiate the idea, known and accepted by many in the community that the dead keep returning during the first six weeks after their death:

> M: Even science recognises that for six weeks there is a ghost … you do hear things like that.
> F: Well, yes they do say you need to keep the candles burning for six weeks. [F 67; M 69]

Besides personal experiences, vernacular views and scientific arguments, clerical teachings also represent a possible point of departure for shaping an individual's personal views regarding existence after death. One young woman, for instance, after having mentioned volcanoes as a possible locus of hell citing religious literature ventured the idea that the grave itself could be hell. She justified this by reference to Christ's visit to hell in the period between his death and his resurrection, but she did not appear entirely convinced. In fact, with regard to the place where the soul itself resides, she seemed downright uncertain.

> *And you said hell was that they lower them into the grave…*
> Well, that is what I say, it must be, for, you see, Jesus died, too, didn't he, and then on the third day the dead man rose, and he had been as far as the gates of hell, as they say, so that everything, as they say, the ground, it must be down there, in the underworld, or I have no idea where it is.
> *And then does the soul also descend into the grave?*
> Well, then it must stay here, I don't know how that works. It goes to God, it must stay here, so the soul breaks away here, the body is put inside the grave, but the soul stays here on the face of the earth; it must stay here because this is where the soul breaks away. Because if you don't go on breathing, once you are dead, it must stay here on the face of the earth.
> *Because the soul – is your breath?*
> Well yes, your soul. It is just like you give a blow, just like this, and then we don't see it, the soul is air. [N 34]

Although the interlocutors of the last few quotes cited arguments to support the various notions, whether collective or personal, the passages do not reflect full certainty. At several points the excerpts I quote from the interviews contain the phrase "it must be so", "that must be how it is", which, although seemingly definitive statements, cannot be considered as synonymous with the statement "this is how it is"; much rather, instead of indicating a sense of firm conviction, they express the desire to persuade or be persuaded.

Even though the villagers do fundamentally accept that life after death cannot be known, their verbal and non-verbal expressions suggest that they view dreams about the dead as a way of getting a glimpse of the other world, and they look for certainty in the knowledge they think dreams thus convey. Many people in the community consider dreams to be spontaneous, genuine experiences and attribute a similar truth value to dream experiences as to waking experiences. During our conversations, they recounted dreams of their own or those of others and talked about the details of life in the otherworld reflected in them: that the dead can see everything; that they need to work even in the otherworld; that they are missing something, etc. Several of them described dreams in which their experiences contradicted the teachings of the Church; dreams about suicides who attained salvation belonged to this category.

The context and the way in which dreams about the dead surfaced in our conversations – and here I must emphasise that this was not only in interview situations – render it quite obvious that dreams are treated as valid sources of information and can, on occasion, play a persuasive role.

> *And where do you think the soul goes then [after death]?*
> F: Well… [Her husband: that is beyond what we can know] that is beyond what we can know. If we are sinners, what usually happens is that [the soul] goes to purgatory, because I once saw the old man next door, after he'd died, in my dream…
> *Yes?*
> F: After years, after years.
> *Years after he died?*
> Yes, a long time after he died. I dreamt that I was going along and saw that he was home. So I said good day to him and asked him, how are you, Uncle Joe, and so he said, I am fine, he did. And then my son, my younger one, he was still a small child and then he [the dead man] said, come, little Steve, come to me. And then, in my dream, I was so scared, I grabbed the child so that, no, the dead man must not touch him because they say he will take him away and he'll die. So then I started asking him, what's it like over there, Uncle Joe, and how is it going for you and what do you all do, and he said, well, the way it goes over there is that everyone who ever dies must once go through the fires of purgatory. So you go through and you suffer and then, then he did not say where he had gone, he just said that it was time to go, he said, because I was just on leave, and my leave is up, so I must go back now.
> M: If nothing else, even there they discipline people.
> F: Even there they give them orders I am sure. [F 56; M 64]

During the rest of the conversation when I questioned her about the meaning of the dream she repeatedly questioned the truth value of the dream and not only of this particular one, but of dreams in general. In this case, however, I must indicate my suspicion that her scepticism may well have been a gesture addressed to the researcher and the interview situation. I think so because during our subsequent conversations she talked more about her dreams related to the dead and did so without any signs of doubt. What is more, living as I did in her direct neighbourhood and chatting with her relatives it gradually became clear to me that some of her dreams were known to a somewhat wider circle and people looked to them as sources of knowledge about the otherworld and as messages from the dead. In fact it was from her daughter-in-law that I heard many of the dreams she had had about the man next door in the dream narrative. The daughter-in-law also told me that these dreams convinced her mother-in-law about the existence of the other world and of life after death.

> … my mother-in-law always said, too, that coming back really did exist, that he [the dead neighbour], too, must have come back to see and to know that Erzsi [his wife]

had remarried. He must know then. My mother-in-law was always going on about this, that there really was an eternal life, because then he must have come back, come home and find out about everything. [F 33]

However, not everyone considers dreams as an experience with truth value, at least not every time and not in the case of every dream. It is not so much that certain people believe in dreams whereas others do not, rather people try to make up their minds about the truth value of a given dream depending on the context, at times also consulting with others about it. It does appear, however, that dreams about the dead are considered meaningful and, therefore, worthy of attention far more often than dreams that are omens.

Dreams are viewed as the channel through which most of the communication between the living and the dead takes place. People perceive the connection of the two groups essentially along the teachings of the Catholic Church, where the idea of atonement in purgatory after death is a central element. An essential part of this process is that the living have the capacity to shorten the suffering of the dead in the fires of purgatory for instance by praying for them, having mass said for them, giving alms or fasting. People draw their inspiration to do so partly from the teachings and expectations of the Church and partly from the fact that they perceive themselves as indebted to certain dead persons. Thus the relationship of the two groups is seen as an exchange where the living are duty bound to take care of the dead in exchange for help received in the latter's lifetime or for wealth inherited after their death.

Thus, it is mostly through dreams that the living learn about the fate and wishes of their deceased loved ones in the otherworld, and this information helps them hasten their salvation. Often they follow the instructions they receive in the dreams even when they are not fully convinced of their credibility. This raises the question whether there are discernible trends in the differences in attitudes towards the various conceptualizations of the otherworld, and whether the uncertainty appearing in such discourses is reflected in ritual practices concerning the dead.

Practice

As I indicated above, the scepticism observable in the interviews is not uniform in the sense that most people do not consistently doubt the truth-value of all ideas concerning life after death. In the following interview excerpt, my interlocutor offers something very close to an inventory of what we can and what we cannot know about life after death:

You cannot know where [the other world] is. But you can, or I do believe, that it exists somewhere, but then how big it is, well, I think, it can be a separate planet, like the planet we have here, just so there can be a planet there, or who knows how big it is, they say there are seven solar system. *[Yes.]* So. Is that true then?

I am sure you've heard about it, too. How big the world is is something we cannot know. Not even the greatest scientists. We know that this planet is here, but how many more planets are up there? Some have been extinguished, but it is possible there is another living planet, we cannot know, but we do know that our Lord Jesus rose from the dead and went up to heaven, but where heaven is is something that nobody knows. But he did rise. And even this thing here [the television] has shown how he rose to heaven. And we also learnt at school, when we went to Bible class, we did go to Bible class and we learned how that man, after he had shown himself to the disciples, rose and went to heaven. We know that. The Holy Scriptures write about it. But where it is, we don't know. We just know that there is something, that much is certain. [M 55]

The picture that generally emerges from these conversations is in line with what the above quotation reflects, namely that the basic religious tenets enjoy general acceptance: resurrection exists, the otherworld exists and, ultimately, God exists, too. Whatever doubt one does encounter mostly concerns the details of these conceptualizations and the connected rituals; and in this respect there is no difference between how the official clerical dogma and the vernacular local notions and practices are evaluated. People are equally likely to question the vernacular rites surrounding the clerical funeral ceremony, the beliefs about the occasional visitation or constant presence of the dead as the church images about the various domains of the otherworld or the idea of helping the dead currently suffering in purgatory. As one of my interlocutors, the most sceptical of all towards the teachings of the Church, observed, "well, I do at least believe in the resurrection, but I wonder in what form that will happen?" It remains a question to what extent the doubt about the verbally expressed beliefs becomes manifest on the level of practice, i.e., of people's behaviour in the context of death-related rites and attitudes to the dead. Apart from the strictly choreographed movements of the Church funeral, burial rites in the village vary widely; in fact one could say with little exaggeration that there are no two households where people follow the same steps in preparing the deceased, making preparations for the funeral and actually conducting the burial itself. Funerals may even vary within one and the same family – certain rituals may be omitted in the case of one death, while in another case a new custom may be added to the ritual sequence. In one family, for instance, when the grandmother was buried, a roll of linen was placed in her coffin on her special request. In the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox traditions this represents the plank over which the dead access the otherworld, that is to say, it is a crucial means of reaching otherworldly life. A few years later, however, when the grandfather died, the same ritual was omitted. The circumstances surrounding the death do not always make it possible to execute all of the rituals to the last detail, and often the family members and those assisting around the funeral are unable to attend to every little element, but this is very rarely experienced as a tragedy. What does, however, seem a uniform and widely pursued practice is that of ensuring the welfare of the dead in the other world in the sense that hardly any families neglect to comply with their duties

toward the deceased. Even people who otherwise voice scepticism regarding the util-
ity of alms after death or the needs of the dead in the other world will observe these
customs.

Observing and performing death-related rites may be fuelled by a range of differ-
ent motivations. On the one hand, many people are inspired to do so purely by their
adherence to the laws of faith and religion.

> *Don't people tell you why you need to do this [place a candle in the dying person's hand]?*
> Well, the way this was explained by faith and the law, by faith, not the law, our faith,
> the faith the way it is held, that it will shine a light for them in the otherworld, this
> is the kind of beliefs that are held round here. [N 80]

Observance of death-related rituals is also inspired by local, vernacular beliefs accord-
ing to which, improperly executed death-rituals or the neglect of the memory or sal-
vation of the deceased can result in the dead returning or may incur their wrath that
will seriously harm the living. Besides religious tradition, social expectations also play
a considerable role in adherence to customs and rituals. Neglecting your duty toward
the dead is interpreted in the community along the lines of the logic of exchange
between the living and the dead, and is seen as a sign of selfishness or stinginess. This
is part of the reason why a local parish priest's attempts to curb the custom of crip-
plingly costly burial feasts have rem   ained futile to this day.

In addition, some people have a "better safe than sorry" attitude. One man, for
instance, gave the following reply to my question about what his dream about his dead
father may have meant,

> *And does this dream mean that he is now in a good place?*
> Well, I think it does. I do often pray for him, too, I don't know, if it is actually as the
> Scripture says it is, I may help him with his sins, because he was in the war for a long
> time, in the '44 war. And he said he had shot a lot of soldiers, Russians at that time.
> Well, he was on the front. [M 55]

The same idea inspires some people to adhere to the prescribed Christian way of life:

> I said, all right, let us pray, and … this is the way we live, trying to turn the right way
> because these priests, what they teach us is not bad teaching at any rate. It is better
> to live this way than to live in self-indulgence, and truly, if what the books say and
> the priests teach us is true, then it is better to die without having done anything evil
> than dying as someone who had done … all the bad things in the world. [N 80]

Uncertainty then does not necessarily lead to discontinuing rituals or ignoring the
rules. Logically, uncertainty itself may become the motivation for adhering to
the norms when the individual is unable to make up his or her mind about the truth
value of the various religious conceptualizations and teachings.

Conclusion

I have presented above the element of uncertainty surrounding conceptualizations of life after death that are manifest in the verbal utterances of my interlocutors, as well as its possible causes and interpretations. I have argued that the scepticism expressed in connection with these ideas is not merely the outcome of the interview situation, of difficulties in articulating ideas about the subject or the church's teachings that declare the sphere beyond death to be unknowable, but rather it is fuelled, at least in certain cases, by genuine uncertainty. This is an uncertainty that some individuals try to overcome by comparing and analysing the knowledge and experiences available to them in order to reach a conclusion about the truth-value of the various notions. After examining the villagers' strategies of interpretation I have argued that they do not arrive at their conclusions by consistently applying the teachings of the Church or of science – although both influence their thinking – and in many cases they seem to be content with not arriving at a conclusion at all. Nevertheless, these indeterminacies do not influence ritual practice significantly since the uncertainty itself contributes to the villagers' adherence to rituals.

References

Asad, Talal. 1983. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz." *Man* 18 (2): 237–59.

Bartha-Balog, Emese. 2001. "Hit és kétely a hiedelemszövegekben" [Faith and doubt in belief texts]. In Czégényi Dóra és Keszeg Vilmos, szerk., *Emberek, szövegek, hiedelmek,* 47–76. Kriza Könyvek 7. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság.

Bennett, Gillian. 1999. *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse.* Logan: Utah State UP.

Corell, Timothy Corrigan. 2005. "Believers, Sceptics, and Charlatans: Evidential Rhetoric, the Fairies, and Fairy Healers in Irish Oral Narrative and Belief." *Folklore* 116 (1): 1–18.

Czégényi, Dóra. 2001. "A hiedelem és hiedelemszöveg mint reprezentáció" [Beliefs and belief texts as representation]. In Czégény Dóra és Keszeg Vilmos, szerk., *Emberek, szövegek, hiedelmek,* 141–206. Kriza Könyvek 7. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság.

Czuczor, Gergely és Fogarasi, János, szerk., 1864. *A Magyar Nyelv Szótára* [A dictionary of the Hungarian language]. Pest: Emich Gusztáv Magyar Akadémiai Nyomdásznál.

Csábi, Szilvia. 2003. *Magyar értelmező kéziszótár* [Hungarian lexicon]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Davies, Douglas J. 1997. *Death, Ritual and Belief. The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites.* London and Washington: Cassel.

Eőry, Vilma, editor-in-chief. 2007. *Értelmező szótár* [Lexicon]. Budapest: Tinta.

Fejős, Zoltán. 1985. *Hiedelemrendszer, szöveg, közösség. Esettanulmány Karancskeszi példáján.* 2 vols [Belief Systems, Texts, Communities. A Case Study of the Example of Karancskeszi]. Néprajzi Közlemények XXVII–XXVIII. Budapest: Múzsák Közművelődési.

Geertz, Clifford. 1960. *Religion in Java.* New York: The Free.

Goody, Jack. 1996. "A Kernel of Doubt." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (4): 667–81.

Hesz, Ágnes. 2008. "Néphit vagy helyi vallás: lélek- és túlvilágképzetek Hidegségen" [Popular belief or local religion? Notions of the soul and the other world at Hidegség]. In Pócs Éva,

szerk., „*Vannak csodák, csak észre kell venni". Helyi vallás, néphit és vallásos folklór Gyimesben.* I:15–78. Studia Ethnologica Hungarica VIII. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

–. 2012a. "Hit, kétely, bizonyságkeresés. A halál utáni léttel kapcsolatos elképzelések Gyimesben" [Belief, doubt and the search for certitude. Conceptualizations of life after death in Gyimes]. In Landgraf Ildikó–Nagy Zoltán, szerk., *Az elkerülhetetlen. Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Vargyas Gábor tiszteletére.* Budapest: PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék–MTA BTK Néprajztudományi Intézet–L'Harmattan–Könyvpont, 71–92.

–. 2012b. *Élők, holtak és adósságok. A halottak szerepe egy erdélyi falu társadalmában* [The living, the dead and their debts. The role of the dead in the society of a Transylvanian village]. Kultúrák Keresztútján 16. Budapest: L'Harmattan–PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék.

Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/1-corinthians/2.html. Accessed 12 September 2019.

Hufford, David J. 1982. Traditions of Disbelief. *New Folklore* 8: 47–55.

Huntington, Robert and Peter Metcalf. 1991. *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP [1979].

Iancu, Laura. 2013. *Vallás Magyarfaluban. Néprajzi* vizsgálat [Religion at Magyarfalu. An ethnographic survey]. Studia Ethnologica Hungarica XVII. Budapest: L'Harmattan, and PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék.

–. 1994. *A Katolikus Egyház Katekizmusa* [Catechism of the Catholic Church]. Budapest: Szent István Társulat.

Keszeg, Vilmos. 1999. *Mezőségi hiedelmek* [Beliefs in the Mezőség region]. Marosvásárhely: Mentor.

Knuuttila, Seppo. 2001. "How to Seize Mentalities." In Pille Runnel ed., *Rethinking Ethnology and Folkloristics,* 17–53. Tartu: Tartu Nefa Rühm.

Körner, Tamás. 1970. "Mutatvány a készülő hiedelemmonda-katalógusból. A halál és a halottak" [Samples from the catalogue of belief legends. Death and the dead]. *Ethnographia* 81: 55–96.

Landgraf, Ildikó. 2006. "Archívumon innen, katalóguson túl: Többletek és hiányok a mai magyar történeti mondakutatás műfajelméleti és rendszerezési kérdéseiben" [Less than an archive, more than a catalogue. Surpluses and shortcomings in generic and classification issues of Hungarian historical legend research]. *Ethno-lore. Az MTA Néprajzi Kutatóintézetének Évkönyve,* XXIII: 27–40. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Leach, Edmund. 1966. "Virgin Birth." *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 1966: 39–49.

Lewis, Ian M. 1986. *Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Losonczy, Annamária. 2012. "Rituális rögzítettség és rögtönzés. A kolumbiai Chocó-vidék emberá sámánizmusa" [Fixation and improvisation in rituals. Emberá shamanism in the Columbian Chocó region]. In Landgraf Ildikó és Nagy Zoltán, szerk., *Az elkerülhetetlen. Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Vargyas Gábor tiszteletére,* 93–108. Budapest: PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék, MTA BTK Néprajztudományi Intézet, L'Harmattan, and Könyvpont.

Mitchell, Jon P. 1997. "A Moment with Christ: The Importance of Feelings in the Analysis of Belief." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3 (1): 79–94.

Pócs, Éva. 2008. "'Rajtunk is történt nagy csoda.' Beszélgetések és elbeszélések a természetfelettiről" ["We experienced a great miracle." Narratives and conversations about the supernatural]. In Ead., szerk., *Vannak csodák, csak észre kell venni. Helyi vallás, néphit és vallásos folklór Gyimesben 1,* 289–351. Studia ethnologica Hungarica VIII. Budapest: L'Harmattan–PTE Néprajz – Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék.

Southwold, Martin. 1979. "Religious Belief." *Man* 14 (4): 628–44.

Vidacs, Bea. 2005. "An Anthropological Education: A Comparative Perspective." In Chris Hann, Mihály Sárkány, and Peter Skalník, eds., *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies: Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe,* 331–42. Münster: Lit.

Bea Vidacs

Faith and Doubt in the Light of Sincerity and Agency in the 2015 Lenten Teachings of a Hungarian Seer[1]

The paper addresses the relationship of faith and doubt through a close reading of the series of talks delivered during Lent 2015 by a Hungarian (Catholic) seer, whose words are supposed to come directly from Jesus Christ. Fear, doubt and anxiety are recurring themes of these texts. Looking at the discourses as representative of a Christian worldview, I argue that their understanding of doubt is diametrically opposed to the consensus of secular thinkers which regards doubt as a productive and creative force, a gateway to agency.[2] The seer suggests that doubt (along with fear and anxiety) are indicators of lack of sufficient trust in the divinity and as such act as impediments to the efficacy of prayer, blocking the believers' desire to commune with God. The negative feelings they harbour make their prayer insincere and therefore inefficient. The desired communication can only be reached through sincerity – opening oneself to the divinity. But this can only take place if the believer is willing to give up her bid for control, her agency granting it to God – what Hirokazu Miyazaki[3] has termed "putting agency into abeyance." While a secular reading would celebrate the opening that doubt creates as achieving agency, in this view the desire for agency (doubt) is a will to power that rather than liberating the individual, renders her powerless and frustrated of her desire to reach God. Paradoxically, the way to achieve agency is though giving it up, which in turn re-grants agency to the believer on a higher plane.

> Where is the blessing of the Living Holy Spirit? How can it work in me and on me? Because, My Lord, I believe, I recognized it, I think I accepted it, I *think* that I accepted it, but I cannot get rid of the anxiety of fear, doubt, and then I cannot live

---

[2] Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015, Goody 1996, Haynes 2019, Keane 1997a, Pelkmans 2013a.
[3] Miyazaki 2000.

and move on in my daily life [*mindennapjaimban*] with love. Because then it is possible that in the first part of the day I am embraced by joy and happiness, but if the anxiety of fear, doubt is inside me, then the middle of the day [*sic*] again radiates from me that I should give myself over to the anxiety of this fear, doubt. So, then I am again terrified, I tremble: "What will happen? How can this be solved? What can I expect? How should I live and what should I do?" Then the last part of the day, before the Sun goes down, then I try to excitely, nervously, tremblingly pray in such a way that if it were possible I would almost take apart my rosary, because I am praying now, and I must convey this, this must reach the Sacred Heart! (Third Lenten Teaching 2015)

These words were uttered on the third Friday of Lent 2015 in a southern Hungarian village by Jesus Christ conveyed through a Hungarian seer,[4] who relives the Passion of Christ every first Friday of the month and every Friday during Lent. After the seer, Erzsike,[5] experiences the passion and dies as Jesus Christ, Jesus speaks through her in the wee hours of the morning and conveys what they call teachings or messages. Though this takes place every time the seer experiences the passion, the "Lenten teachings" constitute a single unit, a set of six messages conveyed after the apparitions of each Friday during Lent. So much so, that while the monthly teachings are sold for a nominal price in a pamphlet beginning about two weeks after each vision, the Lenten teachings are also gathered together as a separate "volume" under the title *Lenten teachings* (*Nagyböjti tanítások*), thus they form a special subset among the

---

[4] Seers or holy people have been part of the landscape of Hungarian vernacular religion for a long time. We know of such activities since the sixteenth century to the present (Bálint 1942, Grynaeus 1974, Küllős és Sándor 2012, Küllős 2001, Pócs 1998, 2008, 2010, Szigeti 2006, Voigt 1998). Holy people or peasant prophets have often been rejected and persecuted by both the church and the secular establishment as they often challenge these powers and are seen as troublemakers or else as frauds. During the socialist period they were often persecuted both in Hungary and in Romania all the more so as they often questioned directly or indirectly the inevitability and longevity of the political system (Gagyi 1998, 2004, Peti 2006, 2012, Pozsony 1998). Since the end of socialism a more lenient attitude has prevailed and several seers have risen to prominence in Hungary and in the Hungarian-speaking areas in neighbouring countries. Especially famous was the seer of Szőkefalva (Seuca) who had Marian visions (between 1998 and 2005) and attracted pilgrims from three ethnic groups. The majority of prominent visionaries most commonly had Marian visions all over the world and in Hungary as well (Zimdars-Swartz 1991, Hermkens, Jansen, and Notermans 2009, Margry 2009). Sister Natália (1901–1992) a Hungarian nun, who is often presented as the precursor of Erzsike by the latter's followers, had visions of (and conversations with) both the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, but her visions never became broadly public as Erzsike's did, and we only know of them from her diaries, which mostly came to light after her death (Fogas 1993). Erzsike is unusual both in that she exclusively sees Jesus Christ and especially her dramatic re-enactment of the Passion of Christ is unique to her among Hungarian seers, as is the extent and sheer volume of what she hears from him and imparts to her followers as well as the length of time she has been publicly active. She also makes herself available to her followers outside of the visions and provides advice, solace both in her capacity as a "chosen" person and through offering prayers and supplications on behalf of those who seek her out.

[5] Erzsike is a pseudonym.

larger body of teachings. The combined length of the booklet is about 32 pages. One of the recurring themes of the Lenten teachings of 2015 was the question of fear, doubt and anxiety.

It is clear from the words of the quote above that although they may be uttered by Jesus, through Erzsike, he is citing the ordinary believer who is struggling to keep her[6] faith and experiences fear, anxiety and doubt regarding her daily activities, which make it impossible for her to live her life "with love", and ultimately for her prayer to reach and be heard by God. Fear, doubt and anxiety act as obstacles to fully attaining communication with the Lord and the blissfulness that this contact would bring.

This paper reflects on the connection between doubt and faith through examining the utterances of the seer/Jesus Christ in the Lenten Teachings of 2015. Discussions of faith and doubt in the social sciences tend to look at both from a secular perspective, hailing doubt as an antidote to faith (the religious worldview) that opens up alternative frameworks of seeing the world productively and creatively.[7] By concentrating on the seer's discourse on fear, anxiety and doubt I attempt to take seriously the religious point of view and show that through the seer's optic doubt stands in the way of creativity and productivity. In her conception, just as in the case of the secular viewpoint, doubt is a claim for agency, however, she perceives it as self-defeating when the believer desires it for herself and argues that the very agency that the believer desires can only be achieved through yielding it to God. Thus, the two viewpoints offer diametrically opposed interpretations of what doubt means. I will pursue the religious viewpoint through analysing Erzsike's/Jesus Christ's pronouncements, also hoping to bring us nearer to understanding what faith means to the believer. I should state at the outset that I am a non-believer, so what follows is a "classic" anthropological attempt to try to understand the "native's point of view".[8] I should also state, however, that the experience of attending Erzsike's apparitions and listening to the "teachings," as well as talking to and interacting with the pilgrims in the course of my fieldwork have not left me unaffected, but that is a topic for another paper.

A search of the various ways the concepts of faith and doubt have been paired with each other leads us to a range of opinions: most commentators would argue that the one is necessary for the other.[9] For example Geddes MacGregor points out that "Doubt and scepticism, although popularly accounted antithetical to religious

---

[6] Similarly to many religious groups today, the majority of the followers of the seer are women, therefore I will use the feminine version of the third person singular pronoun (*she)* throughout to refer to the "generic" follower. Since the pronouncements that I am analyzing are supposed to be those of Jesus Christ spoken through a female seer, when this is the case I will use the synthetic third person pronoun "*s/He*" to indicate the duality of the speaker to her listeners. In the Hungarian language there is no grammatical gender, thus the question of what pronoun to use does not arise in the life of the group, therefore I cannot follow the "emic" solution to the problem. Suffice it to say that the followers of the seer are convinced that the messages are spoken by Jesus through her.

[7] Haynes 2019; Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015; Pelkmans 2013b.

[8] Malinowski 1978 [1922], 19.

[9] MacGregor 1987; Pelkmans 2013b.

belief and alien to the religious attitude, are in fact inseparable from every deeply religious disposition. … All authentic religious faith, indeed, may be viewed as a descant on doubt".[10] Others (such as at least some versions of Catholicism) are adamant that faith and doubt are contradictory and cannot coexist. For example, the on-line *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*'s entry on Doubt republishes Alfred Sharpe's 1909 entry who declared quite unequivocally: "… whereas a philosophical or scientific opinion may be held provisionally and subject to an unresolved doubt, no such position can be held towards the doctrines of Christianity; their authority must be either accepted or rejected. The unconditional, interior assent which the Church demands to the Divine authority of revelation is incompatible with any doubt as to its validity".[11] Yet others admit that they have had doubt crop up even as they maintain their faith. I think some of the differences can be accounted for if we realize (as the Catholic Encyclopaedia points out) that those who accept (even posit) the coexistence of doubt and faith tend to be engaged in theoretical arguments, while those who posit a rigid either or division between the two tend to write from a doctrinal point of view. But it is also true that besides "popular opinion" referred to above by MacGregor, which I take to be a reference to people outside of religious circles, some religious people (often those labelled fundamentalists) also subscribe to either/or positions in which doubt is tantamount to disbelief but even there it is rare to find absolutes.[12]

Our Hungarian seer's, Erzsike's, views fall into the third, more forgiving mould. I will argue that in her interpretation, doubt and faith are also interconnected, but while doubt does not necessarily negate faith completely, overcoming it leads to the ability to experience faith more fully and more joyfully, by ultimately getting closer to God. Before going into detail I want to note that at least in connection with Christianity our (and I primarily mean secular academics although most likely we could include secular people in general) everyday, unreflexive thinking about doubt and faith are quite inadequate to capture the reality of ordinary believers. This is so mostly because we tend to unthinkingly subscribe to the second view, the one I labelled Catholic, and assume that having faith or doubt is an either/or question. Among others, Tanya Luhrmann[13] calls attention to the fact that non-believers are often surprised by the idea that believers have doubts because they take belief to be an either/or question.[14] This is a complex issue because on the one hand there does indeed seem to be a point at which one does have to declare that one either believe or not, or at least has to take a stance, but in the everyday reality of people's lives there are shades or degrees of faith. Perhaps the same cannot be said of doubt, but as Pelkmans[15] and others[16] have noted doubt in many languages literally means being at two minds about something,

---

[10] MacGregor 1987, 424.
[11] Sharpe 1909.
[12] Crapanzano 2000.
[13] Luhrmann 2012.
[14] Cf. Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015; Claverie et Fedele 2014.
[15] Pelkmans 2013b.
[16] For example MacGregor 1987.

that is to say, doubt wavers, so there are at least traces of faith in it, or to put it differently utter certainty is only possible in the presence of the shadow of doubt. Belief is perhaps more of an either/or proposition, but if so it is a relatively recent one and peculiar to Christianity.[17]

When talking about doubt, Erzsike is talking about communicating with the divine through prayer, giving her audience a glimpse of both the believer's longing to be near the divinity, the joy it may bring when achieved and the obstacles she might face in trying to fulfil this longing. These obstacles are caused by doubt (accompanied by fear and anxiety) and can be paralysing. As I will show doubt in Erzsike's interpretation raises the question of who the believer endows with agency, does she stay in charge or does she yield it to the divinity. There is a real tension here, even if the solution the seer suggests unequivocally points to the necessity of yielding for faith to be fully lived, the characteristic human desire to remain in control is a hard one to overcome. Accordingly, I will interpret Erzsike's discourse on fear, doubt and anxiety within the framework established by the Anthropology of Christianity with regard to sincerity and agency. As well-known this approach has been mostly formulated in connection with Protestantism, but I hope to show that it can be fruitfully used in the case of the Catholic seer (whose religiosity nonetheless shows some charismatic elements). Drawing upon the work of Niloofar Haeri[18] I argue that as Erzsike presents it, sincerity is not necessarily about the power of words only, not merely a question of meaning, but just as importantly is about the believer's relationship to God, in other words about an emotional state of being, the willingness and ability to open up to the divinity. Seen in this light, the notion of agency needs to be reconceptualised as well and I argue – with Hirokazu Miyazaki[19] – that for the religious person agency paradoxically involves yielding it to the divinity.

The paper has five sections. I start with a brief description of the history of the seer and the context in which she works and in which the teachings are conveyed. Next I turn to how doubt in general and religious doubt in particular has been treated in the anthropological literature. In the third part I discuss Erzsike's conceptualization of prayer and will compare it with that of Tanya Luhrmann[20] in a recent writing on prayer as a metacognitive activity. In the next two sections, examining further passages of the Lenten teachings I will analyse Erzsike's understanding of sincerity, arguing that in her treatment, sincerity requires an openness to the divine, which is only possible if the believer is willing to yield or relinquish her agency to the divine while paradoxically this relinquishing is what accomplishes the full communication with God that the believer desires. Thus, doubt, which can be conceptualized as self-doubt or as a will to be in control in one's own affairs acts as an impediment to achieving grace through "communion" with the divine. I will conclude the paper with a brief summary of the argument.

---

[17] Pouillon 2016 [1982], Ruel 2002 [1982].
[18] Haeri 2017a and b.
[19] Miyazaki 2000.
[20] Luhrmann 2018.

The Seer and Her Context

Erzsike is a woman in her early 60s who has had visions of Jesus Christ since April 1993. Her first vision took place in a football field in a neighbouring small town, where an American preacher was speaking. After she returned home her visions continued and soon a group of enthusiastic followers came together around her, many of whom are still among her inner circle. She was born into a large family in a nearby village. Upon completing eight years of primary schooling she started working in a factory, but she was so sickly that according to accounts, she spent more time on sick leave than at work. She married someone from a neighbouring village and settled there upon marriage, sharing a compound with her in-laws to this day. The couple has had two children, who are grown by now. At the time of her first vision she was awaiting a serious operation, but her illnesses were miraculously cured during that first vision. She is also reported to have been a very shy person, of a retiring disposition, who was rather inarticulate. Over the years this has changed and her transformation into a very effective, seasoned speaker is attributed to divine grace and considered to be proof of her chosen status by her followers. Such transformation from unremarkable to remarkable of course is one of the main characteristics of seers everywhere and serves to legitimate them in the eyes of their followers.[21] Almost all commentators note about seers, and in her case I have done so too, that one of their most extraordinary characteristics is how ordinary they tend to be.

After her initial more general visions of Christ, from Lent 1994 on Erzsike began to have visions of His Passion; ever since she has been reliving Jesus Christ's suffering (or walking the Golgotha as they call it) each first Friday of the month, and weekly during Lent. On these occasions some 100 to 140 pilgrims gather, some from nearby settlements, others arriving from all corners of the country and even from beyond the borders. They pray and sing together in the chapel that had been built in the family courtyard, some may also walk the open-air Way of the Cross, which is also part of the complex. At 6 p.m. there is mass, held by an ordained priest.

Finding a priest is no easy matter as the Catholic Church has not accepted Erzsike's visions as being credible[22] and has on several occasions expressly forbidden its priests to visit the seer (let alone hold mass in her chapel).[23] Consequently, for the past fifteen or so years only priests from outside the borders of Hungary have come to celebrate mass and take confession. Mass is followed around 9 pm by Erzsike's "appari-

---

[21] Apolito 1998; Bromley and Bobbitt 2011; Christian 1996; Davis and Boles 2003; Farra-Haddad 2013; Laycock 2014; Matter 2001; Zimdars-Swartz 1991.

[22] Her followers claim that her case has never been properly examined by the Church, and certainly the Bishop of the nearby town issues statements from time to time that explicitly forbid Catholics to attend the apparitions at her compound. These statements are to be read at mass in all churches. Especially forceful, according to my informants, have been the instructions to priests to keep away from her.

[23] The community of followers constructed a chapel on the compound of Erzsike's in-laws along with the Way of the Cross. The chapel has not been consecrated by the Hungarian Catholic authorities.

tion" in the course of which she relives the last few days of the life of Jesus Christ (for the most part following the Book of John). This takes place in a marquee that was the first structure the group constructed for itself and they consider it to be a Holy place. During the vision she is in the Holy Land and is an eyewitness to the last few days of the life of Christ, however, she becomes much more than an eyewitness as over the course of the roughly three-hour long vision she increasingly identifies with Jesus to the point that she feels His physical pain and eventually dies along with Him on the cross. From this point on s/He begins talking as Jesus Christ in the first person singular, in this capacity s/He appoints three people to give testimony in the chapel. Meanwhile, her trusted helpers – referred to as "bastions" – carry her/His unconscious body into her house from where, following the testimonies, lying, her eyes closed, tucked up in her bed s/He delivers the "teachings" or "messages" of Jesus Christ, which is broadcast on a screen to the faithful in the chapel. Her audience is convinced that it is Jesus who speaks through her. After the teachings, the congregation partakes of a second mass, which ends about 2:30 am, subsequently most of those gathered for the event leave by a chartered "pilgrim bus" that takes them to Budapest, the capital city, or by car while the rest wait in the chapel singing, praying (or sleeping) until the "regular" bus service resumes in the morning.

The declared purpose of the apparitions is to atone for the sins of mankind, in keeping with the widespread atonement movements in the world in our age. The prototype of these kinds of movements is the Fatima vision where the Virgin informed the shepherd children that to avert the wrath of God mankind needed to pray constantly.[24] Erzsike conceives of the task similarly – the original request of Jesus from Erzsike to undertake the Passion was to atone for the sins of "priests", later s/He amended this to include "youth" and eventually the atonement became all encompassing, covering mankind in its entirety. Witnessing the apparition reminds the faithful of Jesus's sacrifice for mankind, forces them to contemplate its meaning monthly and brings them to participate vicariously in the Passion, thereby understanding it more in depth and thus deepening their faith. Even when speaking as Jesus Christ Erzsike broadens the scope of the messages to include reflections (one could almost say a blueprint) for what constitutes a meaningful life (for example the need for forgiveness or the necessity of living purposefully are among the recurring themes s/He discusses.)

Doubt

Although arguably all of us encounter doubt among our interlocutors (not to mention the doubts we, as anthropologists, have to contend with both in the field and in the course of "writing up",) doubt is not a common topic for anthropologists to investigate directly, because it is not quite possible to set out to study it. This is so partly, because it is a rather fleeting thing as people strive to resolve it, as Mathijs

---

[24] Apolito 1998; Turner and Turner 1978; Zimdars-Swartz 1991; Matter 2001.

Pelkmans puts it: "catching doubt in midair is … far from a straightforward task".[25] Partly because it is not necessarily predictable when and how it will occur, and in any case anthropologists, steeped in positivism as they were, were interested in what people believed in rather than in what they did not believe in or what they doubted.[26] Arguably, the reflexive turn of the 1980s and the overall post-modern sensibility that has permeated much of the discipline in the past few decades laid the groundwork for more systematic attention to doubt both among anthropologists and the people they study/work with.

Even then, it was only in 2013 that the first edited volume meeting doubt head on by anthropologists was published: a collection of papers entitled *Ethnographies of Doubt* edited by Mathijs Pelkmans.[27] His volume primarily concentrates on lived or experienced doubt, not exclusively of a religious nature. In the introduction to the volume Pelkmans[28] provides a thorough overview of some of the most important questions that the concept gives rise to, but his overview is purposely broad and thus does not deal much with religious doubt as such directly. Both prior to Pelkmans's volume and in its wake there have been some occasional articles on doubt[29] as well as some special issues of journals in which the articles relate to such close relatives of doubt as scepticism, reflexivity, secularism or uncertainty,[30] some others came not long thereafter.[31] Despite this seeming abundance it is quite evident that doubt remains an elusive subject that has not been adequately explored in Anthropology or the social sciences in general.

Doubt among religious subjects has been studied even less often, and one has to agree with Matthew Engelke when he remarks: "it is surprising how infrequently scholars in the social sciences treat uncertainty in the religious subject (Christian or otherwise) … Uncertainty *in* the religious subject is something else altogether: It signals the doubts, misgivings, hesitations, and confusions that accompany life under any "sacred canopy" (Berger 1967)".[32] He is writing about Johane Masowe, who was a church founder in Southern Africa during the 1930s, carefully reconstructing the

---

[25] Pelkmans 2013b, 5.

[26] I thank Ágnes Hesz for calling my attention to this point, see also Hesz this volume and Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015, 8.

[27] Pelkmans 2013a.

[28] Pelkmans 2013b.

[29] Correll 2005; Engelke 2002; Gable 2002; Goody 1996; to mention just a few.

[30] Hojbjerg 2002; Kapferer 2001.

[31] Claverie et Fedele 2014; Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015; Haeri 2017a. The journal *Social Anthropology* published two special issues in consecutive years that deal directly or indirectly with questions relating to doubt and faith, on Secularism in 2001 and on Religious Reflexivity in 2002 (respectively Kapferer 2001; and Hojbjerg 2002). The trend continued after the publication of Pelkmans's volume, too: cf. the special section of *Social Compass* entitled Uncertainty in vernacular religion edited by Elisabeth Claverie and Anna Fedele (Claverie et Fedele 2014); as well as the special section of *Social Analysis* on "godlessness" (Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015) and most recently in the journal *HAU* à propos of sincerity the contributors touch upon doubt as well (Haeri 2017).

[32] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* (New York: Anchor Books, 2017) cited by Engelke 2005, 783.

evolution of Masowe's thinking including doubts, hesitations, and wrong turns he was faced with while "he learnt to organize and express his religious mission as he went along".[33] Some of these hesitations led to the fissioning of the church he had originally founded, because some of his congregation would not follow him as his ideas were transformed in the process. Alas, I do not have independent accounts of Erzsike's early days or about her doubts about her own calling (then or now). She is not talking about her own hesitations or revisions of her thinking in the Lenten Teachings of 2015, but rather she addresses the doubts that the believer is struggling with, which indeed do fall under the category of "uncertainty in the religious subject".

It is possible that Erzsike/Jesus may be talking about the *self-doubt* of the believer. S/He does give a brief glimpse that suggests that the believer might be doubtful whether her prayer achieves its goal, reaches its destination. During Lent 2015 Jesus Christ said the following through Erzsike:

> And in the present prayer is important, the one that comes from the heart, … that I do not shut off … that I perhaps just say, but *I am not sure whether it reaches where I would like it to reach* …. (Third Lenten Teaching 2015, emphasis added)

S/He does not elaborate, but the statement is out there. This doubt does not question the petitioner's belief in God, it only concerns her uncertainty whether she is doing "it" right, whether her prayer reaches its desired destination, whether she is praying properly, or perhaps even whether she is worthy of being heard. Engelke – reacting to Tanya Luhrmann's 2012 article where she attributes the playful way in which her interlocutors relate that they think they can have a "date" with Jesus to their awareness of the secular world around them that would find such claims outrageous – suggests that this behaviour could rather "be the doubt of particular persons, unsure whether they get it – not whether there is something to be got in the first place".[34] I will return to this question when discussing sincerity in a later section of this paper. The self-doubt is also likely to be fuelled by the claims of some to have achieved the special connection with God Erzsike outlines as the goal of prayer, which for someone who has not been able to attain it may feel like a personal failing.[35] It certainly seems to me likely that such unequal distribution of grace may contribute to self-doubt of the type Engelke is talking about among Erzsike's followers. Regardless of the egalitarian ethos of her group (everyone is a "sibling") there is a hierarchy here, which despite all attempts to the contrary[36] may feed the fervour of the prayer of a given individual –

---

[33] Engelke 2005, 805.

[34] Engelke 2012, 385.

[35] Cf. Luhrmann 2012; who shows that a similar sense of "inadequacy by comparison" (or self-doubt) might be part of the striving of her informants to enter into conversations with God.

[36] One such attempt to downplay the differences in the amount of grace certain people have been given while others have not was Jesus Christ's injunction that the songs that had been "received" by certain individuals in the early days of the life of the group should be published anonymously rather than with the name of the person who wrote them down under divine inspiration.

the vey fervour that in Erzsike's/Jesus's telling is an impediment to the openness that is required for prayer to reach its destination.

Going back to the first excerpt of the paper, let us look at what kind of doubts the seer/Jesus Christ is talking about. Erzsike/Jesus puts the following questions in the mouth of the believer: "What will happen? How can this be solved? What can I expect? How should I live and what should I do?" These are pragmatic questions that are asking what course of action the person should take to resolve practical problems. They should sound familiar to us from our own lives, they are the kind of doubts that besiege most of us at least some of the time, that lead to sleepless nights of anxiety and can at times be debilitating. These are what is referred to as *lived* (or experienced) *doubt.* Regarding lived doubt (which is the focus of the volume he edited,) Mathijs Pelkmans argues that it: "… points also (and sometimes more pressingly) to pragmatic referents, to the question 'what to do?'".[37] The doubts that the hypothetical believer Erzsike cites in the passage quoted above is struggling with concern precisely the question of "what to do". There is nothing particularly religious about these doubts, they are what one could call run of the mill apprehensions that imply uncertainty about the course of action one should take and about one's ability to find a solution to one's problems; just as familiar should be the accompanying fears and anxieties regarding the consequences of not finding the right solution. What makes these religious doubts is the framework into which Erzsike/Jesus places them.

Prayer

S/he locates the questions of the anxious believer in a religious framework, that of the act of praying, in which fear, doubt and anxiety prevent the believer from reaching her goal of praying successfully. Let us stop for a moment at this triad; practically every time s/He talks about doubt during the Lenten Teachings Erzsike/Jesus Christ uses all three words as a sequence. In my view, by doing this s/He is making a point about fear and anxiety, which may seem unrelated to doubt or to religion. By bringing them together consistently s/He transforms these sentiments into a question of faith, a religious matter – because they undermine belief in a fundamental way. Despite what many a theoretician (both religious and non-religious) says about doubt and faith being implicated in each other, or being two sides of the same coin, it is not only unbelievers who tend to think that doubt is the opposite of belief, as I indicated above many ordinary believers hold this view. Arguably Erzsike's followers are aware that they should have unwavering belief and keep away from doubt, after all at every prayer meeting they reaffirm their faith by reciting the Credo, and most of them pray regularly and fervently. But in the act of discursively removing everyday lived doubt from its daily context into a religious one, in the Lenten Teachings Erzsike/Jesus is pointing out that the fears and anxieties that disturb her followers signal religious

---

[37] Pelkmans 2013b, 2.

doubt. These fears and anxieties and the lived doubts together would be normal (if at times neurotic) parts of the life of believer and non-believer alike, but by switching the context to a religious one, Erzsike/Jesus is showing that they indicate that the person praying has insufficient trust in God's ability and/or willingness to take care of His "children". This is not ontological doubt, s/He does not suggest that her audience/followers would explicitly doubt the reality or the benevolence of God, but rather points out that this lack of trust manifested in their fear, doubt and anxiety (about how to act, about what to do or whether a problem will be resolved) signals a lack of *sufficient* faith in God. The way s/He frames it, the doubts, fear and anxiety stand in the way of the prayer of the believer, stop it from being able to reach its destination, stand in the way of the openness required to reach the divine and thus prevents achieving bliss.

The believer hypothesized by Erzsike/Jesus could in fact be expected to ask for help with the problems that cause her anxiety, doubt and fear that block her prayer, but does not. Though Erzsike/Jesus does not state it, logically she should ask, because as long as she is distracted by her problem she is not able to pray properly. While not asking for help can be mere "momentary forgetfulness" on the part of the believer, it can also be a desire for agency: for being in charge of one's affairs (a sort of "will to power"), which indicates a lack of trust in God (who by definition should be able to help solve any problem). As we shall see, it is critical to Erzsike's/Christ's argument that the believer should relinquish her desire to be in control of her affairs and trust God to take care of them.

Let me give an example of what I mean by momentary forgetfulness. One of Erzsike's followers recounted a story according to which, she was looking for something and could not find it. When her husband inquired whether she had asked for it she did not at first get his drift and he had to pointedly repeat his question for her to understand that he was inquiring whether she had asked Jesus to help her find the item. When she told me about it, she was laughing bashfully at how even though she knows that Jesus is there she did not think to ask. Although she saw the story as funny, it was also for her an indication of a momentary lapse of faith.

The same point was driven home to me by another one of Erzsike's followers in a testimony during Lent 2015 (that is to say responding in public to the Lenten messages.) She recounted how ashamed she felt, when – reflecting upon the words of Jesus Christ about fear, doubt, and anxiety – she recalled that on the occasion of a pilgrimage trip she participated in with some members of the group, instead of trusting God, she was worried about what would happen to her ailing child while she was away. She identified her fear and anxiety as a lack of sufficient faith and noted with astonishment that after more than twenty years of being a member of the group she still had so little faith and so much to learn. So both not asking for help and worrying about a problem instead of trusting that God will bring a resolution are or can be seen as lack of sufficient faith on the part of the believer.

Doubt and the insufficient faith it indexes has the consequence that prayer becomes inefficient and we get the frustrated, fearful person described by Erzsike/Jesus Christ

at the beginning of this paper. The praying person's lived doubt, her daily worries turn out to be more than indicators of a hard life and difficult choices, it signals of lack of trust in God or divine providence. They point to the failure of faith, a failure of trust (in God).

How can it be that Erzsike's followers, who are sincere believers some of whom have been her adherents for more than twenty years, still have doubt, or at the very least their belief is insufficient for the level of trust needed? I would like to suggest that what we are dealing with is a failure of nerve, and here we enter into the murky area of what exactly belief is. Leaving aside the debate about whether belief is a universal category that carries the same meaning across space and time,[38] and talking as an outsider (I am after all a non-believer,) belief requires a leap of faith[39] that is well-nigh impossible to make for the non-believer, but as the discourse of Erzsike shows it is also a stretch for the believer.

Religious belief as conceived by Christians is not a static but an active frame of mind that requires effort and constant re-affirmation. MacGregor points out that 'When the authentic believer says "I believe", he omits a hidden qualifier – "*Nevertheless*, Ibelieve"'.[40] The statement is part of the evidence he marshals to prove that faith and doubt are intimately interconnected but the remark also speaks to the mechanics of how belief works. The way I see it, the believer needs to re-affirm her belief in divine goodness practically every time she has a problem and the affirmation is a leap because there are no assurances that this is the case. Others have also noted this. For example, Luhrmann insightfully remarks that "Faith is hard because it is a decision to live as if a set of claims are real, even when one doubts: in the Christian case, that the world is good; that love endures; that you should live your life as if the promise of joy were at least a possibility".[41] Paul Ricoeur, cited by Miyazaki,[42] who went on to write a book about hope,[43] expresses something quite similar when he states: "[Faith] could be called 'unconditional trust' to say that it is inseparable from a movement of hope that makes its way in spite of the contradictions of experience and that turns reasons for despair into reasons for hope".[44] These are all instances of the believer managing to make the leap, being able to hold on to or perhaps achieve belief.

Erzsike/Jesus Christ too is circling in on this "unconditional trust" as a necessary element of faith. However, when Erzsike/Jesus is talking about doubt, anxiety and fear s/He is talking about the other side of the coin, about what happens when the believer – for whatever reason – does not or cannot make the leap. This is what I have

---

[38] Cf. Ruel 2002; Pouillon 2016.

[39] The phrase "leap of faith" is mistakenly attributed to Soren Kierkegaard, it appears he never wrote it, nor anything comparable (McKinnon 1993; Nientied 2014).

[40] MacGregor 1987, 429.

[41] Luhrmann 2012, xiv.

[42] Miyazaki 2000.

[43] Miyazaki 2004.

[44] Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language", in Id., *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, ed. Mark L. Wallace (Fortress Press, 1995), 35–47, 47 cited in Miyazaki 2000, 46.

called a failure of nerve, which – unlike in the situations described by Luhrmann and Ricoeur – can be regarded as failure of trust. In another part of the teachings Erzsike/Jesus explains what faith is: unconditional belief, trust and hope. Using the example of Abraham as an analogy, s/He argues that similarly to how he turned to the Father for mercy, the believer of today turns to Jesus. S/he presents doubt and trust as opposites, and associates belief and trust with each other: along with hope they form an almost permanent triad. By doing this Erzsike/Jesus shows what is at stake in overcoming fear, doubt and anxiety:

> "My Lord, Jesus" – You turn to me, because you can/are able to *believe* and *trust* and *hope*. Because so long as these are present in your heart, so long as they live in this heart, and in this body, you don't have to be afraid, you don't have to doubt, and you don't have to be anxious. (Lenten Teachings 2015 2/ X Emphasis added)

Consequently, belief, trust and hope cancel out fear, doubt and anxiety and enable the believer to make the leap, to reach God.

But arguably the messages also talk to a different level of the relationship to God. Ultimately, Erzsike's/Jesus Christ's words are about prayer, which is perhaps the most important way the individual believer can reach God. In the Lenten teachings of Erzsike/Jesus the primary purpose of prayer is achieving communication or at the very least a direct connection to God, reaching him and basking in His "light," goodness and benevolence, thus indeed, s/He is talking about the efficacy of prayer and the grace one receives when prayer reaches its destination.

Erzsike/Jesus Christ casts fear, doubt and anxiety as what stand in the way of reaching God and being heard by him, or put differently, preventing communication with the divine. She is talking about the impediments to this communication and how to remove them, more precisely about how to pray and what stands in the way of prayer reaching its goal, and how to overcome the obstacles. Once the impediments are removed, the promise of joy (that is arguably the ultimate goal or rather result of strong belief) is fulfilled. She also goes on to give an image of what happens when fear, doubt and anxiety are overcome, when prayer is successful. Stressing the importance of belief, trust and hope s/He gives her listeners a glimpse of the bliss of realizing that it is possible to vanquish doubt, fear and anxiety and the joy of receiving the gift of grace and communicating with the divine.

> … We return today too, don't we: fear, doubt and anxiety. In this time of repentance besides prayer these three things [belief, trust and hope] are important that they should be present from week to week, that *you feel the touch, you feel the caress, feel the rising* ['lifting up' – *felemelkedést*] *in the embrace,* because it is then that you'll understand what this teaching wants to say [*mondanivalóját*] in its simplicity. Since, if you ask, if you beg, if you are hoping, if the trust of your faith remains, and is not shaken, and you do not throw it away with the doubt of your fear, with its anxiety, then you can believe, trust and hope that: "Help can arrive in the gift of grace,

it can come to me, embrace me and can show me too that wonderful grace in the security, that 'Yes, my Lord, you heard my beseeching voice [*felkiáltó szavamat*], my request!'" (Lenten Teachings 2015 2/3, emphasis added)

Not only does this image of grace reassure the believer that her prayer reaches God, but also that it is heard. Erzsike's description of making the contact is tactile and kinetic, almost sensuous and promises enormous joy and relief. To my mind, the relief is so palpable in the last triumphant exclamation of the quote that it recalls the possibility of self-doubt Erzsike raised when s/He mentioned that the believer might not be sure whether her prayer would reach its destination. The threat of the obstruction caused by the triad of fear, doubt and anxiety to this communication undermining the efficacy of prayer and depriving the believer of experiencing the divine is still there, making the contrast all the greater.

Erzsike's characterization of what the believer is trying to achieve through prayer is eerily similar to how MacGregor describes the meaning of the Greek word *pistis* (faith) and especially the connotation of trust associated with it "[it] often has the older connotation of intellectual conviction alongside the notion of trust, the bending of one's whole being to God in complete confidence in his infinite goodness and in his ability to guard and to guide one's entire life in the best possible way".[45] The similarity also underlines the significance Erzsike/Jesus Christ attributes to trust in her/his conception of faith.

In fact, prayer has been a pre-occupation of Erzsike's (or Jesus Christ's) from the beginning. In the early days of her activity as a seer, Jesus Christ visited Erzsike and her circle of followers and instructed them on praying The Lord's Prayer "properly". For Christians, The Lord's Prayer of course is "the" prayer, the one that Jesus Christ taught His disciples, so its significance is unquestionable. So important it is to Erzsike/Jesus that on various occasions s/He repeats the instruction, which also includes explanations on the meaning and significance of the prayer. Thus for example, s/He has repeated it in several teachings following the "regular" First Friday Golgothas, and on several occasions s/He began the Lenten teachings of a given year with it. Jesus's instruction consisted in teaching the seer's followers how to pray with feeling and sincerity, articulating the words clearly and meaning every one of them. S/He also laid emphasis on saying it in unison, not helter-skelter, and that they should be totally present in the prayer, not be distracted by other thoughts. As one of my informants explained to me once "you cannot be praying and thinking of what you will be buying

---

[45] MacGregor 1987, 426. MacGregor proffers this explanation while attempting to clarify the relation between faith and belief. His full remark is as follows: "[in] medieval usage the Latin *fides* ('faith') generally means both. Even in the New Testament the distinction between the two is not entirely clear for the Greek word *pistis* ('faith') often has the older connotation of intellectual conviction alongside the notion of trust, the bending of one's whole being to God in complete confidence in his infinite goodness and in his ability to guard and to guide one's entire life in the best possible way" (MacGregor 1987, 426).

at the store at the same time". Teaching prayer is not unique to Erzsike, it is often part of what visionaries do.[46]

In a recent contribution Tanya Luhrmann[47] discusses prayer as a metacognitive activity that helps believers reflect upon their "inner experience" in a way that includes both the past and the future, and thus imagine a desirable future for themselves. She frames prayer as a metacognitive practice that – much like cognitive behavioural therapy helps the patient – helps the believer reorient their reality and as a result gain some form of inner peace. She comments: "To pray is to make hope external, and the mere act of doing so can still panic in the face of uncertainty"[48] with the result that "the private fears of midnight dissipate".[49]

Luhrmann closes her chapter with listing the factors which make the practice of prayer contribute to emotional well-being "and to our ability to deal with sorrow and buffer pain".[50] Her entire chapter describes an ideal case scenario for what – when it works – prayer can achieve. In addition to contributing to reframing how a praying person sees their world, the act of prayer, and the "effort" the believer exerts in that act, contributes to her or his emotional well-being. Luhrmann stresses that despite all these benefits – and similarly to behavioural therapy which she maintains is the most successful form of therapy – prayer works only for some people some of the time.[51] She concentrates on what prayer can contribute when it is successful and she is not concerned here with how or why prayer does not work when it does not.

While Luhrmann shows that through these steps equanimity is reached, Erzsike/ Jesus Christ primarily looks at when the attempt fails. S/he calls attention to what happens when these steps are *not* taken but also offers guidelines on how to arrive at these steps and also holds out images of bliss if they are. Thus, Erzsike's/Jesus's discourse encompasses both ends of the spectrum, but s/He mostly focuses on the occasions when (and the people for whom) prayer does *not* work and pinpoints fear, doubt and anxiety as impediments to prayer. In the opening citation of this paper Jesus Christ, speaking through Erzsike, describes the terrified and miserable person who is bogged down with fear, anxiety and doubt and no matter how much she tries to pray, her prayer does not reach its destination, God. I have discussed above what s/He had to

---

[46] Cf. Apolito 1998.

[47] Luhrmann 2018.

[48] Ibid., 305.

[49] Ibid., 314.

[50] Ibid. Luhrmann lists the following features: 1) Shifting of attention, 2) The act of hope, 3) Absorption, 4) Detachment, 5) Catharsis, 6) Story, 7) Attachment, and the creation of positive emotional relationship.

[51] Luhrmann remarks wryly: "Therapy helps, for some people, to some extent and at some times. The same is no doubt true for prayer …" (2018, 316), in other words, despite clearly considering prayer to be a powerful tool for the believer, she does not claim that its power is all-encompassing, which of course sets her apart from Erzsike and other believers. However, Erzsike's insistence that fear, anxiety and doubt can prevent prayer from achieving its goal also means that there is the possibility that prayer may not work all the time (but this would mean that something is not done as it should be done.)

say about the bliss that awaits the believer if only she can defeat her fear, doubt and anxiety. But Erzsike/Jesus does not stop here, s/He also tells her audience what they need to do to achieve the desired result.

> And in the present prayer is important, the one that *comes from the heart*, … that I *do not shut off* … that I perhaps just say, but I am not sure whether it reaches where I would like it to reach – this is why this too has to be changed. And this can only be done if you are *free and open*, and if you understand what it means to *open my heart and give up all from it*, what is inside me, and I am no longer afraid, I am no longer doubting, and I am not full of anxieties. And then the gift of the grace of penitence is working in its love, in its recognition and in the *gift of joy*. (Third Lenten Teaching 2015, emphasis added)

I already quoted a shorter section of this text in connection with self-doubt, but it deserves further attention, because here Erzsike/Jesus characterizes the frame of mind necessary for being able to overcome doubt. This is a different angle from the one s/He pursued earlier, instead of trust, belief and hope s/He is calling upon the believer to be "free and open" to "open [the] heart and give up all from it". The reward for doing so will again be "joy". In the next two sections I want to pursue what these thoughts mean for the relationship of doubt and faith through the anthropological lens of sincerity and agency.

Sincerity

Erzsike's/Jesus Christ's call for openness can be seen as a call for sincerity, by which s/He means that the prayer should be coming "from the heart", but her/His call for openness (do not shut off, be open and free, open my heart and give up all from it) indicates both receptiveness and a willingness to offer oneself to the divinity. The impediment to this openness, one could call it a flow, is to be sought in fear, doubt and anxiety.

Sincerity is a theme anthropologists of Christianity have often discussed especially among Protestants and in connection to prayer. It is a common view that formulaic prayer is not as sincere as spontaneous prayer.[52] As I discussed it earlier, teaching the recitation of The Lord's Prayer has been a recurring element of Erzsike's discourses. While it can be seen as an "homage" to The Lord's Prayer, the move of the seer/Jesus to teach her followers to recite The Lord's Prayer "properly" can be seen as an attempt to counter the formulaic nature of the prayer. "S/He" may not have said so, but it sounds as if s/He were enjoining them to recite the prayer every time as if they were saying it for the first time. Paradoxically then (or in keeping with her "charismatic" bent), when Erzsike/Jesus is teaching her followers to pray The Lord's Prayer, s/He

---

[52] Cf. Bielo 2011; Keane 1997a; 1997b; Shoaps 2002.

is encouraging them to be more spontaneous (and thus, more sincere,) even when praying formulaically. In the case of the Lenten teachings under discussion, however, s/He is talking about the more clearly spontaneous, free-style invocation-type prayers, when the person performing the prayer attempts to communicate with God directly and achieving this goal depends largely on her sincerity.

The question of sincerity of course has a large literature in the anthropology of Christianity. Webb Keane defines it (following Trilling) as "a way of characterizing a relationship between words and interior states",[53] where nothing but what is inside a person (as thought) is what comes out (as words). The notion gains special importance in prayer, as at least in the Western view of Christianity the resulting transparency is a condition of the prayer being heard. Keane also argues that "sincerity seeks to locate the authority for words in the speaker".[54] Thus, he associates sincerity with agency, which I will discuss in the next section, after reflecting some more on sincerity.

In a 1997 article on sincerity and agency Keane contrasts the linguistic ideologies that guide the attitudes of his informants on the Indonesian island of Sumba, some of whom have converted to Dutch Calvinism during the twentieth century, while others have retained their traditional faith (*marapu*) which as Keane notes was the majority of the population into the 1980s. In their rituals the followers of the traditional beliefs attempt to repeat verbatim the words of the ancestors, with the result that to the Protestant observer, their ritual language does not seem sincere because it is not spontaneous, does not come "from the heart". However, in their own perception what they are doing is putting responsibility on the words of the ancestors, seen as more sacred than anything they could be saying by themselves. In contrast, what Protestants consider to be sincere prayer, speaking spontaneously, is seen by the *marapu* followers as insincere because they use their own words. Thus, both sides question each other's sincerity.

Writing in a special section of the journal HAU on sincerity Niloofar Haeri[55] and her collaborators have convincingly argued that the concept is far from being unique to Protestants. One of the aims of the collection is precisely to show that sincerity is an issue and aspiration for the adherents of other religions as well (the collection brings together articles on Iranian Shiite Muslims, ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York, Russian Orthodox Christians and only one of the contributors is writing about a Protestant group, Lutherans in Papua New Guinea.) Erzsike and her followers are Catholic and as I hope to have shown above they too are concerned with sincerity.

Not only are Erzsike's followers Catholics, they are devout Catholics, so at least in the common sense meaning of the word sincere, they are sincere indeed. But what Erzsike/Jesus points to is that their negative sentiments prevent their sincere words not so much from turning from internal speech into corresponding external speech (as Keane would have it), but from reaching their divine (external) destination, thus

---

[53] Keane 2002, 74.
[54] Ibid, 74.
[55] Haeri 2017a.

giving the lie to their sincere words. Consequently, these sentiments render their speech inauthentic, insincere and ineffectual. Instead of believing, trusting and hoping they are afraid, they have doubts and they are anxious, thus demonstrating a lack of sufficient faith.

In light of this, I find Haeri's formulation that sincerity can be seen "as an anxiety about the quality of one's relationship to the divine…"[56] to be a more useful take on the concept. To my mind this take on sincerity opens up the notion to what feels more like the lived experience of religion as I observed it in the field rather than the rather clinical and technical sounding definition(s) of Keane do. Such as his statement that "[t]he concept of sincerity thus seems to assume a clear distinction between words and thought, as parallel discourses (interior and exterior) such that they either could or could not match up".[57] Writing about Shi'a women's experiences with prayer Haeri makes a similar observation stating that Keane's emphasis on "speech and thoughts" … "seems to ignore how emotions and silence are, at least, at times part and parcel of sincere enactments of worship".[58] Using Haeri's idea of linking sincerity to the believer's relationship to the divine has the advantage of conveying three aspects of what Erzsike's discourse brings out about the connection of prayer, sincerity and doubt (and ultimately agency). First, by acknowledging the relevance of emotions, it highlights the believer's desire to be heard by God, to be close to him, to be basking in his light, all of which point to the emotional aspects of sincere religious experience. The second aspect is that by concentrating on the believer's relationship to the divine the formulation brings to the fore and allows us to consider the possibility that the doubt Erzsike is talking about is (at least partly) self-doubt as I discussed it above. Finally, the definition also brings into focus that the fear and the anxiety harboured by the person trying to pray are manifestations of doubt that the believer is not even aware of, thus that it is "negative agency" undermining the efficacy of prayer. The harm inflicted by the believer is to herself.

Agency

In the conclusion of his 1997 article on sincerity and agency, comparing *marapu* and Calvinist religious discourses on the island of Sumba, Webb Keane argues that despite their differences the two groups share the trait that they "grant agency to non-human agents". He explains that "[n]either accepts the proposition that human beings simply make themselves, and both impose significant limits on human agency – locating it … with other non-human agents altogether".[59] He continues to muse on the question of different conceptions, or rather attributions, of agency and asks:

---

[56] Haeri 2017b, 134.
[57] Keane 2002, 74.
[58] Haeri 2017c, 153.
[59] Keane 1997a, 690.

> If the agency of others is predicated in part on their own beliefs and on the notions of agency immanent in their practices, how are we, if we are secular scholars, to reconcile their attribution of agency to divine subjects with our desire that they recognize that agency lies within their own hands? And, to the extent that the value Western scholars place on self-transformation is itself a product of our own genealogy, what does it mean for us to insist on the self-transforming powers of others?[60]

What strikes me as curious about Keane's questions is that they posit an absolute divide between "us" and "them", western and non-western conceptions of agency (human and non-human) and by extension also between our beliefs and theirs. At the same time he blurs the categories of Westerners and secular scholars somewhat, whereas it is quite clear that there also exist non-secular scholars (and non-scholars) in the West who would equally attribute agency to non-human agents either exclusively or at least some of the time. The contrast he sets up is too sharp, in fact non-Western and Western believers *both* count on non-human or divine agents. But what also bothers me about this formulation is that my sense is that the religious person does not think of granting agency to non-human (divine) agents as giving up his or her autonomy, instead, she sees it as a sign of strength rather than of weakness (as secular people would). She is likely to look upon relying on non-human agents as normal and desirable, even absolutely necessary, nothing can be achieved without the support of God. What seems to the secular-minded to be an unwarranted giving away of agency, seems to the believer to be more than a reasonable use of all available resources, it is a necessity that ensures, even guarantees, additional agency for the believer, agency that is simply not available to the non-believer.[61]

But I think it goes deeper than this. What Erzsike/Jesus Christ is signalling in the Lenten teachings is that while fear, doubt and anxiety will make it impossible to achieve the goal of communicating with God, their opposites: trust, belief and hope will help the believer accomplish it. Similarly to Hirokazu Miyazaki's notion of faith being the "capacity to place one's agency in abeyance",[62] what Erzsike/Jesus proposes is that insisting on having agency is working against the person trying to reach the divine, the way to achieving their desire to reach God is through *relinquishing* agency. To receive divine grace one has to be able to let go. Accordingly, in this sense too, to the believer granting agency to non-human agents is thought of as a strength rather than as a weakness. Paradoxically of course, by this logic reaching the divine is only possible through placing agency in abeyance but this very act (re)grants agency to the believer (and arguably a more potent one than otherwise possible.) This is what Erzsike/Jesus Christ is advocating for in the quote at the end of the last section when s/He argues that in order to overcome doubt and receive the gift or grace and joy, the

---

[60] Ibid.
[61] Cf. Christian Jr 1991; for an insightful description of how such marshalling of resources happens in a real life situation.
[62] Miyazaki 2000, 32.

believer needs to be free and open when praying, that it is important for the praying person not to "shut off", "open the heart and give up all from it". Above I characterized these expressions as indicating the need for sincerity, but I also noted they were also about receptivity and in light of Miyazaki's notion it could also be seen as laying oneself bare and giving up all agency, which is of course also an ultimate form of trust in God.

Erzsike's own example is telling, she is considered to be a visionary, a chosen person, whose authority is due to the fact that she yields agency to the divine. And, indeed she fashions her trance state as being that of someone who opens her heart wide and thus lets the divine enter. The mere "fact" that Jesus Christ speaks through her is proof that she opens herself completely, she sometimes even uses the expression emptying herself out (in the sense of draining). Consequently, without necessarily saying so, she serves as an example to her followers. Even if this does not mean an invitation to assume her role, her willingness (and ability) "to open her heart" gives her special authority, empowers her in the eyes of her followers.

Conclusion

Identifying Erzsike/Jesus Christ's Lenten discourse about fear, doubt and anxiety to be about prayer I have argued that s/He posits these sentiments as signifying insufficient trust and thus insufficient faith in God. In this interpretation doubt acts to block prayer, and prevents communication with God, or to put it differently it undermines both the praying person's prayer being heard (and her wishes granted) and her just as important desire to be experiencing bliss or communion with the divinity through prayer. In light of this, doubt can be seen as "negative agency", taking away agency from the religious person, preventing her from achieving her desire to reach God. For this to happen doubt needs to be overcome and Erzsike/Jesus Christ proposes that this can happen through a sincere opening up to God. Taking up Haeri's idea that sincerity has to do with the believer's anxiety about her relationship to the divine I propose that to the religious person – unlike secular interpretations (such as that of Keane) – granting agency to non-human agents or in Miyazaki's terms relinquishing agency is a means to reaching God and as a result paradoxically a way to not only "communing" with God, but also to re-gaining agency of a higher order. Ultimately the paper speaks to the differences between the secular and the religious worldview, Erzsike's/Jesus Christ's discourse on fear, doubt and anxiety is about faith, and in her/His view doubt rather than being a productive force that propels people forward as the secular view would have it, holds them back, what is productive is overcoming doubt and that can only be done through faith.

References

Apolito, Paolo. 1998. *Apparitions of the Madonna at Oliveto Citra: Local Visions and Cosmic Drama.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Bálint, Sándor. 1942. *Egy magyar szentember: Orosz István önéletrajza* [A Hungarian Holy Man: The Autobiography of István Orosz]. Budapest: Franklin Társulat.

Bielo, James. 2011. "'How Much of this is Promise?' God as Sincere Speaker in Evangelical Bible Reading." *Anthropological Quarterly* 84(3): 631–53.

Blanes, Ruy Llera and Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic. 2015. "Introduction: Godless People, Doubt, and Atheism." *Social Analysis* 59(2): 1–19.

Bromley, David G. and Rachel S. Bobbitt. 2011. "The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14(3): 5–41.

Christian Jr., William A. 1991. "Secular and religious responses to a child's potentially fatal illness." In Eric R. Wolf, ed., *Religious regimes and state-formation: Perspectives from European Ethnology,* 163–80. Albany: SUNY Press.

–. 1996. *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Claverie, Élisabeth et Anna Fedele. 2014. "Incértitudes et religions vernaculaires/Uncertainty in vernacular religions." *Social Compass* 61(4): 487–96.

Correll, Timothy Corrigan. 2005. "Believers, Sceptics, and Charlatans: Evidential Rhetoric, the Fairies, and Fairy Healers in Irish Oral Narrative and Belief." *Folklore* 116(1) 1–18.

Crapanzano, Vincent. 2000. *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench.* New York: New Press.

Davis, Phillip W. and Jacqueline Boles. 2003. "Pilgrim Apparition Work Symbolization and Crowd Interaction when the Virgin Mary Appeared in Georgia." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32(4): 371–402.

Engelke, Matthew. 2002. "The Problem of Belief: Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner on 'the inner life'." *Anthropology Today* 18(6): 3–8.

–. 2005. "The Early Days of Johane Masowe: Self-Doubt, Uncertainty, and Religious Transformation." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47(4): 781–808.

–. 2012. "Comment on Tanya M. Luhrmann's 'A Hyperreal God and Modern Belief: Toward an Anthropological Theory of Mind'." *Current Anthropology* 53(4): 385–86.

Farra-Hadad, Nour. 2013. "Staging the Extraordinary Emergence of Divine Entities in the Daily Life of a Visionary House in Beirut." *Mediterranean Review* 6(1): 43–64.

Fogas, Anna, szerk. 1993. *Natália nővér* [Sister Natália]. I–III. Budapest: Szent József Kiadó.

Gable, Eric. 2002. "Beyond Belief? Play, Scepticism, and Religion in a West African Village." *Social Anthropology* 10(1): 41–56.

Gagyi, József. 1998. *Jelek égen és földön. Hiedelem és helyi társadalom a Székelyföldön.* [Signs in Heaven and on Earth]. Csíkszereda: KAM.

–. 2004. *A krízis éve a Székelyföldön 1949* [The Year of Crisis in Seklerland 1949]. Csíkszereda: KAM.

Goody, Jack. 1996. "A Kernel of Doubt." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(4): 667–81.

Grynaeus, Tamás. 1974. "Engi Tüdő Vince: a legenda és a valóság" [Vince Engi Tüdő: Legend and Reality]." *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve* 1972/73: 155–83.

Haeri, Niloofar, ed. 2017a. "Unbundling sincerity: Language, mediation, and interiority in comparative perspective." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(1): 123–233 (Special Section).

–. 2017b. "Unbundling sincerity: Language, mediation, and interiority in comparative perspective." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(1): 123–38.

–. 2017c. "The sincere subject: Mediation and interiority among a group of Muslim women in Iran." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(1): 139–61.

Haynes, Naomi. 2019. "The benefit of the Doubt: On the Relationship between Doubt and Power." *Anthropological Quarterly* 92(1): 35–57.

Hermkens, Anna-Karina, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, eds. 2009. *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Hojbjerg, Christian Kordt, ed., 2002. "Religious Reflexivity. Essays on attitudes to religious ideas and practice." *Social Anthropology* 10(1): 1–103.

Kapferer, Bruce, ed., 2001. "Secularism. Personal values and professional evaluations." *Social Anthropology* 9(3): 323–44 (Dossier).

Keane, Webb. 1997a. "From fetishism to sincerity: On agency, the speaking subject, and their historicity in the context of religious conversion." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39(4): 674–93.

–. 1997b. "Religious Language." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 47–71.

–. 2002. "Sincerity, 'Modernity,' and the Protestants." *Cultural Anthropology* 17(1): 65–92.

Küllős, Imola. 2001. "We were Led by the Lord in a Special Way…" *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 46(1–2): 153–59.

Küllős, Imola and Ildikó Sándor. 2012. "Activity of Two Peasant Prophetesses in the 20th Century in Sub-Carpathia." *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 57(2): 361–81.

Laycock, Joseph P. 2014. *The Seer of Bayside: Veronica Lueken and the Struggle to Define Catholicism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Luhrmann, Tanya M. 2012a. "A Hyperreal God and Modern Belief: Toward an Anthropological Theory of Mind." *Current Anthropology* 53(4): 371–95.

–. 2012b. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Random House.

–. 2018. "Prayer as a Metacognitive Activity." In Joelle Proust and Martin Fortier, eds., *Metacognitive Diversity: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 297–318. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacGregor, Geddes. 1987. "Doubt and belief." In Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 424–30. New York: MacMillan Publishing.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1978 [1922]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge.

Margry, Peter Jan. 2009. "Marian Interventions in the Wars of Ideology: The Elastic Politics of the Roman Catholic Church on Modern Apparitions." *History and Anthropology* 20(3): 243–63.

Matter, E. Ann. 2001. "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalyptic, Representation, Politics." *Religion* 31(2): 125–53.

McKinnon, Alastair. 1993. "Kierkegaard and 'The Leap of Faith'." *Kierkegaardiana* 16.

Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2000. "Faith and its Fulfillment: Agency, Exchange, and the Fijian Aesthetics of Completion." *American Ethnologist* 27(1): 31–51.

–. 2004. *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Nientied, Mariele. 2014. "Kierkegaard without 'Leap of Faith'." *From the ALWS Archives: A selection of papers from the International Wittgenstein Symposia in Kirchberg am Wechsel*.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. ed., 2013a. *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies,* 1–42. London: I.B. Tauris.

–. 2013b. "Outline for an Ethnography of Doubt." In Id., ed., *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies.* London: I.B. Tauris.

Peti, Lehel. 2006. "Conflict between State Power and the Church in Moldavia during the Communist Dictatorship." *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 51(3): 327–34.

–. 2012. "Látomások, vallási megtérés és megszállottság: Kommunikáció a transzcendenssel egy erdélyi faluban" [Visions, Religious Conversion and Possession. Communication with the Transcendent in a Transylvanian Village]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Szent helyek, ünnepek, szent szövegek. Tanulmányok a romániai magyarság vallási életéből,* 13–74. Pécs–Budapest: PTE Néprajz–Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék–L'Harmattan.

Pouillon, Jean. 2016 [1982]. "Remarks on the verb 'to believe'." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6(3): 485–92.

Pozsony, Ferenc. 1998. "Látomások a moldvai csángó falvakban" [Visions in the Csángó Villages of Moldova]. In Pócs szerk. 1998, 72–80.

Pócs, Éva, szerk. 1998. *Eksztázis, álom, látomás. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* [Ecstasy, Dream, Vision.] Budapest and Pécs: Balassi Kiadó–Pécsi Tudományegyetem.

–. 2008. "Szőkefalva /Seuca: egy új kegyhely új üzenetei [Szőkefalva /Seuca: The New Messages of a New Shrine." In Id. szerk. *Démonok, látók, szentek. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 484–504. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.

–. 2010. "Seers, Visions and Shrines: Divine Interventions in Crises of Private and Public Affairs." In Galia Valtchinova, ed., *Religion and Boundaries: Studies from the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Turkey,* 195–221. Istanbul: The Isis Press.

Ruel, Malcolm. 2002 [1982]. "Christians as Believers." In Michael Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion,* 99–113. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sharpe, Alfred. 1909. "Doubt." Robert Appleton Company. Accessed 14 August 2019.

Shoaps, Robin A. 2002. "'Pray Earnestly': The textual Construction of Personal Involvement in Pentecostal Prayer and Song." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12(1): 34–71.

Szigeti, Jenő. 2006. *Protestáns népi látomások a XVIII. századból I.* [Protestant Folk Visions from the 18th century I]. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Turner, Victor and Edith L. B. Turner. 1978. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Voigt, Vilmos. 1998. "Órás András eksztázisban (1690)" [András Órás in Ecstasy (1690)]. In Pócs szerk. 1998, 93–100.

Zimdars-Swartz, Sandra. 1991. *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eszter Spät

Religious Crossover in Northern Iraq: Interfaith Practices of Beseeching the Supernatural[1]

Religious or interfaith crossover is a phenomenon which can be found all over the former Ottoman Empire and indeed wherever Muslims and religious Others coexist.[2] The practice of visiting other religions' sacred places, and imitating or appropriating the rituals enacted in those sacred places, all with the aim of appealing for help from the supernatural, reflect important points of contact between the dominant Muslim and various minority groups.

This article looks at how interfaith pilgrimages and shared ritual practices for beseeching the supernatural reveal the complex nature of inter-communal relations between different confessional groups – Muslims, Christians and Yezidis – in Northern Iraq.[3] While today the media is filled with the horrors ISIS and other Islamist groups have perpetrated on such religious minorities as the Yezidis and Christians in the region, evidence of continued religious crossovers, of sharing and visiting each other's ritual places and practices stands as living proof that relations between majority (Sunni) Muslims and minority ethnoreligious groups have not always been so fatally inimical in the region. This is not to say that during the centuries the different religious minorities did not suffer their share of intermittent persecutions, or that they were on an equal social and legal footing with Sunni Muslims. The written history as well as the oral memory of the different religious minorities testify to the troubled past of these communities. However, the tradition of visiting the religious Other's

---

[2] For the use of this term in the context of interreligious pilgrimage, see Albera and Fliche 2012.

[3] For a short introduction on the Christians of Iraqi Kurdistan see Hunter 2014. For more on Yezidis see Kreyenbroek 1995; and Spät 2005. This article focuses primarily on the Yezidi community living east of the Tigris, in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and its vicinity. Sinjari Yezidis, living in a different cultural environment on the Syrian-Iraqi border, have developed their own distinctive customs.

sacred places and sharing their rituals in order to procure divine intercession implies that a certain degree of tolerance and even mutual respect for each other's beliefs and saints or holy beings has always existed. It is this tolerance and respect that has ultimately contributed to the continued existence of religious minorities.

In the regions of the former Ottoman Empire, Muslims and Jews, as well as Muslims and Christians, have for long shared sacred space or visited each other's sacred places and partaken in one another's rituals.[4] The same could be said of Iraqi Kurdistan today, with the slight modification that Jews,[5] once very much a part of the Kurdish landscape, are gone (forced into migration in 1951), while Yezidis, the third most populous confessional group in the region, have a somewhat unusual position. Yezidis follow a religion that relies on oral tradition rather than on a sacred book. Consequently, they are not considered *Ahl al-Kitab* or "People of the Book." In fact, Muslims traditionally regarded Yezidis as heretics, *kafir*s ('infidels') without a revealed book, and even devil-worshippers. Yezidis are also considered to be unclean, both in the physical and the religious sense. Even today, many Muslims refuse to eat food cooked by Yezidis, or consume the meat of animals slaughtered by them. On the other hand, Yezidis claim that Muslims are their eternal enemies, who have always persecuted them. Many Yezidis say that they respect every prophet, except Mohamed, whom they consider a false prophet, and they like every religion except Islam, which they consider violent. While Yezidis, at least today, tend to consider Christians their cousins, both in the religious and social sense, it is not unusual to hear Christians (even from mixed regions) say that Yezidis worship the devil, or at least, they look upon Yezidis as a people without a real religion. Thus, it is somewhat surprising to find members of the other religious groups, especially Muslims, visiting Yezidi holy places.[6] This still seems to be the case, at least on occasion, indicating that the relationship between these ethno-religious communities is more complex than everyday discourse suggests.[7]

Before examining in detail religious crossover in Northern Iraq, it must be emphasized that painting an exact picture of interfaith pilgrimage and shared ritual practices in pilgrimage places is made difficult by the painful lack of data. My own field

---

[4] See Hasluck 1929; Meri 2002; Albera and Couroucli 2012; Cormack 2013; Bowman 2012b.

[5] Jews must also be mentioned here. Though they were to all practical purposes expelled in 1951, they used to be an important part of the religious landscape. For more on the Jews of Kurdistan see the classical work by Brauer–Patai 1993; and Ammann 2014.

[6] Here I am specifically talking about the practice of *ziyaret* (from Arabic *ziyārāt*), that is, visiting a sacred place with the intention of asking for supernatural intercession on behalf of the pilgrim or a family member. I do not include *sefres*, that is, 'outings', when people, especially Muslims, visit the scenic sacred spots of other religious groups merely to have a picnic in a pleasant setting. As for visiting the religious Other's sacred places to take part in religious festivities, this does not seem to be a part of the religious map in Northern Iraq today.

[7] It must be added that several tribal confederations of the past included both Yezidi and Muslim tribes, while some tribes (at least in the Sinjar region) included both Yezidi and Muslims sections. Yezidis also traditionally chose Muslim *kerifs* or "godfathers" when their sons were circumcised, forming strong ties based on mutual obligations between Muslim and Yezidi families (cf. Kreyenbroek, 2005, 12).

research concentrated primarily on Yezidis, but I soon realized that comparison of the ritual practices of the different groups was indispensable for a thorough comprehension of the Yezidi religious system and its place in the wider socio-cultural context. However, while it is Yezidis who are routinely referred to in the media as a hardly known, mysterious people, I soon came to realize that the Christians and Muslims of Kurdistan, and especially of Iraqi Kurdistan, have attracted even less scholarly attention, despite the richness and singular nature of their local culture. (A culture, moreover, which is today fast disappearing, due to intense urbanization, modernization, and in the case of Christians exodus to the West.) I tried to rectify this woeful lack of data by making enquiries about Christian and Muslim traditions, but as the time I could spend on this "secondary" research topic was limited, my knowledge of the healing rituals of the other groups is necessarily sketchier than that of Yezidi shrines and rituals. I must also add that it is not so easy to collect evidence of interfaith pilgrimage and shared ritual practice, as people usually deny visiting each other's sacred places. That is, Yezidis openly admit to visiting Christian churches, or even boast of it, as they see this as a sign of their strong connection to Christians – and thus to the West – but they deny visiting Sunni Muslim places.[8] Christians and Muslims both claim that the Others visit *their* sacred places (in fact, such pilgrimages by the Other are the very proof of the power and spiritual authenticity of any sacred place), but that they themselves would never visit the places of the other religions. What is more, Muslims in the Duhok region, where I primarily carried out my research, deny visiting sacred places at all, considering it a superstitious, un-Islamic practice, something that may have been done in the past, but "now we know better." This may be due to the fact the majority of Duhok's Muslim residents has no roots in the city – and therefore no shrines or other sacred spaces associated with religious and healing practices. Duhok was just a few decades ago a small town, of about 200 houses, inhabited mostly by Christians, with a few Jews and (non-tribal) Muslims. Duhok was also a small trading centre for the members of the neighbouring Doski and Mizuri tribes, who either brought their goods to Duhok, or had to pass through Duhok on their way to Mosul. According to locals, in the '60s and '70s, with the slow onset of urbanization in Kurdistan, members of these tribes started settling in Duhok. The great influx of people, however, came from the mid-1970s and 1980s. During these decades of warfare between the state and the Ba'athist regime, Saddam repeatedly ordered the destruction of Kurdish villages in the mountains and moved their inhabitants into towns, easier to control, lest they support the Kurdish *peshmerga*. As they were forbidden to return, the newcomers soon lost connection to their villages, along with their traditions, including that of visiting the graves of local Muslim (Sufi) "saints".[9] Furthermore, the unravelling of traditional social life and religious culture made the newcomers susceptible to the influence of

---

[8] The situation may be different regarding minority Shiʿia sacred sites in the Sinjar region. See footnote 18.

[9] This view was also put forward by some native inhabitants of Duhok to explain why traditions like visiting tombs and shrines no longer existed among the people of Duhok.

Islamist missionaries, who preached a new, austere, puritanical form of Islam which rejected all such traditional customs as superstition or even as blasphemy. During the years of economic hardship caused by the embargo imposed on Iraq, these missionaries, backed by the generous financial support of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, exerted a considerable influence on religious life in Duhok. The influence of Salafi-inspired puritan Islam proved so strong that even though Duhok itself and some of the surrounding villages (now incorporated into the town) used to have some Sufi tombs, these local shrines have also been relegated to oblivion. Though some people claim the tombs are still there, they are so well hidden by the new buildings erected over them that no one visits them any longer. In fact, the majority of younger people have not even heard of them.[10]

The picture is already quite different in Mosul some 80 kilometres to the south, with its mixed population of Arabs, Kurds and Christians. Despite its reputation today as a town of Islamic fundamentalists, Mosul is also a town where visiting shrines and the tombs of Sufi figures has had a long tradition. To go on a pilgrimage to places dedicated to the "saints (lit. friends) of God" (*evliya Xwedê* in Kurdish) was a normal practice for many Mosul residents, one which has declined only in the past decade due to the appearance of militant Islamist groups who strongly disapprove of such practices.[11] As one of my informants, (herself a "refugee" from Mosul) told me in 2013, people no longer dare to go, as Islamists with Salafi-inspired ideologies have forbidden such visits. However, before the recent rise of extremism, pilgrimage used to enjoy such respect among Mosulis that, according to the same informant, if someone visited the tomb of Nebi Yunis (Prophet Jonah) seven times, that was considered equal to having gone on a pilgrimage or *Hajj* to Mecca.[12] What is more, she attributed the origin of this idea to the Prophet Mohamed himself. Similarly, in the plains inhabited by the Kurdish Goran tribes, just south of the Duhok mountain range (and east of Mosul), Sufi tombs are still venerated by many. A few years ago a member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, a political party affiliated with the Muslim-Brotherhood, nearly came to grief when enraged locals wanted to attack him for agitating against the *ziyarets* or visits to Sufi tombs in Goran territory.

The findings of my field research indicate that religious crossover between the different groups does take place, despite people's claims to the contrary. Even some Muslims from Duhok take part in such practices under certain circumstances. There

---

[10] A similar process has been going on in neighboring Turkey. The Tappers, working in the Central Anatolian town of Eğirdir in the 1980s, also found that such sacred sites as saints' tombs, sacred springs, etc., had vanished and that townspeople even seemed unaware of their existence (Tapper and Tapper 1987). In a Turkish village, where such "folk" practices had similarly disappeared by the early 2000s, "villagers reluctantly admitted that 'in the past' they 'might' have engaged in some of them." Hart 2009.

[11] According to my informants, Christians from or living around Mosul (for example in Beshiqe, Bartella, Qaraqosh) are also said to observe more traditional pilgrimages and associated healing rituals than those living in Duhok and its environments.

[12] The tomb of Nebi Yunis and the shrine built over it was blown up by ISIS in June 2014.

is a certain asymmetrical pattern to interfaith pilgrimages, a pattern also noticed elsewhere, reflecting the complex nature of interaction between the Muslim majority and the minority communities. It appears that Muslims, secure in their social and numerical superiority, were traditionally more inclined to visit the sacred places of the "inferior Other" without fear of pollution.[13] Although, as stated above, Muslims today seem to categorically deny the idea of visiting the shrines of others, the number of claims by Christians and Yezidis of Muslims coming to visit their sacred places indicates that this must happen at least from time to time. Some accounts of such religious crossovers contain too many concrete details to let us dismiss them as mere fantasies or generic stories.[14] Thus, for example, some Chaldean Christian women claimed that the big Chaldean church in Duhok, housing the grave of an early martyr of the Christian faith, "helped" Muslims more than Christians. According to them, the church was built over the body of a former deacon (*shamesa*) of the church, called Isallah, an early martyr of the Church. Isallah was captured by the Persians and taken to Erbil (Arbela at the time) along with five hundred other Christian bishops, priests and church servants. They were all put to death in Erbil. However, Isallah requested that he be killed in Duhok. Accordingly, he was crucified in Duhok and a church was later built over his grave. Now he serves as a focus of miraculous healing from his tomb. Just the week before our conversation took place, the women said, a visit to the church (with the tomb under it) had cured a son from the family of the Doski *agha* (the leader of the powerful Doski tribe). "He was taken to Austria [to see doctors]... all his children here went to the church and started crying there, in fact he had cancer... but then the doctor said, *inshallah*, you will not die. He was cured. The doctor said, you will live twenty-five years. They say, this cure, it was thanks to this church." When asked what induced members of a Muslim *agha* family to go to a Christian church to appeal for divine help, the women answered: "They know that this church helps the Muslims. This family, the family of Diwali *agha*, they had already taken their sick to this church three times previously. They sacrificed a sheep and they were all cured. Muslims go there for help more than Christians." Of course, it is not possible to verify the details

---

[13] As Maria Couroucli writes of Ottoman times: "In Anatolia as elsewhere, Muslims visited Christian shrines with a certain system of belief where the Christian 'other' is both familiar and inferior, and this is why entering Christian sanctuaries implies no ritual pollution." Couroucli 2012a, 54.

[14] Though I never personally witnessed Muslims visiting a Yezidi (or Christian) sacred place for religious purposes, I was more than once present when Muslims (always in family groups) came to see Yezidi religious specialists about their problems. I witnessed several Muslims visit Yezidi "seers" (on Yezidi seers see below), who gave them earth from Yezidi sacred sites, sugar or a *dezi* or sacred thread (functioning much like a protective amulet), along with ritual instructions just like the ones given to Yezidi clients. I also met a Muslim family visiting a Yezidi sheikh who specialized in making written amulets from the purported Yezidi sacred book "Book of the Angel Sheikh Sin", written by the incarnated Yezidi Angel Sheikh Hassan (Sheikh Sin), the ancestor of his lineage. The sheikh was asked to prepare a number of amulets for different family members, and he also promised to lift the *nazar* or evil eye put on the family "by a jealous female relative". These visits to Yezidi religious experts, along with the examples quoted below, indicate that visits to Yezidi sacred places must also occur (even if possibly less frequently than in the past).

of this story. However, it is reasonable to assume that such a detailed account about a family well-known to all in Duhoki society is unlikely to be a fabrication, at least as far as such a public visit to the church is concerned. (My informants also claimed that not only Muslims, and of course Christians, went to the church seeking miraculous cures, but so did Yezidis and Jews.)

Confirmation that at least in some places Muslims do indeed visit Yezidi shrines (and may then encourage Muslims from other regions to do so as well) came from a Kurdish Muslim woman living in Bardaresh, a township in the Goran plains[15] roughly half way between Duhok and Erbil. In her immediate district there were no Yezidis, but her sister had married a man who lived near to the Yezidi twin villages of Beshiqe-Behzani (not far from Mosul.) These two villages are famous for their shrines,[16] which are allegedly also visited by many Muslims, especially those from the surrounding villages. This claim was verified by the young Muslim woman in question. As she told me, once, by mistake, she visited a Yezidi shrine with her small daughter. The little girl suffered from painful stomach aches, and while on a visit to her sister living near Beshiqe-Behzani, the brother-in-law, a native of the region, advised her to take the child to one of the shrines. Not being familiar with the area or with Yezidis, she first thought that this was the tomb or shrine of some Muslim holy man. (Visiting Sufi tombs is still a custom in the Bardaresh area, though the woman claimed that she herself never went.) She took the child to the shrine, where the little one even had her forehead and chest anointed with sacred earth (taken from the holy place) by the guardian of the shrine, as is the Yezidi custom. Later on, the mother came to realize her mistake, and she refused to take the child back there again.[17] According to her, however, the brother-in-law as well as other Muslims in the vicinity routinely visited these Yezidi shrines. (Incidentally, the husband of the same woman had previously denied that a Muslim would ever visit a Yezidi shrine.)

As regards Yezidis, as has been pointed out above, they freely visit Christian churches, especially those who live in mixed districts. However, the same is not true for Muslim sacred places. This may be attributed to numerous factors. First, especially these days, Yezidis may lack knowledge about such places. More importantly, we may assume that as a minority held in contempt by Muslims, they may be wary of visiting Muslim sites. They have reason to fear causing offence with their "unclean" presence,[18] and even more reason to be afraid of the threat of forced conversion

---

[15] Territory of the Goran tribe or rather tribal confederation. It is a few kilometres east of Mount Meqlub, while the Yezidi villages, Beshiqe and Behzani lie just at the southern foot of the mountain.

[16] These shrines were destroyed by ISIS in 2014, but have since been rebuilt.

[17] Ritual healing among Yezidis often necessitates three visits on consecutive Wednesdays or Fridays to the holy place.

[18] As various researchers working on the phenomenon of "shared sacra" in the Eastern Mediterranean have pointed out, the most frequent configuration is that of (dominant) Muslims crossing into Christian (and presumably other minority) territory. Crossing in the opposite direction is less frequent. We must also take into account that entering Muslim mosques was forbidden to the non-Muslim minorities of the Ottoman Empire (see Couroucli 2012c, 131), though the same may not have applied to shrines and *tekkes* or *tekiyes*, as Hasluck's description demonstrates (Hasluck 1929, 75–97).

(or even of the mere gossip of their conversion, as this may lead to social ostracism in their own community.)[19] Nonetheless, when in trouble a fair number of Yezidis, both from the Kurdistan Region and Sinjar, turn to such Muslim religious specialists as *sayyids* (descendants of Mohamed), *sheikhs* (Sufi leaders, though *sayyids* may also be referred to as *sheikhs*) and *mullahs,* all of whom may specialize in ritual healing. They also make use of Muslim amulet makers[20] (many of whom are *mullahs.*) Typical is the case of a middle-aged Yezidi man, in a family I formed close contact with during my field research. He started suffering from severe mental disturbances in his late teens. First, he displayed serious symptoms of persecution mania, which eventually turned into physical aggression. When I came to know him, some two decades later, he was totally withdrawn from the world, not communicating with anybody, sitting around talking to himself and smoking incessantly. After long months of acquaintance with his family, I learnt from chance remarks that this young man had been taken not only to doctors, numerous Yezidi shrines and various types of Yezidi ritual healers, but also to Muslim *mullahs* and *sayyids,* that is, Muslim religious experts specializing in exorcising the jinn. (Incidentally, both Yezidi and Muslims ritual experts were of the opinion that his madness was due to jinn. To be more exact, to his having married a female jinn, and having begotten children with her – it was assumed he was talking with these jinn children when speaking to himself. Both Yezidi and Muslim experts agreed that he would not recover unless he agreed to reveal the name of his wife – something he clearly refused to do.)

Though far less frequent than Muslims visiting the sacred places of the other groups, there are still instances of the (inferior) non-Muslim Other visiting Muslim shrines. The sheikh of a Sufi *tekiye* or 'convent' housing the tomb of Abdul Aziz Gilani[21] in Aqre claimed that not only Muslims but also Christians and Yezidis visited the tomb, as had the Jews before their expulsion.[22] He told the story of a Yezidi man who came from the Yezidi village of Beshiqe every year, bringing as a gift for the *tekiye* and for the *sheikhly* family bottles of olive oil (a product Beshiqe is famed for). This gift was a way of giving thanks to Aziz Gilani, because his mother had conceived him after a visit to

---

[19] It must be mentioned that the situation may be different in the Sinjar region, where minority Shi'ias have long existed alongside Yezidis. Some Yezidis from Sinjar reported on Yezidis traditionally taking part in the feast Khidir Ilyas (a holy figure revered by many religious communities in the Middle East) at the shrine dedicated to him, near the town of Telefer. They also go there to pray for children in case of infertility. Though the guardians of the shrine are Shiia Turkomans, these Yezidis did not see the shrine of Khidir Ilyas as specifically or exclusively Muslim. Benjamin Rassbach, presently a PhD student of the University of Leipzig, heard from Sinjari Yezidi refugees during his field research that they used to visit the Shiia shrine of Pîr Zeker in the mixed town of Sinjar (on the southern side of the mountain range). Personal communication by Benjamin Rassbach.

[20] These days both Muslims and Yezidis visit in secret, as such activity is forbidden by both the Iraqi and the Kurdish state.

[21] The son of Abdul Qadir Gilani, the founder of the Qadiri Sufi order.

[22] It must be stressed that this is not a mosque. A *tekiye* or Sufi "convent" is built next to the tomb and this is where religious rituals take place. Inside the little building housing the tomb itself only private prayers are performed, but no public rituals.

the saint's tomb. The *sheikh* also recounted how the tomb was visited a few years previously by an Israeli man from Tiberias. This Jewish man was called, amazingly, Dervish. The parents of this man were originally from Aqre and his mother, after having longed for a son in vain for a long time, conceived him after praying to the saint for intercession, hence this unusual choice of name for a Jew. Again, it is hard to verify the truth content of this story, but later, reading a book on the Jewish art of Kurdistan,[23] I found that one of those who contributed important information to this volume is a man of Jewish Kurdish descent, living in the Israeli city of Tiberias and going by the name of Nahum Darvish.[24] An internet article indicated that his father had left Kurdistan in 1968, and Nahum returned to visit the land of his forefathers' after the fall of Saddam.[25] Though neither the book nor the article make any mention of how he (or rather his father) came by the name of Darvish, the above details appear to bear out the sheikh's account, though he attributed the name Darvish and the story of his naming to the son, instead of the father.

Seeking Help

As can be seen from the above examples, visiting the religious Other's sacred places and beseeching aid from the powers of the Other is not an everyday event, but rather one that people turn to as a final recourse. As Maria Couroucli writes: "sharing is not an everyday practice: it is an exceptional modality… related to borders and margins."[26] Though when speaking of the blurring of margins, Couroucli refers to the margins "of institutions, village territories, or even customs," we may also state that people resort to such an exceptional modality in situations when they have to face the out of the ordinary. The blurring of otherwise rigid social and religious boundaries usually occurs in cases of extreme need – usually connected with physical and mental health as well as fertility.

   All the ethnoreligious communities of Kurdistan traditionally believe that serious physical and mental illness, as well as difficulties in having children, can generally be attributed to supernatural causes. Some afflictions may be brought on by divine wrath (as a retribution for sins) or by the inscrutable will of God. Yezidis may equally attribute illnesses, especially "mysterious" pains, to their holy beings (*khas*), who mete out punishment for infringements of taboos or negligence of religious duties. Thus, for example, someone told me how her elderly grandmother used to complain of a pain in her leg so insufferable that she could hardly walk. She was convinced that she

---

[23] Shwartz-Be'eri 2000.
[24] Traditionally no family names existed in the Middle East, instead people took (and take) their father's name as their last name. So Nahum Darvish's father probably had Darvish as his given name.
[25] http://lhvnews.com/en/news/5395/barzanis-role-in-israels-presence-in-iraqs-kurdistan. Accessed 21 March 2015.
[26] Couroucli 2012b, 6.

had been kicked in the leg by the horse of one of the *khas* as a chastisement because that year she failed to go to Lalish, the Yezidi holy valley, with other people from her village to "do service" (*khizmetkarî*), that is to help clean the holy valley. She even claimed to have seen a white knight on a white horse (the appearance people usually associate with Yezidi holy beings when manifesting themselves to people) who asked her why she had not gone to Lalish to "do service." People suffering from such unexplainable ailments attributed to the *khas* were traditionally even referred to as *makhum* or "condemned ones" (i.e., condemned or found guilty by the holy beings).

In all three communities some complaints may be attributed to more "profane" but all the same supernatural causes. One is the evil eye, which enjoys a uniform popularity all over the region. Belief in the power of the evil eye is so deeply rooted that even many educated people may attribute all kinds of ill fortune to it, claiming that it is caused by the "rays" of the (jealous) human stare. I have heard university students, future English teachers declare that the evil eye is a real phenomenon and that they had been taught about it in psychology class. Similarly, many believe in the existence of the jinn, invisible creatures made of smokeless fire, who have taken the place of the numerous daemons and evil spirits of the antique Near East. (Since the Qur'an mentions the jinn as one of the three sapient creations of God, even many educated Muslims are wary of denying their existence, though sceptical ones may carefully add "I have never seen one.") People traditionally ascribe many afflictions, especially madness, as well as the death of unborn or newly born children, to the jinn. It is believed that some jinn (especially those belonging to another faith) are hostile to mankind and are out to hurt men. Most jinn, however, are neutral toward humans, and may attack them only when (even inadvertently) hurt by them. As humans cannot see the jinn, this may easily happen. Therefore, people are careful to utter a prayer or a pious warning before throwing out hot water, lest they scald a jinn child and draw the revenge of the parents on themselves. Yezidi custom forbids playing with scissors for similar reasons. Finally, there is also black magic, usually conceived of these days as the result of malevolent written charms, or *nivishti/nivishki*.

The two maladies that seem to cause the greatest distress, and thus make people seek the help of the supernatural wherever they can, including among other, "inferior" religious groups, are mental affliction and barrenness.

Different forms of mental affliction, which include depression, anxiety, insomnia and various stress-related complaints as well as serious cases of madness, are often attributed to jinn possession. Curing madness therefore, in its various forms, requires chasing away the invading jinn or evil spirits. All three religions have special places for healing jinn-induced madness, often associated with tombs or caves (or the two may be combined, as in the case of Mar Behnam, as will be shown below.) What is more, the houses of certain Yezidi families (who descend from priestly lineages specializing in curing jinn possession) may also act as sacred spaces when it comes to curing jinn possession.[27]

---

[27] Many of these families belong to the lineage of the Shemseni sheikhs, believed to descend from Sheikh Shems, the overlord of the jinn.

This is due to the fact that these families have their own jinn servants who live in the house and around it in the yard, and just like loyal family dogs (an often-made comparison), they chase away strange jinn, or even kill them, should they approach their territory. They do so regardless of the religious affiliation of the person affected by the jinn. As one expert, descending from a family lineage famous for curing jinn possession, explained: "A Muslim family came to me. They had a child, seven-year-old. He could not walk and could not feed himself. He spent six months in Baghdad, but the doctors, good doctors, could not heal him. He lay three hours in our yard, and he stood and could control his hands. He was healed." The jinn of the family had obviously chased away the jinn that was retarding the little Muslim boy's development.

The case described above included a Muslim patient and a Yezidi healer, but in the case of madness (or jinn possession) crossovers occur the other way around as well. I have already mentioned above the case of the severely disturbed young man who was taken to Muslim *mullahs* and *sayyids* after both modern science and Yezidi healers and healing places had failed him. Similarly, a female Yezidi seer was taken to a Muslim expert early on in her "career" as a seer. Yezidi seers are people who communicate with the supernatural world directly, with the help of a *delîl* or supernatural guide. The most frequent form of this communication is a kind of trance state. The ability to reach such a trance state is usually preceded by strange, unexplainable fits or attacks. These are considered to be the first attempts on the part of a seer's supernatural guide to communicate, the forerunners of the trance state so to speak. However, in the early stage the true origin of these fits is hard to recognize, and they are often attributed to jinn possession. (It usually takes another seer to recognize the true nature of the symptoms.) As this seer told me, for years after she was married off by her family (against her wishes), she suffered from some mysterious sickness, which manifested itself in spells of dizziness as well as epilepsy-like episodes. Sometimes she had such serious attacks that when they were out driving, her husband was afraid that their car would overturn, she was throwing herself around with such a violence. Her husband's family took her to doctors and Yezidi holy places, as well as to a Muslim *mullah*, in the belief that she was possessed by jinn. This *mullah* was a well-known expert in exorcising jinn. He seems to have practiced the traditional Muslim method of healing jinn afflictions – combining the reading of the Qur'an with beating the possessed person until the jinn fled. The *mullah* promptly administered her a sound beating (though in this case to no avail, as she was not possessed by jinn, but was being protected by her *delîl* from feeling any pain.)

In several Yezidi shrines dedicated to curing jinn-induced madness, the guardians claimed that Muslims (as well as Christians) also regularly brought patients seeking their help. At my enquiring how it was possible that Yezidis and Muslims visited each other's healers and sacred places despite the fact that both groups loudly disparaged the other's religion, a Yezidi sheikh (who had inherited the power to heal jinn-induced madness from his family lineage and who claimed to have cured many people afflicted by the jinn) answered, showing a deep understanding of the human psyche: "if you are sick, you go to the doctor. If that does not help, you go to the priest,

you go, you come to me, you come to someone else… but you have to go around and try everybody." While a younger, university educated man present at our conversation added in English: "if a member of your family is sick, you will go and see even a thousand doctors, in order to find the best one."

Just like madness, the inability to have children is considered a great calamity. People without children are pitied and seen as "lacking" by the others, while women who cannot produce a child (or a male child) face the prospect of divorce, or having to accept a co-wife. Thus, barrenness is the other great cause prompting religious crossovers among people who are ready to try anything (and any religion) in order to conceive a child. The tomb of Abdul Aziz Gilani in Aqre, and the story of Jews and Yezidis going there to pray for a son has already been mentioned above. Ariel Sabar, the son of the linguist Yonah Sabar, describes in his book *My Father's Paradise* how his grandmother living in the Jewish district of Zakho[28] and desperate for a son, "needed help. She wanted to go where other Zakho women had gone in times of distress: to the Shrine of the Prophet Yona," that is, the tomb of the Prophet Jonah, Nebi Yunis for Muslims. The building standing above the alleged grave of this Jewish prophet was a Muslim mosque, but it was visited by followers of the other religions as well. At the grave Miryam prayed "'If you grant me a boy, dear Yona' she said 'I will name him after you.'"[29]

One of the most interesting and well-known stories (also told by Yezidis) concerns Saddam's brother-in-law, who had wished for children for years. After having sought the help of doctors in vain, he finally went to the Syriac Orthodox monastery of Mar Matti. Mar Matti, the fourth century monk who is said to have settled here, is a powerful saint and his monastery is famous for healing and especially for helping barren women. Women who wish for a child must climb up to the monastery on foot, following a steep, winding path from the valley, as a form of somatic sacrifice to the saint. This is what Saddam's sister and brother-in-law are said to have done, and their wish was duly granted by Mar Matti. To express his gratitude, Saddam's brother-in-law had a brand new asphalt road built leading up to the monastery. These days this is what most pilgrims and picnickers use. Only women who come to ask the saint's intercession to help them conceive still climb the ancient path, leaving their cars at the bottom of the mountain. Of course, there is no way of telling how much of the story about Saddam's brother-in-law is true, but the fact that it is being told, and what is more being told by Yezidis as well, is certainly significant.

Many Yezidis also told stories of Muslims who, yearning for children in vain, asked their Yezidi friends or acquaintances to take them to Yezidi holy places – not just to shrines dedicated to Yezidi holy beings, but even to places with a strong touch of "pagan" nature worship. As a Yezidi man now in his mid-thirties told me, as a child they had a neighbour in Duhok who came from the Mizuri tribe. The man and his wife could not have children. They even went to Germany to consult doctors, but in

---

[28] A Kurdish town in Northern Iraq, near the Turkish border.
[29] Sabar 2009, 46–47.

vain. Finally, they asked their Yezidi neighbours (or more likely were advised by them) to take them to the *dara miraza* or Tree of Wishes, in Lalish. This tree is in fact a stone column inside the cave dedicated to the holy being Mem Shivan (though some claim it is a petrified tree). Pilgrims try to hug the "tree" (see plate 1 in the Gallery). Should their fingers touch in front of the column, their wish will come true. This *dara miraza* is said to be very popular among people wishing for children, and it is to it that the Muslim couple turned as a last resort. The most fascinating part of the story is the fact that the Muslim couple of the (probably true) story came from the Mizuri tribe. Mizuris, living in the mountains east of Duhok, are remembered for their enmity toward the neighbouring Yezidis. Yezidis claim that many villages in Mizuri territory used to be Yezidi villages, but that their original inhabitants were chased away by the Mizuris, some of them as late as the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, a descendant of a *sayyid* family from the Mizuri tribe described how his ancestor had been invited to the district by the prince of Amadiya (overlord of the whole Bahdinan region from the fourteenth to the mid-nineteenth century) to convert local Yezidis to Islam. According to him, the district was indeed Yezidi in the distant past and "they were very bad", oppressing Muslims. However, according to him, the Yezidi inhabitants were not chased away, but rather converted thanks to his forebears' administrations, centuries ago. In other words, it is not merely the religious Other, but rather the enemy himself, a man from a tribe traditionally hostile toward Yezidi faith, who finally resorted to supplicating the supernatural powers of the "devil-worshippers". To do so, he had to cross not only traditional social and religio-legal boundaries, but psychological ones as well when he embraced the belief in the power of a Yezidi sacred place.

Hostility or at the least deep-seated suspicion against Yezidis similarly had to be overcome in another case where modern medicine failed to help. This story too illustrates the psychological immensity of crossovers, for it indicates that such an act also necessitates belief in the sacred powers of the religious Other, however counterintuitive this may be. An elderly and pious Muslim man, whose son (belonging to a different, less religious and more tolerant generation) was friends with a Yezidi informant's family, suffered from a bad case of skin infection, which doctors failed to cure. Even though like most men of his generation and social position he was convinced that Yezidis worshipped the Devil, when all else failed, he was persuaded by the Yezidi friends of his son to go to the shrine of the Yezidi holy being, Sheikh Shems in Beshiqe. However, on his first and second visit, the guardian of the shrine refused to "treat" him, saying that he could see in the eyes of the old man that he did not believe in Sheikh Shems. When he came to the shrine a third time, the guardian said, "Now I can see that you believe", smeared mud from the shrine on his skin and said the requisite prayer. The procedure was repeated two more times on consecutive Wednesdays, the holy day of the Yezidis, as is the custom. The old man's skin problem then allegedly disappeared. It all hinged, as both Muslims and Yezidis saw it, on his ability and willingness to believe in the power of a Yezidi holy being and in the sacred space suffused with his power.

Obviously, belief in the rituals of the religious Other also implies a belief in the powers revered by the (often inferior or despised) Other.[30] This also explains why most people deny that they would ever visit the sacred places of the other religious groups, and why such religious crossovers figure so frequently in accounts of the miraculous powers of such places, as well as different types of religious healers. They serve to demonstrate the indisputable power and spiritual authenticity of the religious group as well as of the particular place, shrine, family or expert.

Crossover and Shared Rituals

Shared rituals, that is, similar rituals performed at the sacred places of the different groups, perhaps provide an even more eloquent and reliable testimony of the long-term tradition of religious crossover, than the (often second-hand) accounts (which may reflect wishful thinking as much as everyday reality.) When people visit the shrines of others renowned for their healing abilities, they usually also perform the rituals particular to that holy place. The similarities of the various rituals associated with beseeching the supernatural in the sacred places of the various communities clearly indicates that religious crossovers, or interfaith pilgrimages and visits are not a new phenomenon but one that is centuries long, which has led to the development of a common stock of rituals observed by the different faith groups.

Blood sacrifice (*qurban*) is the most universal and common element of pilgrimages made to sacred places in order to ask for the intercession of a higher being. As all over the Eastern Mediterranean, the blood sacrifice is seen as the highest form of sacrifice: the sacrificial animal may be a sheep, a goat or a lamb, or for those with little money even a chicken (see plate 2 in the Gallery). Others, with lesser means or less weighty supplications (or besides the blood sacrifice), may offer cooked food, freshly baked bread or just sweets. It is a common sight to meet people inviting others to partake of their food or distributing sweets at sacred places. Similarly, even in big cities it is not unusual to see children going around and taking the neighbours fresh bread – a sort of votive gift usually performed when making a wish or after having it fulfilled. In Yezidi villages even cooked food may be taken around – usually at the suggestion of a seer – following a pilgrimage to a sacred place. It may be worth mentioning that unlike in Europe, the Christians of Kurdistan also perform blood sacrifices – usually in gratitude for miraculous healing. This sacrifice, according to my informants, is performed behind the church – preferably on the feast day of the patron saint of the

---

[30] The importance of "belief" in the ability of the religious Other to petition the supernatural successfully is also mentioned by Susan Sered. Writing of old Iraqi Jewish women in Jerusalem, she draws attention to the importance they attribute to the concept "to believe" which is not limited to their own religious groups. As an Iraqi Jewish woman explains: "This Arab woman in Iraq who couldn't have children, and she asked one of us, the Jews, for an amulet. The *hacham* scribbled something on a paper, folded the paper and gave it to her. She got pregnant because she believed. Belief is the biggest thing" Sered 1998, 50.

church. Those sufficiently affluent sacrifice a sheep; others sacrifice a chicken, or if poor, simply distribute bread and *iprak* (*dolma*, stuffed grape leaves). Failing to distribute food, especially the meat of a sacrificial animal, may have serious consequences: A Kurdish woman who used to live in Mosul and told me about the various pilgrimage places in and around Mosul, also related to me the story how at the shrine of Sheikh Mahmud, a "saint of God", a family sacrificed a sheep, but failed to share its meat with the poor – the earth then opened and swallowed their children alive.

If a person's wish is granted it is a common custom to express one's gratitude annually with an appropriate sacrifice. Thus, a Yezidi man told me how his father had lost two wives in childbirth. When he took a third wife and she became pregnant, someone suggested that he sacrifice a sheep to Karajal, the Yezidi holy being protecting a nearby village, whose mountain-top shrine attracts huge crowds from all over the region on his feast day or *tiwaf*. The third wife then successfully gave birth to a son and survived the birth herself. The husband continued to sacrifice a sheep to Karajal every year on his feast day. Since the death of the father, the son has carried on the yearly sacrifice, even though other people from his village do not sacrifice to Karajal (the protector of his own village is Sheikh Shems, and it is on his feast day that the villagers normally perform a sacrifice.) Similarly, a Christian family from Duhok told me how their daughter suffered from an affliction known as "smallness of the moon" (*kêma heyvê*). This mysterious sickness, which usually afflicts children, is universally associated with the new moon. The family made a pilgrimage to the church of Mar Amadisho, the child was duly cured and the family sacrificed a sheep and gave money to the church. However, they intended this to be a one-time thanksgiving, until they were roundly rebuked by an acquaintance, who told them that they should express their thanks to the saint annually. Since then they return for every *shanader* (the feast day of the church and the saint protecting it) taking *qurban* and some monetary gift.

People may also leave some money when visiting sacred places. No Yezidi would visit a shrine without placing at least one bank note, even if of a small denomination, on the threshold of the shrine. During *tiwafs*, or shrine festivals, some guardians stand by the shrine with nylon sacks full of such bank notes. The grave of Abdul Aziz Gilani in Aqre attests to both this practice among Muslims and to the changing times. It is covered by a glass case, presumably to stop devoted pilgrims throwing money (and candy) through the elaborate cage decorating the tomb. The glass cage is probably a concession to Salafi-inspired Islamic Puritanism, which is exerting a growing influence in the region and which frowns upon such practices as leaving money at a tomb as pure idolatry. However, the bank notes and small candies on and around the tomb indicate that this practice was recently still alive, and would probably still be continued if it were not for the glass forming an insurmountable barrier. In Christian churches one meets with Western-type collection boxes at the door. Naturally, larger donations, usually given when some wish or cure is granted, are handed to the person in charge of the holy place, whether Christian priest, Muslim sheikh or Yezidi *mijawir* (guardian of a shrine). This may be a substantial sum of money, even gold coins, or

lengths of coloured cloth, like the ones put on holy tombs. Christians (or those visiting a Christian shrine) donate candles as well.

Besides expressing gratitude for wishes fulfilled, there are many rituals which convey the wishes of the pilgrim, and which are sometimes believed to be a kind of direct communication with the sacred. These rituals, more than anything, show the close contact between the different groups. Thus, there can be little doubt that the Yezidi practice of circumambulating seven times the tomb of Sheikh Adi, their most important holy being, in the Central Sanctuary in Lalish, can be directly traced to the Muslim practice of *tawaf,* or the ritual circumambulation of the Kaaba during *Hajj.* The ritual of circumambulation is not restricted to the Kaaba alone, but can also be performed as part of local Muslim cults. At many Sufi shrines Muslim pilgrims walk around the tomb, praying and beseeching the saint for his intercession on their behalf. (I have, for example, observed this at the tomb of Abdul Aziz Gilani, where pilgrims all took seven turns around the tomb. Some pilgrims, mainly women with sick children, prayed loudly, interspersing the formal prayer with supplication to the saint for help.) Interestingly, Yezidis even call the yearly feasts held in honour of the shrines *tiwaf,* though at most shrines such circumambulations are not practiced today – as the space housing the (usually only symbolic) tomb is often too small for pilgrims to enter. However, at the shrines of Shahsê Batê pilgrims ritually circumambulate (three times) the stones marking a circle said to symbolize the tent of Shahsê Batê, next to the shrine dedicated to this holy being (see plate 3 in the Gallery). The other place where I observed this practice was, curiously, a brand new shrine dedicated to Sheikh Shems, in the old village of Girêbani. The original shrine, destroyed by Saddam in 1986 when the villagers were forcibly moved to a collective village, was merely a small stone structure resembling a hut.[31] When it was rebuilt a few years after the 2003 war, a proper shrine with the conical spire (which has become a symbol of Yezidism) was raised, with a small tomb inside. Though people knew that the tomb did not have an occupant (in fact, it was constructed too small to foster any such belief), they still performed the ritual circumambulation around the symbolic tomb, which formerly was not a part of the *tiwaf.*

Countless rituals performed at sacred places, specifically aimed at fulfilling supplicants' wishes, reflect centuries of interaction leading to shared notions for beseeching the supernatural for aid. Anybody who has ever travelled in the Middle East, or even simply the Balkans, will be familiar with the sight of trees with little pieces of cloth tied around their branches, evidence of a request to the sacred power residing in or near the tree that a wish be fulfilled. This is yet another custom shared by all the religious groups of Iraqi Kurdistan, and trees near the sacred spots of all religious groups often sport hundreds of small ribbons – including some made of chocolate and bubble gum wrappers, elastic hair bands, nylon socks and even sticker labels from water bottles (see plate 4 in the Gallery).

---

[31] Many traditional Yezidi shrines (or *mezars,* i.e., graves).

There are also many other little rituals, most of them rather playful and amusing, whose aim is to aid in the successful fulfilment of one's wishes. These playful rituals fulfil a double function: while the pilgrims see them as a quasi-magical means to realizing their wishes, on a deeper level they also promote communal solidarity among the pilgrims. Through creating laughter and a feeling of easy camaraderie, they bring to life what the anthropologist Victor Turner referred to as *communitas*,[32] a spontaneous and shared sense of belonging among strangers of diverse backgrounds brought together by pilgrimage.

Deep inside the *Parestgeh*, the Yezidi Central Sanctuary of Sheikh Adi in Lalish, in a tunnel-like room dug into the mountain-side, where jars of sacred olive oil for the lamps are kept, pilgrims, their eyes closed, try to throw a homespun cloth over a rather phallic looking piece of rock jutting out at the end of the room (see plates 5–6 in the Gallery). Each pilgrim has three tries, and if the cloth falls on the tip of the rock, sticking there, his or her secret wish will come true. During festivals long queues await their turn, while strangers cheer each other on. For them this is mostly an occasion for laughter, but for those who come to pray for help in a difficult situation, the ritual becomes one of great significance.[33] A Yezidi friend was enchanted to discover a similar practice in the Christian monasteries of Mar Matti, and of Raban Hormuzd in Alqosh,[34] when we visited together. In both places, in rooms dug deep into the mountain, pilgrims try to throw colourful handkerchiefs high in the air, hoping that they will get caught in the cracks and crags of the wall – a sign that their secret wish will come true.

In the shrine of Mehmed (or Mêm) Reshan at the foot of Meqlub Mountain, Yezidi pilgrims close their eyes, raise their arms before them and try to make a straight line to the opposite wall in the hope that they will be able to put their hands in a little niche blackened by the smoke of the sacred oil lamp burning there. In an inner chamber of the shrine, a member of the guardian family opens and closes the door three times, letting the same woman through each time. Both rituals are for wishes. In other places pilgrims have to balance three stones on each other, or else the guardian does it for them (see plate 7 in the Gallery). Hugging the "tree of wishes" has already been mentioned. All these rituals have their counterparts in Muslim and Christian places of pilgrimage. Not far from Erbil, on the road leading north to Duhok, a small cliff conceals a cave visited by many pilgrims (there are always cars standing in the small parking area below.) The cave is a kind of Muslim shrine dedicated to the revered founder of the Qadri Sufi order, Abdul Qadir Gilani, who is said to have hidden in this cave from his enemies for years. Left of the entrance, there are shallow holes in the blue-painted wall of the cave. Pilgrims try to balance small stones to make them stay in the

---

[32] Turner and Turner 1978, 250–53.

[33] And elderly Yezidi woman who came to pray for her sick daughter, happily told her family afterwards how each time the cloth fell square on the rock – in reality she missed the first two times, and the cloth found its target only at the last try.

[34] The former is a Syriac Orthodox and the latter is a Chaldean Catholic monastery.

holes of the wall to obtain the secret wishes of their heart (see plate 8 in the Gallery). Christians practice similar rituals in many of their churches. In the lower church in Alqosh there is said to be a cross carved into the wall. Pilgrims have to approach it with eyes closed and try to touch it – rather like pilgrims do in the Yezidi shrine of Mehmed Reshan. In the church of Mar Behnam pilgrims stick "gold" coins on the wall. If they do not fall, their wish will be granted.[35] I have also observed similar rituals in Eastern Turkey (Turkish Kurdistan.) In a pilgrimage place on the shore on Lake Van, for example, one had to throw small stones so that they stayed on a shelf in the rock face. Placing rounded stones on top of each other is said by informants from the region to be another widespread custom. The list of such shared little rituals could be continued ad infinitum, and they indicate the prevalence and lasting influence of interreligious contact among the different groups.

The above rituals are usually practiced during ordinary visits to sacred places, when people may simply come for a picnic, or as part of a holiday cycle, and they may or may not be taken seriously by the pilgrims. There are special rituals, however, for those who go to a holy place specifically to beseech the supernatural for help in cases of serious sickness or affliction. The methods of approaching the divine in such cases again reflect the strong contact, both diachronic and synchronic, among religious groups.

Some of the healing rituals connected with holy places can be traced back centuries, probably to late antiquity. One such ritual is incubation, that is, the practice of sleeping at a shrine. It was an important part of the cult of Asclepius, though it was also practiced in the case of other deities associated with healing.[36] After the arrival of Christianity, the sanctuaries of Asclepius and other pagan deities were taken over by the so-called healing-saints in the Eastern Mediterranean. The healing-saints inherited not only their roles as miraculous healers from the cult of their pagan predecessors, but also a number of other motifs, including the ritual of incubation.[37] Incubation was later also practiced at the tomb of various medieval saints.[38] Just as in the case of pagan temples, incubation at the shrines of healing-saints cured a range of illnesses. However, a new, special feature also appeared: the curing of demoniacs in the churches.[39] Demonic possession was a common complaint, including not only a list of different mental illnesses, but also epilepsy, as well as paralysis and aphasia caused by a stroke.[40] The sufferers were taken to the church to have the demons causing the affliction driven out. Medieval writers giving an account of the miracles taking place at the churches of healing-saints even claimed to have personally seen "the evil spirits

---

[35] For pressing and sticking coins against a wall or rock in Christian places of worship in Istanbul and the Black Sea region, especially in the past, see Couroucli 2012c, 129 and 131.

[36] It was practiced, for example, in the cults of Isis, Serapis, Dionysos, Amphiaraos, Pluto, or the Dioscuri. Hamilton 1906; Meier 1996; Hart, G. D. 2000.

[37] Hamilton 1906, 110–15; Gregory 1986; Esbroeck 1981; Vikan 1984; Hart 2000, 210–11; see also Ildikó Csepregi's paper in this volume.

[38] Talbot 2002, 153–73, passim.

[39] Hamilton 1906, 116.

[40] Talbot 2002, 158.

leaving the man when the saint drove them forth".[41] The cure of people possessed by evil spirits became a regular practice in churches, so much so that demonic possession was the most common complaint for seeking a miraculous cure in a holy place,[42] and churches became asylums for the insane.[43]

   One of the few places where this ancient practice of incubation is still continued, primarily for curing afflictions believed to have been caused by jinn or evil spirits, is Iraqi Kurdistan. These include, as noted above, not only mental disorders, from madness to depression and insomnia, but also inexplicable fits and sometimes paralysis caused by stroke. Christians have numerous places known for curing madness that are also visited, so they say, by Muslims. One of the most famous and intriguing of these is the church of Mar Behnam,[44] in the vicinity of the Christian town of Qaraqosh. Saint Behnam is a sort of "chtonian saint", an early martyr of Christianity, whose miraculous power emanates from under the earth concealing him. According to local legend, Behnam was the son of Nimrod, the pagan king who became the symbol of idolatry in the legends of the Middle East. Behnam's sister, Sara suffered from a mysterious skin disease. When the siblings heard how Mar Matti (that is, Saint Matti), who had settled on Mount Meqlub east of Mosul, preached the faith of Jesus and cured people through prayer, they went to see him. Mar Matti cured Sara, and she and her brother Behnam came to believe in Jesus and became baptized. Upon learning this, their father King Nimrod was seized by such a rage that he wanted to kill them. The siblings and forty of their friends fled, but Nimrod sent his army after them and they were caught and cut down where Behnam's church stands to this day, in the village of Khidir Ilyas (a Muslim village today). Their vindictive father wanted to burn their bodies to deny them the honour of a burial, but the earth opened and swallowed up the bodies of Behnam, Sara and their forty friends. They are still under the earth there,[45] and Behnam, now Mar Behnam, sends forth his healing powers from there. In the church raised where the bodies disappeared, there is a small room, and people suffering from mental disease must sleep inside this room for one night in order to be cured. Though lacking the legend of a similar chtonian saint, people also practice incubation at Mar Matti monastery. They sleep for a night or two in the church or in what they refer to as the cemetery, but what in reality is a room with an intricate ceiling carved into the mountainside, containing the ossuaries. If Mar Matti appears to

---

[41] Hamilton 1906, 116. These testimonies resemble the accounts according to which some Yezidis suffering from jinn possession claimed to have seen their torturers being killed by good jinn serving Yezidi holy beings and the families associated with them.

[42] According to Talbot, in Byzantium in the eight to tenth centuries, approximately one-third of the individuals seeking healing suffered from demonic possession. Talbot 2002, 158.

[43] Hamilton 1906, 116.

[44] The church and monastery were overrun by ISIS in the summer of 2014. According to videos posted on the web on 19 March 2015, ISIS blew up the tomb and part of the monastery.

[45] According to my informant, their mother, Shirin also believed in Jesus and she made a tunnel from her room to the place of her children's grave. The tunnel is still there.

the supplicants in their dream, yet another ancient motif of incubation and dream-healing, they will be cured.[46]

The practice of incubation did not end with the arrival of Islam, and it probably influenced the development of some non-orthodox practices among Muslims. The ritual of sleeping at the tomb of Sufi saints in search of a cure[47] is still practiced in Kurdistan, just as in many other traditional parts of the Muslim world.[48] In the mountains not far from Duhok, there is a mosque that houses the tomb of the Sufi saint Sheikh Nuradin Brifkani. Today it is mostly people from the south, especially from the traditional villages of the Goran plain and from Erbil, who come on pilgrimage here.[49] However, an old woman who grew up in an adjacent village told me that in her youth, before the "Islami" came (that is before Salafism, or Puritan Islamic movements) and told people to go to the doctor if they were sick, local people also came here seeking the saint's help.[50] Primarily, she said, it was used for curing mad people, who were made to sleep there and would then be cured, if God was willing. This information was confirmed by the *mullah* of the mosque. According to him, *majnun*, that is, people driven mad by the jinn, still come here, though less frequently, as most pilgrims have to come from afar. They come with their families, who make a sacrifice and say prayers, after which the afflicted man has to sleep by the tomb. Some stay for the whole night, others just for a while. In any case, if the patient falls asleep it is considered a good sign. The tomb also gives aid to pregnant women and those suffering from cancer; however, these do not practice incubation. Incubation at the shrine of Sufi saints is also said to be widely practiced in the region of the Goran tribes, who are famous for the veneration they pay to Sufi tombs.[51]

---

[46] A monk of the monastery claimed that all people, including Muslims, come and pray to the saint for intercession, but only Christians sleep there. Or rather, only Christians may sleep there. This may, however, be a recent development, reflecting the growing tension between the different communities. I heard that for years after the 2003 war local Christian police, manning the checkpoints leading to the shrine, allowed no Muslims to make a visit, though by 2011 Muslim visitors from Mosul were back. Admittedly, most of them seemed to have come for an outing in an idyllic place rather than for religious reasons.

[47] A practice much frowned upon by those who want to cleanse Islam of such "exogenous and superstitious accretions".

[48] Green 2003.

[49] During one of my visits to the mosque a family from Erbil arrived. First they claimed to have come only for a picnic, but eventually they admitted that they also came to pray to the saint to make the pregnancy of one of the women in the group safe and easy. Interestingly they seemed embarrassed about declaring the real reason for their visit, though it was unclear whether this was because talking about pregnancy is still a sensitive topic in the region, or because they felt a Westerner would disapprove of such a practice.

[50] She had to leave the village, just as did everybody else in all the villages here during the '80s, and was living in Duhok. She and her family were visiting their land near Brifke to pick some fruit, and gave me a lift. They did not visit the mosque in Brifke.

[51] The veneration of Sufi saints in the so-called Goran territory (not to be confused with Gorani speakers in Iran) is so far a completely un-researched topic. In Turkey I have encountered incubation at shrines of saints among Alevis (considered a Twelver-Shiite religious minority), though local Sunni Muslims also visit these Alevi places seeking miraculous cures.

Incubation to cure jinn-induced madness is also a well-known ritual among the Yezidis. Those seeking a cure must spend the night, or at least sleep, at the shrines dedicated to holy beings or *khas* specializing in curing madness.[52] Alternatively, they may have to sleep at the house of the members of the lineage believed to be descended from such *khas*. As has already been said above, Yezidis believe that such places have their own good jinn, serving the holy being and its descendants. Should some strange jinn approach their place, they attack and chase away or even kill these malignant jinn. These Yezidi *khas* themselves are said to be able to command the jinn, and not only their own, but even strange ones, so that even if their jinn familiars are themselves not strong enough, the *khas* may still be able to achieve a cure by commanding the hostile jinn to leave their victim alone. (Accordingly, "strange", that is non-Yezidi and especially Muslim and Jewish jinn may cause more trouble, as they are less likely to heed the word of the Yezidi holy beings.) Though there are stories about mad people being cured by merely stepping within such sacred precincts (and then being set upon again by the hostile jinn upon leaving), the accepted practice is for the patient to spend a length of time at sites endowed with such healing powers. Most people agree that the afflicted person has to sleep on the sacred ground for the *khas* and his jinn servants to be able to exercise their curative power.[53] Each shrine curing madness has a special place where the afflicted person should be laid down. If there is no shrine, then the afflicted person has to sleep in the house of the descendant of the *khas*, under a special sack hanging on the wall. This sack contains the sacred objects of the lineage as well as earth from the *khas'* shrine. There are differing opinions and customs as to the exact duration and period of the sleep required: the ideal, usually mentioned, is to stay the whole night. However, several shrine guardians were of the opinion that it is enough if the sufferer falls asleep for a while, whatever time of the day and for however long.[54]

According to Yezidis, madmen who display violent behaviour are best treated at the shrine of Pirê Khejal. When such a madman is taken to Pirê Khejal, his feet are bound by special iron manacles or cuffs, and he is ceremonially beaten with a sacred stick three times. After this (or so they say), he should fall asleep, and next day he is cured – provided God wills it so. Thus, for example, the mentally disturbed brother of my friends, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, was taken to Pirê Khejal's

---

[52] Such shrines are often built above or near caves.
[53] For a more detailed list of such Yezidi sites see Spät 2013.
[54] One member of the guardian family of Sakrê Jinn claimed that if the sufferer fell asleep for an hour, or even a quarter of an hour, he would be cured. If he did not fall asleep, but started crying, that was a good sign as well. He claimed that only "very mad" people needed to spend the entire night at one of the three places dedicated to Sakrê Jinn. The guardian of the shrine of Pirê Khejal in Sinjar showed the place where madmen had to sleep, inside the cave, but he insisted that the madmen didn't actually have to fall asleep, it was enough that they lay down while their family consumed the ritual meal in front of the shrine. Local people, however, believed that in order to be cured one had to fall asleep, and those who failed to do so were not cured.

place[55] in Baadre, during the violent phase of his sickness. Here he was tied up, ritually beaten with the stick, stayed for the night and was then sent home with the strict instruction not to wash for a week (an instruction often given at such Yezidi sacred sites – perhaps as a form of bodily sacrifice) or to see anybody. Unfortunately, he was not healed, which his family attributed to the fact that the latter instruction could not be observed: his father died in an accident five days later and the house was filled with people coming to take part in the traditional mourning ceremony. In another case, that of a little boy, the visit to the site of Pirê Khejal in Baadra and undergoing his rituals was perceived to have helped the child – at least according to the grandmother, my informant. The five-year-old child was a recent refugee in Germany, where he joined his father. Both of them reached the EU with the help of smugglers – a roaring trade in the region. After a few months, he started manifesting strange symptoms. As his grandmother described, he was always afraid and his body was seized with shaking from time to time. The local doctor could not help him, but told them – or so the grandmother claimed – that if they had been Christians he would have suggested taking the child to a church. It is somewhat doubtful if a German doctor would (and could) really give such advice, but in any case the parents brought the child back to Kurdistan.[56] He was taken to the shrine of Sit Habibi in Behzani, then to the shrine of Sakrê Jinn in Bozan, both much-visited places for curing jinn possession, but neither helped. Then he was taken to the house of Pirê Khejal in Baadre. His feet were tied together with iron cuffs, and he had to lie like that the whole night in the room dedicated to healing. He was also told not to wash himself for a week. When I spoke with the grandmother, two months after the event, she insisted that the child's condition had improved greatly following the visit to Pîr Khejal and that his attacks or strange fits of shaking had become much less frequent. He had not had a fit in the last fifteen days, she reported.

Iron manacles or collars fixed to the ends of chains are also used for similar purposes by Christians. I have seen pilgrims in the monasteries of both Mar Matti and of Alkosh put an iron collar, chained to the wall, around their neck in a wishing ritual. However, the real use of these iron collars is for healing sick people, especially the mad. As a Christian woman, originally from Alkosh reported, the iron collar in the monastery is put around the neck of the mentally ill individual, who is then left

---

[55] The sites dedicated to Pirê Khejal are not necessarily shrines in the formal sense of the word. In Baadre his "place" is a special building next to the house of the guardian of Pirê Khejal, much like the *diwan* or guest room of community leaders, (though people claim that somewhere under it there is a cave, and one can occasionally hear the voices of the jinn coming from it.) In the village of Kheter, Pirê Khejal's place is effectively in the guest room of the guardian family; this is where the patient has to lie down, next to the *sterk* or small, altar-like construction dedicated to Pirê Khejal. It is only in the Sinjar Mountain that Pirê Khejal was honored with a shrine – but even here, what really counts is the cave under the shrine. The cave has a separate entrance, and the shrine seems to be a recent addition.

[56] Though theoretically this would mean losing their status as refugees, there are well-tested ways to avoid having an Iraqi stamp put in one's passport.

sitting or lying there. If the collar falls open of its own accord, the madman will be cured. According to Christian informants, similar collars for curing sickness (and ful-filling wishes) exist in other Christian churches as well (for example in the church of Saint George in Mosul).[57] That Yezidis also make pilgrimages to these Christian sites to undergo the ritual of the iron collar is demonstrated by the recollections of a female Yezidi seer in her late forties. When around the age of eight she first started suffering from strange afflictions that are usually the harbingers of a person becom-ing a seer, her father, believing her to be possessed by the jinn, took her to Alkosh. (It must be mentioned that she is from the Sinjar Mountain, quite far from Alkosh.) Here she spent, or so she remembers, an hour with the chain around her neck, while the Christian priest prayed. The priest also gave her some soil, though she claims that he did so at the request of her father. Using earth taken from a sacred place for pro-curing a blessing and healing is widespread practice among Yezidis,[58] and it is possible that the priest merely acted on the impulse of satisfying a supplicant from a different religio-cultural background, a fascinating thought, but the practice is not unknown among Christians either, as we shall see below (though I have not heard it reported from Alkosh.)

The Power of Sacred Soil

The notion that divine power is tangibly accessible and in fact commodifiable in the form of soil or dust taken from places associated with saintly or supernatural figures can be found in one form or another in the popular religious culture of the various communities. The practice of using soil from a sacred place for procuring a blessing and affecting a cure is based on the belief that the earth itself around such places has been imbued with the power of the holy personage. The power emanating from such earth can even be transported.

---

[57] A similar ritual practice was observed by Çiçek Ilengiz in a former Armenian village in the Der-sim region of Turkey. At the sacred spot dedicated to Yeşil Evliya ("Green Saint"), people suffering from what is perceived as madness are tied to a tree. If the ropes open of their own accord while the family performs a blood sacrifice and consumes the meat of the animal, the sufferer is believed to have been cured. Sometimes the afflicted person is left there all night, in the hope that the ropes may unravel. Personal communication by Çiçek Ilengiz (Max Planck Institute, Göttingen). See also "wonder-working" chains in Wolper 2014, 386. Bowman reports that in the Mar Elyas monastery near Bethlehem people would queue up in front of a large icon of St George during the feast of the Prophet Elijah, visited by both Muslims and Christians. The attraction, as Bowman says, is not the icon, but the length of chain looped before it, which people then pass over their heads and bodies. Both Christians and Muslims agreed that they had come to receive a prophylac-tic blessing from the chain, but while Christians believed that the ritual is efficacious because Elias or Saint George acts through the chain, Muslims argued that "the chain simply worked to warn off madness, other illnesses and bad fortune" Bowman 2012a, 14.

[58] See more below.

The use (and transportation) of soil taken from sacred places can be traced back to at least the earliest centuries of Christianity. Syriac sources, especially hagiographies, write about the miraculous power attributed to the dust collected from the dwelling place or tomb of a saint, to which a "blessing" was conveyed through contact with the saint. This dust was known as *hnana*.[59] *Hnana* was used to anoint the body, or occasionally was drunk mixed with water. It cured even the most baffling and serious of illnesses, chased away demons and protected one against all kind of calamities. Some people carried *hnana* with them as a blessing and as a way to ward off evil.[60] The use of sacred dust from the tomb of a saint seems to have survived, at least in the church of St Behnam, among the Christians of Northern Iraq.[61] In this church, there is[62] a subterraneous room with a hole in its floor. During the feast of St Behnam, dust is taken from this hole and is sprinkled on people's heads as a blessing and a prophylactic against diseases. If someone is sick, and cannot attend, he or she may ask someone else to bring some of the dust.

The notion that the *barakat* (blessing or supernatural power) of "holy men" was somehow transmitted to the soil can also be found among Muslims. In some of the villages of the Kurdish mountains of Iraq, the soil from the tomb of the local saint used to be consumed as a kind of panacea against all ills.[63] It is uncertain, though, whether this custom has survived the forced relocations and urbanization of the Ba'ath era, when most mountain villages were abandoned, along with the tombs of local saints and associated rituals.[64]

Soil from sacred places still carries great importance in Yezidi religious culture. Yezidis believe that the soil of a holy place or shrine is impregnated by the power of the *khas* or holy being to whom the place is dedicated. Thus, the earth from a sacred site is believed to possess supernatural properties, and has a prominent place in a number of rituals associated with *ziyaret* places. Pilgrims visiting holy places have a small spot of mud – earth from the place, mixed with water – smeared on their faces, and sometimes on their upper chest as well, by a member of the guardian family. This is a *nishan*, a sign that they have made a pilgrimage, while at the same time it secures a blessing and *selamet*[65] for the pilgrim. Most guardians also keep a container filled with soil from the shrine close at hand (in some shrines there is even a special niche for this purpose carved into the wall near the door.) This sacred soil is called *toberga*,

---

[59] The dust/earth from the place or tomb of a saint could also be called *manna* or *eulogia*. *Eulogia*, literally 'blessing' in Greek, was also used to refer to oil and holy water from a church. All three were believed to have great prophylactic power. See Vikan 1984, 68–73.

[60] For a more detailed treatment of *hnana* as well as Yezidi *toberga* and *berat* see Spät 2013, 120–24.

[61] As the church was built above the spot where St Behnam's body was swallowed up by the earth, it is, to all purposes, the martyr's tomb, and the earth under the church is sanctified by the "presence" of the saint.

[62] Or rather, sadly, there used to be.

[63] Kaya, 2006.

[64] The soil of Kerbala is also widely believed to have special powers due to the blood of martyrs.

[65] This word is hard to translate. Literally, it means 'security', or 'well-being'; in this context it can best be translated as 'blessing' or 'protection against all ills'.

and many pilgrims ask for small packages of *toberga* to take home, wrapped up in the corner of a woman's scarf, or these days more often in transparent plastic bags or coloured pieces of paper. Such packages may be gifts for family members or neighbours who were unable to make the pilgrimage, or may even be sent to relatives living in the Western diaspora. Many take home *toberga* as a kind of medicine to cure sickness. According to an elderly woman (who grew up in Sinjar), when she was a young girl back home, *toberga* was administered to a sick person in the following way: in the morning, when the sun rose, a young unmarried girl mixed the soil with water, using a wooden spoon. Then she turned toward the sun,[66] saying: "Oh Sheikh Shems, protect us, lift this sickness from this sick person." Then she anointed first the forehead of the sick person, then the forehead of other family members, and a chicken was sacrificed. Sometimes, on the advice of the guardian of a shrine or of a seer,[67] the sick person had to drink the *toberga* mixed with water. This ritual is still followed by some people, though these days most sick people would consume the *toberga* without their whole family participating in the ritual. In other cases, people smear the mud obtained by mixing the earth from a sacred place with water (preferably from a sacred spring) on the sick body part. The greatest power is attributed to the soil of Lalish, the sacred valley of the Yezidis. Soil from Lalish protects against every illness and problem. This is distributed not only as a *toberga*, but also in the form of small balls, called *berat*. *Berats* are made from the soil collected in a small cave in Lalish, mixed with sacred water and some salt and covered in gypsum. The *berat* brings blessing, protects against all kind of calamities, and can be found in every Yezidi household. Even some Yezidis living in the Western diaspora are known to carry this *berat* around with them in order that it save them from all kind of disasters. Drinking three times from a glass of water with a *berat* dropped in it is part of the marriage ceremony.[68] People are buried with *berat* in their mouth and over their eyes.

Conclusion

The numerous striking similarities and common details in the rituals of the different religious communities of Northern Iraq beseeching the supernatural for help attest to the fact that interfaith pilgrimage – that is, visiting each others' sacred places and participating in each other's rituals – is a centuries-old practice. As Glenn Bowman writes, "Knowing that certain visits and the rituals involved therein have worked for neigh-

---

[66] Other Yezidis have said they turn toward Lalish.

[67] Seers tell their clients which shrine to go to with their problem, and what to do with the earth and possibly spring water brought from there. This may include consuming the soil, drinking the water, making mud to smear on the aching parts, or putting the earth in a small pouch worn as an amulet around the neck or hidden in the clothing.

[68] This is the ritual of making a "brother/sister of the hereafter", which has to take place before a Yezidi can be wed. See Spät, "Displacement, Loss and Transformation: Yezidi Ritual Life in Iraq", forthcoming.

bours of other religions, they mimic those activities … in the hope that such copying will produce the same effects for them, despite confessional differences."[69] This mimicking may lead, in the long run, to the adoption of the religious Other's ritual within the framework of one's own pilgrimage traditions, as is demonstrated by the examples above. While common rituals stand to prove that crossing boundaries is an inherent feature of the religious landscape of Northern Iraq, the phenomenon of religious crossover itself reflects on the complex and mutually fertile relationship between the different communities. The historical relationship between the different communities is often perceived as antagonistic, or at least conceived within a framework of social inferiority and superiority, and the followers of the different groups may today claim (and believe) that their religious traditions are mutually exclusive. However, the above cases of religious crossover tell a different story, demonstrating that crossing religious boundaries in the hope of receiving succour from the supernatural power(s) revered by the religious Other was, and remains, a lasting feature of the religious and social landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan (see plate 9 in the Gallery).

References

Albera, Dionigi and Maria Couroucli, eds. 2012. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP.

Albera, Dionigi and Benoit Fliche. 2012. "Muslim Devotional Practices in Christian Shrines: The case of Istanbul." In Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries,* 94–117. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP.

Ammann, Birgit. 2014. "The Kurdish Jewish Communities – Lost Forever." In Khanna Omarkhali, ed. *Religious Minorities in Kurdistan: Beyond the Main Stream,* 272–300. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Bowmann, Glenn. 2012a. "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia." In Albera and Couroucli, eds., 10–28.

–. ed. 2012b. *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places.* New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Brauer, Erich and Raphael Patai. 1993: *The Jews of Kurdistan.* Detroit: Wayne State UP.

Cormack, Margaret, ed. 2013. *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Couroucli, Maria. 2012a. "Chthonian Spirits and Shared Shrines: The Dynamics of Place among Christians and Muslims in Anatolia." In Glenn Bowman, ed., *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy Places,* 44–60. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

–. 2012b. "Introduction: Sharing Sacred Places – A Mediterranean Tradition." In Albera and Couroucli, eds.*,* 2–9.

–. 2012c. "Saint George the Anatolian: Master of Frontiers." In Albera and Couroucli, eds., 118–140.

---

[69] Bowman 2012a, 19.

Esbroeck, M. van. 1981. "La diffusion orientale de la légende des saints Cosme et Damien." In Pierre Riché et Evelyne Patlagean, dir., *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IV–XII. Siècles,* 61–77. Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes.

Green, Nile. 2003. "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam. *Journal or the Royal Asiatic Society* 13 (3): 287–313.

Gregory, T. E. 1986. "The Survival of Paganism in Christian Greece." *American Journal of Philology* 107: 229–42.

Hamilton, Mary. 1906. *Incubation, or the Cure of Disease in Pagan Temples and Christian Churches.* London: Henderson and Son.

Hart, Gerald D. 2000. *Asclepius, the God of Medicine.* London: Royal Society of Medicine Press.

Hart, Kimberly. 2009. "The Orthodoxization of Ritual Practice in Western Anatolia." *American Ethnologist* 36 (4): 735–49.

Hasluck, Frederick William. 1929. *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans.* Vol 1. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Hunter, Erica. 2014. "Coping in Kurdistan: The Christian Diaspora." In Khanna Omarkhali, ed., *Religious Minorities in Kurdistan: Beyond the Main Stream,* 321–37. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Kaya, Ibrahim. 2006. "Metina, My Village." *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 20 (1–2): 199–208.

Kreyenbroek, Philip. 1995. *Yezidism, Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition.* Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

–. 2005. *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition.* Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz.

Meier, C. A. 1996. "The Dream in Ancient Greece and Its Use in Temple Cures (Incubation)." In G. von Grunebaum and R. Caillois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies,* 303–19. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Meri, Joseph W. 2002. *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Pócs, Éva, szerk. 2018. *Áldozat, istenítélet, divináció. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben.* [Religious Ethnological Concepts in Interdisciplinary Approach] Tanulmányok a transzcendensről IX. Budapest: Balassi.

Sabar, Ariel. 2009. *My Father's Paradise.* Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

Sered, Susan. 1998. *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem.* New York and Oxford: Oxford UP.

Shwartz-Be'eri, Ora. 2000. *The Jews of Kurdistan: Daily Life, Customs, Arts and Crafts.* Jerusalem: The Israel Museum.

Spät, Eszter. 2005. *Yezidis.* London: Saqi Books.

–. 2013. "On Soil and Jinn: Ritual Practices and Syncretism among the Yezidis of Iraq." In Andreas H. Pries, Laetitia Martzolff, Robert Langer, und Claus Ambos, Hrsgs, *Rituale als Ausdruck von Kulturkontakt: "Synkretismus" zwischen Negation und Neudefinition,* 111–30. Studies in Oriental Religions 67. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

–. Forthcoming. "Displacement, Loss and Transformation: Yezidi Ritual Life in Iraq." In Khanna Omarkhali and Philip Kreyenbroek, eds., *Yezidism between Continuity and Transformation.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Talbot, Alice-Mary. 2002. "Pilgrimage to Healing Sites: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56: 153–73.

Tapper, Nancy and Tapper, Richard. 1987. "'Thank God We're Secular!' Aspects of Fundamentalism in a Turkish Town." In Lionel Caplan, ed., *Studies in Fundamentalism in a Turkish Town,* 51–78. Albany: SUNY Press.

Turner, Victor and Turner, Edith. 1978. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture.* New York: Columbia UP.

Vikan, Gary. 1984. "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38: 65–86.

Wolper, Ethel Sara. 2014. "Khidr and the Politics of Translation in Mosul: Mar Behnam, St George and Khidr Ilyas." In Mohammad Gharipour, ed., *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World,* 379– 92. Leiden: Brill.

ALTERNATIVES TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Anne-Marie Losonczy

Dealing with Doubt through
Performative Misunderstandings

The ethnographic theme developed in this article concerns the international *ayahuasca* itineraries that connect Europe and South America. It rests on the analysis of interactional and communicative processes that produce, support, and feed the discourses, practices, and rituals that connect the ritualized consumption of *ayahuasca* to the activation of the category of "shamanism." Within this frame, *ayahuasca* and its rituals have become one of the most prominent shamanic practices linking Europe and South America.

Our approach is based on multi-sited fieldwork conducted by Silvia Mesturini Cappo in shamanic localities representative of western shamanic tourism in both Europe and South America from 2004 to 2010, and on the fieldwork conducted by Anne-Marie Losonczy in Medellin (Colombia) and Bogotà (2006–2012).[1] It incorporates a theoretical thought-in-progress, which aims to understand the articulation of representation, discourse, and ritual in different settings and situations where ethnic, *mestizo,* and international ritual experts meet each other and offer services to those who belong to these equally different cultural and social backgrounds.

The purpose of this text is to present a hypothesis that can shed some light on the nature of the interactions supporting and feeding a particular relational field resulting from the internationalization of rituals and discourses labelled as "shamanic", particularly those centred around the ritualized consumption of *ayahuasca.* Confronted with the bipolarity of discursive categories such as "Western" and "Indigenous", we shall suggest an analysis elucidating the patterns at work in many successful intercultural communication settings that we have observed during fieldwork. Our argumentation

---

[1] Most localities in Europe were linked to a middle-high class population residing in the capital cities of Belgium, France, Holland, and Spain. As far as South America is concerned, following the shamanic label had led to two main hot spots of the "shamanic" ayahuasca rituality: Iquitos and Cusco (Peru). Nevertheless, the triple frontier of Northern Peru, Brazil, and Colombia, the Amazonian border-zone between Peru and Ecuador, and capital cities such as Lima (Peru), Medellin (Colombia), and Buenos Aires (Argentina) have also permitted pertinent fieldwork.

is rooted in the classic thought of Marshall Sahlins concerning "working misunderstanding" between different cultural systems.[2] It is also inspired by the innovative work of Veronique and Christine Servais[3] that has illuminated a particular communication pattern, based on misunderstanding, by challenging the classical definition of "good" and/or "successful" communication as the exact decoding of a transmitted message through the study of interpersonal interactions between humans and dolphins.

Our work investigates the manner in which ritualized interactions centred on the collective consumption of *ayahuasca* become "stabilized metalinguistic devices".

In fact, together with the metalinguistic effect of ritual action, explicit verbal communication may also contribute to the production or consolidation of misunderstanding. In this case, misunderstanding would arise from, and rest on, explicit verbal exchanges concerning what it is possible to agree on and what is not, and what is translatable, omissible, or synonymous and what is not.

These ritualized devices, both metalinguistic and verbal, allow for the joint construction of a third category of conversational partners, which may be referred to as "spirits" or "inner selves". The misunderstanding that emerges from our ethnographic material stands exclusively around and within a ritualization process and is inscribed and framed by larger cultural and social codes whose restraints can push the partners' misunderstanding beyond the acceptable limits and therefore lead to a communication breaking point. These cultural and social codes, which reproduce historical inequalities and asymmetries, constitute what we shall analyze here as "context".

Ritualized misunderstanding stages an historical "working misunderstanding"[4] between "Westerners" and "Natives" and therefore creates new intercultural contexts. It is, at the same time, the means by which an agreement is made concerning the content of ritual action. It is also what allows for the ritual action to take place and what constructs and establishes its effectiveness. Because of what it allows to create and to legitimate the type of misunderstanding we will be treating here is not entirely a "working misunderstanding" in Sahlins' manner, nor a structural misunderstanding as it appears in Servais and Servais' model, but a *performative* one, both ritually co-constructed and verbally negotiated, between partners who both find their own benefit in misunderstanding one another in order to agree with one another.

In a first and basic misunderstanding setting, supporting the interactions observed in the field, we have identified two different doubting logics each of which responds to a different uncertainty register. The analysis of these two logics throws light upon the way "ritualized misunderstanding" creates and supports interaction and communication between actors who incarnate these different ways of doubting.

---

[2] Sahlins 1982, 73–102.
[3] Servais et Servais 2009.
[4] Sahlins 1982, 73–102.

Healing "Fright" or Searching for Proof of Spirit Existence?

The emergence of uncertainty
between ontological doubt and epistemic doubt

What drives diverse populations to approach *ayahuasqueros* and to drink *ayahuasca*? Beyond the various expressions of these motivations in the international landscape of shamanism, a common quest seems to underlie and bind *ayahuasca* drinkers despite their social and cultural differences. Studying this quest leads us to consider the notion of "uncertainty", and the "search for a way out of uncertainty", as central to the comprehension of the communication dynamics that permit an ethnic and traditional version of *ayahuasca* rituality and an internationalized one to coexist. The common search for a way out of uncertainty reveals the existence of two main cultural logics.

Numerous Amazonian shamanic systems are based on an implicit theory of metamorphosis relating all beings evoked in myths and cosmogonies: humans, spirits, animals, and plants. The possibility of "reversible transformation" is part of this metamorphosis and translates into a temporary change of bodily form and appearance. This capacity is consubstantial to the spirits, and, through apprenticeship, becomes a skill of the initiated shaman. The sharing of this competence between the shaman and the spirits is an essential part of the shamanic identity and its specificity.[5] It also allows for the emergence of narratives concerning the multiple encounters, casual or wished for, with beings whose identities have yet to be determined.

Animal tutelary spirits are likely to appear to hunters and fishers during the daytime, particularly in wild places within the local geography, and in either animal or human form. Experienced shamans can, during ritual celebrations or after their death, leave their human appearance and take on that of various predatory animals. In the nocturnal dreamtime of the non-shamans, unidentified living forms, spirits or shamans appear. Their encounters are often loaded with danger for the dreamer's life and soul. In this manner, narratives belonging to ordinary everyday conversations may evoke daytime or dreamtime encounters with beings whose identities and intentions are uncertain, and which often predict illness for the individual and misfortune for the family. Thus, a permanent uncertainty emerges regarding the meaning of those encounters as well as the identity and intentions of the encountered beings. If the being has predatory features, the physical and psychological impact left by the encounter can turn into something called "the fright"[6] in vernacular languages.

Identification of the encountered figures, clarification of their intentions, and a diagnosis of their impact, together with the management of the interactions taking place between the person and those beings, are primordial motives for the solicitation of shamanic competences, and also for the ritual drinking of *ayahuasca*. Thus, the task falls upon the shaman to offer a way out of the uncertainty by assigning a specific

---

[5] See on this matter Chaumeil 1988; Losonczy 2006.
[6] Deshayes 2002.

identity to the encountered form, elucidating its purposes and effects, and determining the ways appropriate to restore well-being. In Amazonian societies where *ayahuasca* consumption has long been a local custom, or where it may have only recently become such, the shaman fulfils his or her task through the interpretation of physical symptoms and of the visions induced by the consumption of the substance.

In the context of the international itineraries binding Europe and South America through the circulation of a commercial supply and demand of *ayahuasca* rituality, the primary approach of the users tends to include an initial phase involving consultation of testimonial literature or shamanic websites and forums. We have argued in previous writings that this discursive approach to the *ayahuasca* experience creates a set of preformatted expectations that the ritual experts must manage and which will influence the actual lived experiences.[7] Within the frame of this seemingly formatted and homogenous discourse, the most evoked themes concern a personal unwellness connected with past experiences, or with what are regarded as the consequences of a fundamentally damaging Western urban life style. In this context, the search that leads to *ayahuasca* and its experts binds individual physical, psycho-emotional, and/or relational issues with an underlying existentialist ontological uncertainty concerning the possibility of believing that "there is something out there", that spirits may actually be "real" or that there could be such thing as a "soul" or as a "spiritual world". Such are the uncertainties with which this particular public approaches the *ayahuasca* milieu and for which the consumption of the beverage and the participation in the ritual space must represent some kind of a "way out". The visions achieved during the sessions, the physical effects that appear as a purge and purification and the interpretations of shamans and those of other participants all contribute to the construction of a new ontological and existentialist certitude.

As presented previously, the uncertainty characterizing the ethnic search for *ayahuasca* rituality emerges from a certainty background that concerns the existence of spirits, the potential impact of their powers, and the control that the shaman can have over them. Unlike the Western adepts, their doubt is related to the identities of those who are seen in dreamlike states – in savage zones, or during *ayahuasca* sessions – and the impact of these encounters on the resources, the relationships, and the health of those meeting them. All these elements suggest the existence of an underlying *epistemic doubt.*

In contrast, in the second logic, the primary uncertainty concerns the existence and the "reality" of beings and entities that cannot be perceived through ordinary perception. This doubt leads to the quest for an *ontological certainty.* Within this logic, once this basic certainty is constructed and validated by both the individual and the collective, the visionary *ayahuasca* experience and the spirits are represented as having stable forms, identities, purposes, and appearances. These entities are often seen as closely related to typical Christian figures – such as the Devil, or demons and angels – that reactivate the binary logic dividing "good" from "evil". When the spirits are seen

---

[7] See Cappo 2010; Losonczy et Cappo 2011.

as animal spirits or plant spirits inspired by the Amazonian cosmogonies, the identity and the intentions of these entities are described as totally stable, exclusively positive, totally certain, and far more powerful than any shaman.

In these two sociologically and culturally different frames, *ayahuasca* appears as a ritualized, mobile apparatus that is likely to offer a way out of uncertainty. This occurs even though, in the first case, it represents a powerful means of handling the possible relationship between humans and spirits and, in the second case, it becomes a primary means of validating their existence. Nevertheless, this common cognitive function related to uncertainty allows for communication between Amazonian shamans and Western clients. This gets condensed in the sharing of common images, such as those of plant and animal spirits, although the meaning given to these terms is different. The misunderstanding setting materializes each time an indigenous or mestizo shaman holds an *ayahuasca* session for the Western urban public. Thanks to shared emotions and common speech, they can both interact, thereby creating an agreement whose condition of performance rests on the fact that the actors involved do not actually understand each other.

The divergences in the agencies of doubt within the two logics pointed out above do not exclude the idea that the existence of doubt itself can create a conduit between the two, a bridge made of common speech items and similar sentiment of doubt and anguish. We might then conclude that each partner reads the other's doubts in the light of his own.

"Epistemic doubt" – proper to ethnic and mestizo milieus – rests on a tacit knowledge of myths that narrate the birth of those entities, and also on the numerous narratives that belong to everyday conversation about casual encounters with them. Since such encounters are considered common, the epistemic doubt that they awaken goes together with everyday life events. Time and time again, it leads to consulting the shaman, thus producing and validating the ritual and the shamanic interpretative system. "Ontological doubt" – which we have also called "existential doubt" – is what pushes the Western audience towards shamanic rituals and *ayahuasca* drinking. The visionary experience and its shamanic interpretation in terms of "spirit presence" imply, for participants, the validation of an ontological system and the emergence of a certainty, which is not partial, but global. Because of this, the Western public shows a common tendency to look for a renewed experience of transcendence through "spirits", who represent an alternative to the divine entity of the monotheist religions of their cultures of origin; an entity in which, it seems, they no longer manage to "believe" and who is fundamentally characterized by a sort of "speechlessness", or at least, by the absence of relational competence and discursive exchange.

For the Western audience as well as for the ethnic and *mestizo* milieus, those doubts, always renewed, form a sort of ritual residue that leads both parties to a periodic repetition of ritual action.[8] Doubt and certainty function as interdependent partners assessing the reproduction of ritual interaction. Even so, the reappearance of

---

[8] Losonczy 1988.

ontological doubt among the Western audience can cause for them an invalidation of the shamanic system as a whole, and eventually the abandonment of the *ayahuasca* networks. For those who witness such an exit and for the shamans themselves who "stay behind", the invalidation of the whole system leads to a type of interpretation in which evil spirits or dark forces are accused of misleading the person; an interpretation that preserves the validity of the system as a whole.

What is a Spirit?
Dealing with Doubts of Misfortune between Sorcery and Psychology

Seeking recourse in *ayahuasca* or in shamanic ritual work in ethnic, mestizo or Western milieus is almost always prompted by the emergence of a disorder in the daily life of the individual, the family, or the collective. This disorder often appears in the ethnic and mestizo milieus as an accumulation of negative events regarding the body or the possessions of individuals and/or their close family members. This sequence of negative events, which classical British ethnology has united under the concept of "misfortune",[9] has become the foundation for a sorcery-based interpretation that points to human malevolence as the origin of such sequences. The discourse of Western urban users often evokes a diffuse unwellness as a recourse motivation, one that is often described in psycho-emotional terms even when it includes physical symptoms. Therefore, this interpretation situates the source of malady inside everyone's interior individual realm.

Fieldwork has shown how local Amazonian *ayahuasqueros* do not separate their comprehension and use of *ayahuasca* from the task of protecting their local clients and family members from magical or supernatural attacks originating in the malevolence of spirits, who wander in the surrounding environment or are sent by another *ayahuasquero* acting in the interest of a rival social group or individual. In a more strictly Amazonian ethnic context, the collective and periodical ingestion of the substance, along with the visions that it generates, is used by the group members to learn how to master the fear caused by forest encounters with unidentified entities whose intentions are unclear, or how to handle the confrontation with animal protector spirits during hunting expeditions. However, in both these contexts, the power of the shaman and the power of the spirits – including the power of the *ayahuasca* – are represented as being as much at the service of protection and misfortune reparation as they are of malevolent aggression.

In contrast, the Western audience tends to refuse to interpret any feeling of unwellness as the result of a voluntary malevolence of others, and longs instead for an interpretation of *ayahuasca* rituality based on individual experience and on the possibility

---

[9] Evans-Pritchard 1965.

of transcending individual psychological blocks or emotional traumas due to negative past experiences.

This confronts two different causality frameworks and two different interpretations of *ayahuasca* usage: on the one hand, we have a sorcery-based interpretation in which *ayahuasca* is a means of looking beyond that which is ordinarily visible in order to evacuate malevolent spirits from the person's body or environment through a dream-state magical combat led exclusively by the shaman. On the other, this same dream-state is evoked as a field of experimentation, as a search for personal psychological issues, and as a field of transcendence and resolution of those same issues. This search appears as an exercise led individually by each participant, during which the shaman is merely asked to perform the role of guide and counsellor.

These two interpretations seem to have found a translation compromise, owing to the idea, or the image, that each person must lead his own combat against his own issues. These images are sometimes interpreted, or translated, as malevolent spirits inhabiting the person's body and mind. Thanks to a "synonymy effect", full of ambiguity and blurriness, which puts spirits and sorcery on the same plane as psychological and emotional states, a metaphorical continuum seems to be created between those two frameworks, which are then able to communicate. The visions that emerge during the *ayahuasca* session, often preformatted by the recent literature and the numerous web sites on the subject, confront Western users with entities interpreted by the shaman as either figures that incarnate psycho-emotional states such as fear, sadness, sorrow, and guilt or as custodial entities of "good" and "evil" inspired by Christianity such as angels, demons, devils, etc.

Within this process, psychological states often related to traumatic past experiences become "third party communicational partners", against whom the battle can be fought with the help of the shaman and of the *ayahuasca*. In this frame, *ayahuasca* plays the role of an exclusively benevolent entity that is collaborating in a process of psychological and physical purging conducted under the surveillance of a shaman, who tends to be perceived as a transcended and enlightened human being.

However, if this shifting of meaning and interpretation seems functional as far as the encounter and sharing between local *ayahuasqueros* and foreigners is concerned, it refers to the permanence of fundamentally divergent ways of conceiving the social environment as well as one's place and role within this environment. The sorcery-based interpretation reveals itself as highly competent at handling long-term genealogical and social relations within a context of relatively steady and settled communities. In contrast, the psychologically based framework seems particularly well adapted to handle socially isolated individuals coming from a highly urbanized context.

The designation of third party disorder "agents", which are incarnated in figures that the Western public manages to treat as "real" thanks to the experience of *ayahuasca* drinking and to the shamanic discourse surrounding it, is a point of convergence between these two logics. The notion of "spirits" – a Spanish and Portuguese term (*espiritus*) commonly adopted by regional mestizo shamanism – is used by West-

ern, mestizo, and indigenous experts and users alike. The shared usage of this notion helps to conceal divergence regarding, on the one hand, the profiles of indigenous supernatural entities belonging to a realm co-extensive with humans and, on the other hand, those belonging to the individual's psycho-emotional realm, which nevertheless persist as part of everyone's psychic space.

In both interpretations, the *ayahuasca* appears as an entity enabling those who drink it to see other entities, and to interact with them. Nonetheless, what is being perceived, and the answers that the visions and the experience are supposed to bring about, are additional manifestations of divergence and misunderstanding. In the Western conception, experimentation with this substance is supposed to deliver an answer to an ontological quest which ultimately concerns what is "real" and what is "beyond" the commonly perceived reality. Once again, a divergence appears when we compare this type of fundamental search for a unique, universal reality with the local request for solutions to pragmatic everyday life problems.

This divergence is followed by another regarding the temporality of reference evoked in the explanation of malady and misfortune. In indigenous and mestizo interpretation, the causes for disorder are commonly linked with conflicting interests and hostilities associated with the current local, social, and relational context. In contrast, the Western discourse that underlies the quest for *ayahuasca* drinking frames the causes of the present situation of being or feeling unwell within the realm of past experience.

Therefore, the preservation of doubt and uncertainty as of a communicational blur concerning the nature of spirits, their possible or impossible ambivalence, and the regimes of causality that can be evoked to explain and justify each individual life situation, effectively produce a permanent misunderstanding which makes interaction possible and which preserves both the freedom of interpretation and the core of each individual's cultural code and the motivation for ritual repetition in both interpretation registers. Nevertheless, mestizo shamanic practice and its intertwining with popular Christian practices creates an interfacing set of representations which allow for a ritualized transformation of "angels" and "demons" into "spirits", as well as opening the way to the transformation of "fears" and "traumas" into "spirits". The permanent shifting, typical of mestizo practice, between these different entities constructs a space of mediation between indigenous representations and those underlying Western expectations. The verbal dimension of the ritualized misunderstanding, which rests on the management of these synonymy effects, obeys the "circular discourse" logic. Therefore, the verbal exchanges also become ritualized devices, which progressively construct potentially shared and ritually functional meanings and legitimate the enunciating and acting position of both parties.

Conclusions

Multi-sited ethnography has shown that, no matter how different the speech and practices surrounding *ayahuasca* may be, this beverage seems to function as a ritual device capable of opening a relational field that allows people who were previously spatially separated to meet and interact in a common ritual frame while remaining culturally and socially distinct. This meeting stimulates a process of communication and exchange that rests on ritually framed mutual misunderstandings that create, time and time again, the perception of a mutual agreement, expressed in shared ritual action. And it is precisely the existence of incomprehension regarding various aspects of the cultural patterns at stake that creates concatenated misunderstandings. These misunderstandings – fed by the obliteration, the unspoken, and the blurriness caused by synonymy effects, or, additionally, by the intervention of superhuman partners – are at the core of the mutual satisfaction of the communication partners and lead to the reproduction of ritual interaction. The underlying motivation that leads to communication and to performative misunderstanding processes is grounded in the framing of uncertainty and in the resolution of doubt. Notwithstanding the difference of cultural codes that translate into different doubting logics, the capacity of ritual action to reabsorb uncertainty and doubt seems at the core of ritual enhancement and repetition. Furthermore, the expression of doubt is part of the shared discourse of ritual participants and as such, it participates in the creation of subjectively felt effectiveness.

The blur that allows for a shifting among the categories of "spirits", "traumas", "psychic states", and "psychic entities" leads to a constant creation and redefinition of third parties' partners who are available for interaction during the ritual sessions. These interactions always take place through the management of emotion, and this represents, once again, a communicational field where different cultural logics are at work.

It is possible to demonstrate that, although "misunderstanding" as a communicational structure can be detected in most human interactions,[10] the intercultural encounter settings – hosting practices, objects, or discourses related to shamanic *ayahuasca* rituality – construct certain specific patterns of misunderstanding. These patterns all contribute to the *performativity of ritualized misunderstanding*, pertinent for the analysis of other modalities of intercultural encounter. In this sense, the present text offers only a preliminary illustration of the utility of this approach.

We have shown how misunderstanding disperses into various complementary registers. Starting from a cosmological misunderstanding between two types of uncertainty and doubt as preliminary conditions for the ritual encounter, we have shown that ritualization functions as a stabilizer for misunderstanding by opening up different expressive dimensions. Firstly, the emergence of a third party interlocutor, who is meta-empirical, and who articulates both the agreement and the divergence. Secondly, the

---

[10] Servais et Servais 2009.

"psychologization of spirits", together with the "spiritualization of psycho-emotional states", which creates the necessary blur that allows for a successful communication and permeability between different logics. The misunderstanding, shaped by this particular language, shows two divergent representations of misfortune, of its causes and of its relations with the society of origin. The analysis of uncertainty and doubt logics has therefore shown its analytical efficacy as it allows us to see what distinguishes, and yet what translates, between different ways of perceiving the world and one's place in it.

References

Cappo, Silvia Mesturini. 2010. "Espaces chamaniques en movement: Itinéraires vécus et géographies multiples entre Europe et Amérique Latine." PhD diss., Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Chaumeil, Jean-Pierre. 1988. "Le Huambisa défenseur: La figure de l'Indien dans le chamanisme populaire." *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec* 23 (2–3): 115–26.

Deshayes, Patrick. 2002. "L'ayawaska n'est pas un hallucinogène." *Psychotropes* 8 (1): 65–78.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. 1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion.* Oxford, UK: Oxford UP.

Losonczy, Anne-Marie. 1988. "Cadrage rituel et improvisation: Le chamanisme embera du Choco (Colombie)." In *Essai sur le rituel II.* Louvain et Paris: Peters, EPHE.

–. 2006. *Viaje y violencia: La paradoja chamánica emberá.* Bogota: Universidad Externado de Colombia.

Losonczy, Anne-Marie et Silvia Mesturini Cappo. 2011. "Pourquoi l'ayahuasca? De l'internationalisation d'une pratique rituelle Amérindienne." *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 153: 207–28.

Sahlins, Marshall. 1982. "The Apotheosis of Captain Cook." In Michel Izard and Pierre Smith, eds., *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History and Myth.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Chicago Original.

Servais, Christine et Véronique Servais. 2009. "Le malentendu comme structure de la communication." *Questions de Communication* 15: 21–49.

Ilona Nagy

The Creation of the Earth:
Dilemmas of the Creator God[1]

The dualistic conception of the creation of the Earth is well known in the broad zone East of the Hungarian language territory to the Eastern shores of Asia, and Native Americans are also familiar with it. The various earth-diver creation myths have at their heart a common core, namely that God did not create the Earth alone, but that he had a helper whom He sent to the bottom of the sea to bring up bits of mud or sand with which God made the Earth as we know it. The first opinions on how this myth came into being and how its diversified system of motifs developed were proposed by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century researchers; only recently, after a long silence, has interest in the myth and its written version, the Apocryphal *The Sea of Tiberias* received new impetus.[2] My earlier papers were attempts to explore, from a Hungarian perspective, the results of this renewed interest in terms of Hungarian variants of the myth.[3] By now, this work needs to be supplemented, because, among others, the motifs of the myth in question appear in other myth typologies, thereby connecting different creation myths and establishing new branches of thought worth exploring.

The idea of a piece of sand from under the water becoming the Earth has been imagined in various forms. A Vepsian text, for instance, states: "An old grandmother – may she rest in peace – told me that before there was an earth, there was a big lake, a huge lake, bigger than the White Lake. The water was above ground. But there were no people living at that time. The hedgehog brought up the earth stuck on his spines. There were rivers and lakes and grass grew by the rivers, and trees, bushes and everything one needs. The hedgehog also made earth, and the earth was bigger than

[2] Among others, Badalanova-Geller 2011; Dimitrova 2014; Mátéffy 2014.
[3] Nagy 2004; 2006.

the lake".[4] This text describes a mythical animal, a chthonic creature, the hedgehog that created the Earth all by itself. Among the Romanian variants of the earth-diver myth there are many that place the hedgehog in the role of the Demiurge-Devil. The hedgehog creates the world together with God by bringing up bits of mud from the bottom of the sea. His main role is that of a craftsman, moulding with his hands and measuring with a ball of twine given to him by God for this very purpose. He creates the Earth from the bits of mud brought up from the deep waters, even if he does so on the orders of God. "There is no other animal in Romanian folklore that would be as attached to creation as the hedgehog."[5] Among the Hungarian etiological myths we also find a peculiar text, most probably collected by László Mándoki in Balatonederics in the 1950s:[6] "The Milky Way was created when the hedgehog rolled along the sky: we see the holes he pierced with his spines."[7]

This one sentence contains important information: the sky is a solid cover above the earth and the hedgehog is a creator being: he is responsible for the starlit sky. Thus, the sky must be solid, if one can pierce holes in it and behind or above it there must be light that shines through these holes. These are the stars.

> One of the ancient, Finno-Ugric names of the Pleiades is "sieve" or "star sieve". This denomination is very common among Finno-Ugric and Turkic-Tatar languages; moreover, its influence can be detected in Baltic and Slavic languages as well. We might say that in terms of use this star name encompasses the largest Eurasian territory. … Since ancient Finno-Ugrians, and even their ancestors believed that the solid firmament had holes in it and the densely or sparsely placed stars could have reminded them of an important earthly utensil, the brim and grains or holes of a sieve or a sifter.[8]

The Hungarian name for the Pleiades, *szitáslyuk* (literally 'sieve hole') also represents this idea and is probably an element of Hungarian popular belief of Eastern origin.[9] János Harmatta not only lined up Hungarian linguistic proofs of the idea of a sky floating above the earth, but, similar to László Mándoki and József Erdődi, he also provided a series of data from other Finno-Ugric, Indo-European and Paleo-Asian peoples. This idea has been articulated before, as Harmatta quotes an earlier German study: "The archaic view that the firmament hovers above the earth like a solid, stone covering and from time to time their edges touch or even collide has been preserved best among Indo-European peoples partly in the form of linguistic data, partly

---

[4] Razauskas and Civian 2004, 80.
[5] Coman 1996, 81.
[6] Unfortunately, the manuscript does not include the references of the source: the probability of it being collected by Mándoki is only a hypothesis.
[7] Mándoki 1958, 47.
[8] Erdődi 1970, 99.
[9] Pócs 1990, 529; on the basis of Mándoki 1968; and Erdődi 1970.

in the form of myths".[10] The Germans might not believe that constellations are sieves, but they do consider stars to be lanterns, candles, even holes and windows.[11] The oldest, so-called "Sleptche manuscript" of the Apocrypha about the Sea of Tiberias writes about a crystal sky resting upon sixty iron pillars.[12]

The famous Hungarian Gypsy storyteller, Lajos Ámi draws an expressive picture of the edge of the world imagined as a plate and of the curved firmament. In the tale, "King Little Michael (Király Kis Miklós) cannot find any beautiful women to marry" we read the following about the journey of the protagonist: "When he reached the end of the world, where the swallow had to kneel down to drink water from the black grass[13] because there was no room to stand up straight, he found an old house".[14] The same idea can be found in two of János Berze Nagy's tales, and in the tale of the storyteller, Ferenc Jóni entitled "Frog king": "… where the swallow drank the water from the black grass kneeling".[15] This concept can be placed within the system explored by research; however, on the world-creating role of the hedgehog (who basically created the starry sky) we find nothing in Hungarian mythological studies.

The first volume of the four-volume work of Oskar Dähnhardt, *Natursagen* was published in 1907 in which the hedgehog appears as a mythical creature in two Bulgarian, one Rumanian, and one Latvian texts.

When God created the sky and the earth, he made the earth too large, therefore he could not cover it with the sky. He noticed that the Devil and the hedgehog were having a serious discussion about something, so he sent the bee to eavesdrop on them. "God does not know", said the Devil, "that he should grab a stick and start pounding on the earth as hard as he can in order to make mountains and valleys. Then its surface will crumple and the sky will be large enough to cover it". The bee told God, who did as the Devil suggested: he created mountains and valleys; covered the earth with the sky and blessed the bee so that its excrement (wax) lights up weddings and baptisms, and that its honey heals the sick.[16]

Here, the hedgehog is only the interlocutor of the Devil; the idea on how to correct creation comes from the Devil. In the Latvian text, on the other hand, it is the hedgehog that suggests to God to squeeze the earth if he cannot fit the large disc under the firmament: and so he did, and the wrinkles became the mountains and the valleys. In this case it was the hedgehog that God rewarded with a prominent garment made of spines so that no predator can approach him.[17]

---

[10] Harmatta 2004, 439.

[11] Schott 2007, 1273; referencing the ninth volume of *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens* (Hoffmann-Krayer und Bächtold-Stäubli 1927–1942, 766ff.).

[12] Badalanova-Geller 2011, 60–61.

[13] The storyteller explained that the grass could not be green because the sun could not ever reach under the eaves.

[14] Erdész 1961, 312.

[15] Ibid 319.

[16] Collected by Shishmanov, Dähnhardt 1907, 127.

[17] Collected by Lerhis-Puškaitis, also from the end of the nineteenth century, Dähnhardt 1907, 128.

The Romanian variant: "Before the creation of the earth God and the devil were alone on the surface of the water. When God decided to create the earth he sent the devil to the bottom of the sea to fetch the 'earth-seed' in his (God's) name. Three times the devil dived in the water but never fetched the earth-seed, because every time he took it in his own name. At last he dived for the fourth time in his own and God's name – this time he brought up at least a little bit of earth, as much as he had under his nails (claws). God made of that some kind of scone (=a clod of earth) and settled on it to rest. The devil thought that he was asleep so he tried to roll him into the water, along with the clod, and make a Lord of himself. But whenever he reached out with his hand the clod of earth grew bigger, and eventually grew into a huge ball of earth. This compressed the water and when God woke up he saw that by then there was not enough room left for the water. As he had no idea of his own he sent the bee to the hedgehog, the wisest of all the animals God had created. But the hedgehog gave no advice, since God is omniscient. However, the bee hid and spied upon the hedgehog talking to himself: 'God obviously doesn't know that he has to create mountains and valleys to make room for the water.' The bee returned to God with the news and God acted upon the hedgehog's words of wisdom. But the hedgehog cursed the bee for eavesdropping on him: the bee is to eat nothing but feces. But God rewarded the bee and decided to make the bee's feces not dirty and disgusting but worthy of eating – and that is honey."[18] In another Bulgarian mythical text the hedgehog appears to be wiser than the other animals because he is the only one to realise that God should not marry the Sun: if they marry then the multitude of new suns born from their marriage would burn up the earth. He tells the other animals who then prevent the marriage.[19]

We also know about a Bosnian legend that tells the story of how the Devil threw his recently cut hair under a pile of wood: the hair immediately turned into a hedgehog; there is a Bosnian belief claiming that the hedgehog is the smartest animal and lives longer than any other. He remembers everything that happened in the past, all that humans have already forgotten. He knows the magical plant that gives eternal youth.[20]

It must be noted that the hedgehog's figure is surrounded by a thick network of significations: besides having technical knowledge, he also has knowledge of all living things.[21] In Serbian folklore the special skills of the hedgehog are also spoken of; only

---

[18] Dähnhardt 1907, 42–43. Source of this text: Simeon Florea Marian, *Insectele în limba, credinţele şi obiceiurile românilor, Studiu folcloristic* [Insects in the language, beliefs and customs of Romanians. A folklore study] (Bucureşti: Ediţiunea Acad. Rom., 1903), 122. Dähnhardt mentions Russian, Belarussian, Serbian and other Bulgarian variants as well. One newer Serbian source: Jung 1989, 178–79; 1992, 165–66; citing from: Đorđe Bota, *Narodni život i običaji u selu Jarkovcu (u Banata)* [Folk life and folk customs in Jarkovac a village in the Banat (Novi Sad, 1955), 37–38. Dähnhardt considered "the eavesdropping bee" motive Armenian and dating back to before Bogomilism, whereas "the hedgehog aiding and advising God in creation" motive he believed to be of Iranian origin (see ibid., 42–43). Compare: Nagy 2004, 201–2; 2006, 302.

[19] Nagy 2004, 131.

[20] Tolstoj i Radenković 2001, 246.

[21] Coman 1996, 82.

he is capable of finding and bringing the herb that opens locks.[22] According to a Macedonian text, the Moon wished to marry the Sun: the hedgehog prevented the wedding similarly to the previously cited Bulgarian text. In addition to these nineteenth-century publications, new variants emerged thanks to the expeditions launched in the Socialist countries in the 1980s aiming to collect Bible-related texts: the archaic, pre-Christian class of creation myths has also been enriched. A zone was outlined from the Baltic region to the Balkans in the south, along the Amber Road, reaching into North Russia and even to the Siberian Buryats, where in the folklore texts the hedgehog appears as an active agent of creation; he plays a role in the creation of dry land. These expeditions discovered Lithuanian, Romanian, Bosnian, and Banat Bulgarian variants of the previously cited Bulgarian and Latvian texts.[23]

Similar to the Bulgarian text, other Romanian variants (still from the beginning of the twentieth century)[24] include the dramatic moment when the creator God stops in his tracks and realises that he has spoiled the work of creation. He made the earth grow and lifted the sky and saw that the latter was smaller than the former, and thus the edges of the earth remained uncovered. The myth questions God's perfection by suggesting that God might be wrong. We know the Bible verse concerning the quality of creation claiming: "and God saw that it was good"; this proposition is contradicted by God's statement describing the earth and the sky as being of different size. Laura Jiga Iliescu starts from the assumption that those who told the story of creation, being Orthodox Christians, believed in the Old Testament, but also believed in the dual myth. To resolve this contradiction, she focussed her research on the figure of the bee. God sent the bee to ask the hedgehog's advice, who was offended because God had not asked for his advice before starting creation. He refused to give the solution but the bee eavesdropped on him hiding behind a rock while he mumbled to himself. When the bee flew off the hedgehog cursed him "to eat what he excretes on his side"; God, however, blessed the bee to excrete honey to feed others, and its wax to give light. The blessing concerned the bee, which thus transmuted into a sacred animal; it represents virginity and monastic life in the Christian system of symbols. This story is the prefiguration of the redemption narrative, an image of the Fall and of Purgatory. Iliescu claims that the dilemma of the creator God was not admitting his own imperfection, but that the mismatch of the firmament and the earth of creation was part of his redemption plan.[25] Thus, the believers could consider the textual traditions describing creation to be true even if in church they heard a different narrative on the subject.

---

[22] Belova 2009, 396.
[23] Gura 1999; Tolstoi and Radenkovich 2001, passim.
[24] The main sources of the texts cited by Mihai Coman and Laura Jiga Iliescu: Elena Nikoliță Voronca, *Datinile și credințele poporului român, adunate și așezate în ordine mitologică de...* [Romanian folklore data in the mythological order …] (Chișinău, Cernăuti: I. Wiegler, 1903); Tudor Pamfile, *Povestea lumii de demult* [The Story of the World of Yore] (București: Socec și C. Sfetea, 1913).
[25] Jiga Iliescu 2012, passim.

Returning to the topic of the curious, ambivalent character of the mythical hedge-hog: he is God's helper, but in other texts he is also the Devil's partner; the earth is squeezed either by him or the Devil so that it can be fit under the firmament. Jordan Ivanov thinks that the hedgehog is a replacement for the Devil, in other words, he is commensurate with the Devil. On the one hand, he is a chthonic character (as we have seen in the texts presented above); on the other hand, he brings light, he has solar features. The latter can be illustrated with numerous examples.

In the Hungarian text the hedgehog becomes a solar being, bringing light by pierc-ing the firmament. There is a Lithuanian text which develops the association accord-ing to which, the hedgehog's spines are identical to sunbeams and, thus, the hedge-hog *is* the sun: In the beginning the animals received their fur and hair according to where they had spent their first night. The hedgehog slept on top of a mountain and in the morning he admired the rays of the rising sun; this is why his spines are similar to sunbeams.[26] The spines are prickly as are the sun's rays in another form of Hun-garian myth that has numerous variants in Southwest Hungary: in Zala, Somogy and Baranya counties. The myth about the personified celestial bodies is from the collec-tion of János Berze Nagy:

"The Sun and the Moon once got into a quarrel. The Moon threw spines at the Sun, who in return threw dirt and mud. This is why the Sun is so prickly and burns, and why the Moon's light is so blurry."[27] The idea of a creator hedgehog in myths and its association with light has been preserved by Inner Asian Turkic peoples. The ori-gin myths of two Buryat tribes, the Khat and the Ongon, is about the conflict between the deity of the earth and the deity of the sky. The Terra Mater, the "Wide Earth" took the sun and the moon and the earth was covered in darkness. The "High Sky" was put in a difficult position, so he asked for the hedgehog's help; but the latter refused to give him advice because of some earlier offence. A favourite of the celestial god, the rabbit, however, managed to eavesdrop on what the hedgehog was mumbling to him-self. Thus, the sun and the moon were put back in the sky; but the sons of the High Sky, who made fun of the hedgehog, were sent to live on Earth and they became the patriarchs of the two tribes. They mocked the hedgehog for not having legs and roll-ing around on the ground.[28]

The renowned professor of Turkology Erika Taube, suggests that myths and tales preserve long-forgotten cults and might even assist in the interpretation of archaeo-logical findings. There are scattered data on the hedgehog in the scholarly literature and in the etiological myths from Central Asia, especially among Turkic peoples, that describe the hedgehog as a culture hero who guards sunshine for humans. Taube laments that these particular myths have been neglected by research for more than

[26] Razauskas i Civjan 2004, 85.
[27] Berze Nagy 1940, II:606.
[28] Razauskas and Civian 2004, 80. Source: M. N. Hangalov, *Mify kosmologicheskiie i etiologicheskiie: So-braniie sochinenii* [Cosmological and aetiological myths: a complete collection], vol. III (Ulan-Ude, 1960), 1–112.

a hundred years. In her research,[29] Taube discovered that for the Tuva the hedgehog appears as a creator deity; namely, as the creator of the earth: he formed the surface of the earth on which grew living creatures – we know such deeds of the hedgehog from Europe also. We also have data from Tuva claiming that languages were assigned by the hedgehog. Among the Buryat Mongolians the hedgehog, besides being considered a culture hero, is also known as a creator deity. Only these hedgehog-myths are able to explain north Chinese (from the Russian region) archaeological artefacts (the earliest from between the fifth and third century BC): various golden hedgehog figures. Even though shaping a spiny animal from clay is a difficult task, this is also when the first clay hedgehog figurines appeared in Europe; followed by "little red, thorny balls" as sun representations found in graves a thousand years later.[30] The hedgehog figurine with something on its back that appears to be the sun is also from Central Asia (fourth or fifth century BC), which might well prove the early occurrence of the myth in which the hedgehog is the guardian of the sun.[31] From Radloff's dictionary, it is possible to reconstruct another myth: in several Altaic dialects Ülgen: the supreme god, sends the hedgehog as an emissary to the people to tell them that they are going to die but then they will be resurrected. There are two variants according to the type of myth: the hedgehog only relays the first part of the message and forgets about the second part; or he is held up on his way and, by the time he arrives, a false messenger, the rival of the creator god who wants to meddle with his plan, has already preceded him and conveyed only the part about dying. This is why the hedgehog is responsible for the mortality of humans,[32] thereby proving the dual, ambivalent nature of his character. There is more fruitful research to be conducted on the mythical aspects and traits related to light; although we can most likely only rely on data already unearthed as it is unlikely that any new data will come to light later.

References

Badalanova-Geller, Florentina. 2011. "The *Sea of Tiberias* between Apocryphal Literature and Oral Tradition." In Lorenzo DiTomasso and Christftried Böttrich, eds., with the assistance of Marina Svoboda. *The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Slavonic Tradition. Continuity and Diversity,* 13–145. TSAJ 140. Tübingen: Mohr und Siebeck.

Belova, Ol'ga. 2009. "Razryv-trava" [Verbena officinalis]. In Nikita Tolstoi, otv. red., *Slavianskiie drevnosti: etnoligvisticheskii slovar' v piati tomakh,* 5:396. Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyie otnosheniia.

Berze Nagy, János. 1940. *Baranyai magyar néphagyományok.* I–III. [Hungarian folk traditions in Baranya county]. Pécs: Kultúra Könyvnyomdai Műintézet.

Coman, Mihai. 1996. "Ariciul" [Hedgehog]. In Id., *Bestiarul mitologic Românesc,* 81–89 [Romanian mythological bestiary]. Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Romne.

---

[29] Taube 1990; 1999; 2002; 2008; 2009.
[30] Razauskas and Civian 2004, 90–91.
[31] Taube 1999, 150–51; 2008, 95.
[32] Taube 2002, 175.

Dänhardt, Oskar, Hrsg. 1907. *Natursagen: eine Sammlung naturdeutender Sagen, Märchen, Fabeln und Legenden* I. Leipzig und Berlin: B. G. Teubner.

Dimitrova, Dimitrinka. 2014. "Summary. The Story of Lake Tiberias. Textological analysis and critical edition." In Ead., *Skazanie za Tiveriadskoto more. Tekstologichesko izledovaniie i kritichesko izdaniie,* 230–35. Studia mediaevalia Slavica et Byzantina 4. BAN Institut za literatura. Sofia: Izdatelski centr Boian Penev.

https://bogomili.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/s0017217.pdf. Accessed 26 January 2015.

Erdész, Sándor. 1961. "Ámi Lajos mesemondó világképe" [The cosmogonical conceptions of Lajos Ámi, storyteller]. *Ethnographia* LXXII: 311–24.

Erdődi, József. 1970. *Uráli csillagnevek és mitológiai magyarázatuk* [Uralic star names and their mythological explanation]. A Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság Kiadványai 124. Budapest: Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság.

Gura, A. V. 1999. "Iozh" [Hedgehog]. In Nikita Tolstoi otv. red., *Slavianskiie drevnosti: etnoligvisticheskii slovar' v piati tomakh.* 2: 181–82. Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyie otnosheniia.

Harmatta, János. 2004. "Az ég a régi magyar mitikus világképben" [The sky in the ancient Hungarian mythical cosmogony]. In Andrásfalvy Bertalan, Domokos Mária és Nagy Ilona, szerk., *Az idő rostájában. Tanulmányok Vargyas Lajos 90. születésnapjára,* 437–46. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Hoffman-Krayer, Eduard und Hanns Bächtiold-Stäubli, Hrsgs. 1927–1942. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Jiga Iliescu, Laura. 2012. "Albina, mierea şi paradisul. Încerare de reconciliere a naraţiunilor despre Creaţie din folclorul românesc" [Bees, honey and Paradise. An attempt to classify creation myths of Romanian folklore]. In Narcisa Ştiuca şi Adrian Stoicescu, ed. *Exigenţele şi utilitatea lecturii etnologice: in honorem Nicolae Constantinescu,* 121–26. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii.

Jung, Károly. 1989. "A világteremtés dualisztikus (bogumil) legendáinak kérdéséhez – Összehasonlító kelet-közép-európai kozmogóniai problémák" [On the question of dualistic legend about the creation of the World: Comparative problems on cosmogony in Eastern Central-Europe]. *Létünk* XIX (2): 171–205.

–. 1992. "A *világteremtés* dualisztikus (bogumil) legendáinak kérdéséhez" [To the question of dualistic (bogomil) legends about the creation of the World]. In Id., *Köznapok és legendák. Tanulmányok a népi kultúra köréből,* 157–85, 245–46. Újvidék: Forum.

Mándoki, László. 1958. "Csillagneveink és csillagmondáink nemzetközi összefüggései" [The international context of our star names and star myths]. Ms. EA 6319.

–. 1968. "Two Asiatic Sidereal Names." In Vilmos Diószegi, ed., *Popular Beliefs and Tradition in Siberia,* 485–96. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Mátéffy, Attila. 2014. "The Earth-Diver: Hungarian Variants of the Myth of the Dualistic Creation of the World – Pearls in the Primeval Sea of World Creation." *Sociology Study* 4 (5): 423–37.

Nagy, Ilona. 2004. "A föld teremtésének mondája és a Tiberiás-tengerről szóló apokrif" [Legend about the Creation of the Earth and the Apocrypha about the Tiberian Sea]. In Andrásfalvy Bertalan, Domokos Mária és Nagy Ilona, szerk., *Az Idő rostájában. Tanulmányok Vargyas Lajos 90. születésnapjára.* II:181–228. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

–. 2006. "The Earth-Diver Myth (Mot.812) and the Apocryphal Legend of the Tiberian Sea." *Acta Ethnographica* 51 (3–4): 281–326.

Pócs, Éva. 1990. "Néphit" [Folk belief]. In Dömötör Tekla, szerk., *Magyar néprajz.* VII: 527–692. *Népszokás, néphit, népi vallásosság.* Budapest: Akadémiai.

Razauskas, Dainjus i Tat'jana Civjan. 2004. "Iozh v kosmologicheskikh predaniia (Balto-balkan-skii areal)" [The Hedgehog in Cosmogonical and Etiological Legends of the Balto-Balcanic Area]. *Tautosakos darbai* XXI (XXVIII): 79–91.

http://etalpykla.lituanistikadb.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2004~1367155520340/datastreams/DS.002.2.01.ARTIC/content. Accessed 10 March 2014.

Schott, Sebastian. 2007. "Stern." In Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, Hrsg., *Enzyklopädie des Märchens,* 12:1271–76. Berlin: W. de Gruyter [1975].

Taube, Erika. 1990. "Der Igel in der Mythologie altaischer Völker." In Bernt Brendemoen, ed., *Altaica Osloensia,* 339–54. *Proceedings from the 32nd Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference, Oslo, June 12–16, 1989.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

–. 1999. "Zum Quellenwert der mündlichen Überlieferungen schriftloser Völker Zentralasiens." In *Zentralasiatische Studien der Seminars für Sprache und Kulturwissenschaft Zentralasiens der Universität Bonn 29,* 143–53. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

–. 2002. "Der Fuchs von der altaituwinischen Tradition zum zentralasiatisch-sibirischen Kontext." In Hartmut Walravens, Hrsg., *Der Fuchs in Kultur, Religion und Folklore Zentral- und Ostasiens,* 149–78. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

–. 2008. *Tuwinische Folkloretexten aus dem Altai (Cengel/Westmongolei). Kleine Formen.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

–. 2009. "Vom Quellenwert mündlich überlieferten Märchen und was dem Deuten vorausgeht." In Märchenstiftung Walter Kahn, Hrsg., *Märchenspiegel. Zeitschrift für Internationale Märchenforschung und Märchepflege,* 9–22. Jahrgang 20/1. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag, Hohengehren.

Tolstoj, Svetlana M. i Ljubinko Radenković. 2001. "Jež" [Hedgehog]. In Id., ed., *Slovenska mitologija: enciklopedijski rečnik,* 245–46. Beograd: Zepter BookWorld.

Éva Pócs

Faith and Doubt, Pretence and Market Strategies in the Practice of the *Táltos*

In this study, based on the judicial records of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century witch trials concerning *táltos,* I will examine the evidence for the presence of faith and doubt and the relationship between them in the case of the magical/religious specialists of rural communities that were by definition religious.[1]

The figure of the *táltos* has long been accorded a privileged position in Hungarian scholarship, as researchers of the pre-Christian, pagan Hungarian religion (also known as "ancient" Hungarian religion) mostly saw him as the depository of a shamanism they assumed to have existed in the past. They thought to have discovered relics of a past shamanism preserved within a Christian context in modern era *táltos* beliefs and in the roles *táltos* played in modern communities. Regardless of whether this idea of continuity is tenable, a closer examination of the *táltos* figures accused in early modern legal procedures, usually of witchcraft and in some cases of magic, fraud or murder, may provide answers to a whole line of questions regarding faith and doubt with a more general application to modern age specialists of magic and religion.

How much do we know of the role that these twenty-seven women, five men and three children played prior to their trial?[2] Most of them were "wise men" or women ("cunning folk") in a healing role or with multiple functions, also given to divination and "seeing" buried treasure. There also existed persons who specialised only in seeing or acquiring treasure, as well as young girls who were occasionally hired for the purpose of seeing treasure. Some of them were primarily considered to be witches by their communities. The same persons, or others, also engaged in identifying witches and curing bewitchment, acting as it were in the role of unwitchers (witch-doctors). The highest number came to be accused in the Eastern part of the Great Plain, in the town

[2] For a summary on *táltos* appearing in witch trials, see Pócs 2017.

of Debrecen, in Bihar, Békés, Szatmár and Bereg counties, but we also have sporadic data from the Jászság region, Pest County, Transylvania and Baranya County. In Debrecen and its environs, the most important role of *táltos* appears to have been "seeing", finding or digging up treasure. The witchcraft trials of the period listed innumerable treasure diggers or treasure seers who were called by some other name than *táltos*.

At court, however, these accused individuals appeared as *táltos* and in many cases referred to themselves as such. When speaking of events that took place before the trial, witnesses also talked of instances when these people spoke of their *táltos* identity to their own village or urban community, either bragging or using it as self-defence. (There are also *táltos* who never came before the tribunal but were merely mentioned in the course of a case.) In spite of this, remarkably, there are only two or three people who may be assumed, in the light of the existing data, to have actually pursued any kind of special *táltos*-type activity, i.e., to have fulfilled a *par excellence táltos* role or to have been surrounded by the kind of beliefs that characterise *táltos* exclusively. When I say *táltos* activity or *táltos* role, I mean the type of traits that scholars (particularly researchers of "ancient" pre-Christian Hungarian religion) tend to consider to have been the characteristic attributes of the *táltos* as a depository of the shamanic legacy based on data from nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore collections.[3] Of these traits, the following appeared in the context of the trials: the role of the weather magician; the belief that *táltos* were born with teeth; the idea that the fate of the *táltos* was pre-ordained by God already in the womb; experiences of the other world undergone in a trance or dream; turning into an animal; fighting against a world of hostile spirits; battling in heaven or in animal shape. There was moreover the *táltos* horse as a mount and helping spirit for a "soul journey". Let us add that speaking of *táltos* beliefs is far more frequent than actually encountering true *táltos* activity performed by any of these purported *táltos*. This leads straight to the first instance of doubt – this time on behalf of the researcher: whether the *táltos* role, so often referred to, is not in many cases a mere act of pretence or role-playing for the court or the *táltos*'s own audience?

The three hundred years over which we have *táltos* stories at our disposal encompass the rise and fall and eventual disappearance of witch persecution in Hungary during the age of the Enlightenment. The social and cultural transformations of this era affected legal procedures as well as the persons of the accused. We have no direct sources regarding the changes influencing them, but from the general tendencies known from other sources we can be sure, that the presumed medieval weather magician role of the *táltos* in Hungary declined or altogether disappeared during this period. It seems that besides the continued use of quotidian methods of magic, the *táltos*'s role in protection against hail was taken over by the rival priestly benedictions. The "pagan" practice of the heavenly soul battles of the *táltos* – similarly to all ritual practices competing with Christianity – were condemned to disappear slowly. This

---

[3] For an overview of modern-era *táltos* folklore see Pócs 2018.

process was further strengthened by the secular and clerical fight against superstition[4] influenced by the Enlightenment which brought with it fundamental transformations in opinions about superstition, magic, and folk magical specialists. Transformations in church demonology in connection with the persecution of witches had an especially significant impact on attitudes to and legislation of witchcraft (cf. in Hungary for example the 1748 and 1769 patents of Empress Maria Theresa).[5] The changes in the assessment of folk magical/religious specialists, the reduction of their communal roles took place in a more or less similar fashion throughout the area under the influence of Western Christianity. Nonetheless, a pan-European process that began during the Christian Middle Ages was at its height at this time: the non-Christian magical and ritual practices and transcendent communication, hitherto deemed pagan or heretic – if they still existed – gained Christian connotations usually initiated from below (by the actors). It seems to be a general tendency that swindlers, relying on the erstwhile prestige of specialists, gained prominence at this time. One could cite multiple similar examples from several regions of Europe for this phenomenon, here I will only mention two cases of magicians who are quite similar to *táltos* in several respects. In eighteenth-century Norwegian witch trials, Lapp (Sami) shamans gave Christian names and explanations for the images on their drums that represented "pagan" spirits, and other worlds, most likely, they did so to protect themselves: the explanations served to deceive the judges, who disapproved of the "pagan" worldview of the Sami.[6] Concerning the loss of credibility of magical/religious specialists, in Spanish-speaking areas healers and seers (*curandores, saludadores*), who had been born with a divine mark, during the early modern period gradually acquired the reputation of swindlers and charlatans, or yielded their place to actual swindlers, who took advantage of the healers' remaining prestige by promoting themselves as such.[7]

At the same time, beginning in the late Middle Ages transformations were taking place with regard to the roles fulfilled by folk specialists all over Europe. The supposed rise of the so called "village (neighbourhood) witchcraft"[8] in Central Europe and the subsequent arrival of waves of witch persecution that reached this region from the West brought with them the witchdoctor role for all specialists who also engaged in healing.[9] The war-ridden eighteenth century led to a significant boom in the practice of treasure seeing specialists: this became the most common divinatory task, lay people and a whole slew of specialists who had earlier been engaged in different kinds of magical crafts, began to see buried treasure. And impostors also began to appear here, who despite lacking imagined or real ability to see, practiced the "craft"

---

[4] For overviews of this question, see Péter Tóth G. in this volume.

[5] On transformations of judicial procedures and their effects on witchcraft and the persecution of witches, see Péter Tóth G. ibid.

[6] On the Sami shamans in this context see for instance Blix Hagen 2012.

[7] Campagne 2007; Tausiet 2009.

[8] Witchcraft stemming from the internal ("neighbourhood") tensions in small, self-sufficient village communities (see e.g., Macfarlane 1970; Muchembled 1979).

[9] See on this question with regard to Hungary Klaniczay 1990a, 1990b, 2006; Pócs 1999, 2017.

of seeing which they pretended to be a genuine skill (we should add that during the seventeenth–eighteenth century wars it was quite possible to accidentally find treasure (money or other goods), hidden by people fleeing the incessant wars of the period).[10] The processes listed here in combination or sometimes independently of each other, at other times closely intertwined, provided the backdrop and motivations for the trials; for example German treasure diggers usually were not accused as witches, but rather came before the tribunals in their "own right" as fraudulent magicians.[11]

The specialists referred to as *táltos* in Hungarian rural/small town communities were also participants and creators of these transformations. The processes outlined here partly indicate that, based on sources deriving from witch trials alone, it is impossible to determine the extent of the roles and activities of *táltos*, either in time or space. Neither can internal subdivisions be established among them (weather magician, healer, witch and unwitcher, treasure seer) or the proportions of genuine *táltos* and impostors in their ranks be determined since the people concerned (*táltos*, healers, seers of treasure) only came to be accused of witchcraft accidentally. The fact that our sources are documents of witchcraft trials has both advantages and disadvantages. From this period of one and a half century, we only hear of *táltos* through their sporadic appearance in witchcraft documents.[12] (*Táltos*, and magicians in general, were not persecuted or punished – the only *táltos* to be brought before the courts were those who were accused of witchcraft.) Even as regards these *táltos*, our only information comes from the context of witchcraft trials, through the distorting mirror of court discourse. However, the fact that these early modern legal narratives also have certain advantages over the differently distorting mirror of twentieth- and twenty-first-century belief accounts; to wit, that they do at least present both witchcraft and *táltos* activities as part of (still) functioning complexes of beliefs and rituals. Accounts of witnesses and, in many cases, of the accused themselves, offer direct reflections of the activity of the *táltos* and sometimes of their own individual vision experiences, undergone in a trance state. Even if the accused are consciously acting a role or lying – they are still, albeit indirectly, touching upon to the everyday reality of the *táltos,* since strategically inspired tales about otherworldly soul battles also form part of that reality that I am interested in exploring here. In the latter case, our query concerns not the kind of notions that these *táltos* had of the other world but why they found it necessary to invent such a story for the benefit of the court.

Based on the examination of court narratives we cannot shed light on the general activity of the *táltos* of the era. Neither can we ascertain their numbers (since there

---

[10] See for example Dillinger's overview of European and American early modern treasure hunting practices, or Scheutz's, regarding Austria, in which he draws a quite similar picture to the situation in Hungary about the fraudulent treasure diggers, who took over the magical market and about their methods of deception (threats of hail that would be brought upon the community, claiming Christian legitimation, etc. Dillinger 2012; Scheutz 2006; on Hungarian seers of treasure and treasure diggers see Láng és Tóth G. 2012).

[11] Dillinger 2012.

[12] See Pócs 2017.

must have been many more *táltos* than those who had been accused as witches and thus are known to us from witch trial transcripts) or what their role was in the everyday life of the communities of the period. Nor do we know how far we can generalise from the image of the *táltos* as witch and unwitcher in the contemporary system of rural witchcraft as it emerges from the trial transcripts. What we can discern from these texts with some certainty concerns the kind of strategies the participants of the trials employed: the accused who represented their own interests and the traditions of their community; the witnesses speaking in defence of or against the accused, and the court that represented contemporary penal law and the demonological tenets of the anti-witchcraft powers regarding witches and Satan. The narratives of the accused *táltos* and of the witnesses in favour or against them are narrative constructions, joint creations coming into existence through the dialogue of the interrogated people. The nature of these narratives, their transformations and various versions are not so much determined by the faith and religious experiences of the accused, or the events they experienced and rituals they performed, but rather by the narrative traditions of their "pre-trial" community, by the stereotypical judicial narrative and by the prevailing discursive context. Its nature is influenced by the opposing parties' various intentions, expectations, interests and objectives; that is, their diverse narrative strategies.

In a court setting, it is particularly important to reckon with the biased Christianising and demonologising attitude of courts, with changes over time in the assessment of magic, wizardry and *táltos* by the court, as well as the way in which interrogation by torture changes the personality. We must take into account the discrepancy between the words spoken in an unnatural court situation and reality, we must be aware that an account of personal experiences is a stereotyped text even upon its "first" telling, and thus a distorting mirror of reality. We must examine which are the elements of the narrative construct around the belief figure of the *táltos* that these *táltos* and their witnesses deploy in the court dialogue, for instance in order to legitimize or condemn the *táltos* role. In other words, it is necessary to explore the factors that induced the emergence of this constructed dialogue and the narrative strategies used and to find out what motivated the actors of the dialogue at court.

Once this is accomplished, we can attempt to find answers to the following questions: Were the supernatural aspects of the magical/religious specialists' profession subject to religious faith and religious experiences? How did the *táltos* relate to their "sacred" vocation; and what exactly did it consist of? Was faith part of their *táltos* identity in their activities in protecting and helping their community, did it contribute to the effectiveness of their rituals, to the beliefs surrounding their persona; did they have religious experiences (such as otherworldly battles experienced in trance, helping or attacking the spirit world)? How much of their *táltos* identity and *táltos* activities was a reality, and how much of it was just narrative construction?

In a 2017 publication about *táltos* figures in witch trial documents of the early modern era[13] I reviewed the testimonies of the *táltos* and their witnesses and the

---

[13] Pócs 2017.

narrative strategies emerging from them; based on this information I outlined the personality and the roles of some presumably real *táltos* (with a *táltos* identity and *táltos* attributes), some magical specialists (healers, treasure hunters, witches and/or witch-doctors) called *táltos* without *táltos* attributes, and some impostors merely pretending to be *táltos*. I do not have sufficient space in this brief study to describe these explorations in detail. All I can offer here are a few brief examples of the various narrative strategies and to enumerate the various *táltos* we find in these different groups. It is not possible to draw sharp divisions among these categories: even the researcher has many doubts when trying to separate *táltos*, who are true or false, bona fide or pretend, who act the witch or the counter-witch role. Naturally, none of these categories is exclusive, nor can they be, due to the roles of *táltos* and witch being in themselves rather ambivalent.

In this brief enumeration, I omit cases that lack textual context,[14] where want of a court dialogue does not allow us to examine narrative constructs or considerations of faith and doubt. In those cases, all we can examine is the use of the term *táltos* as a speech act. We have no information regarding their *táltos* attributes, but our data do describe some of the non-*táltos* activities of these individuals. Thus, we find out that specialists of healing and divination were termed *táltos* more frequently than were other specialists. As regards branches of divination, "treasure seeing" and reading the stars are prominent. The cases also include two persons who offer advice on freeing prisoners, and there are two individuals sought out or brought in from another village with the purpose of identifying a witch. There is also a witch who became famous for instances of malevolent bewitchment. These individuals were referred to as *táltos* (*tátos*), or the word was used as an adjective to describe them ("tátos ember" = '*táltos* man')[15] or as a byname (e.g., *Táltos* Erzsébet),[16] an indication that in the local communities of Dés, Kecskemét and Bereg in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the word *táltos* had positive connotations. In the case of Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, the use of the phrase "she was a great *táltos*" is probably due, besides her ability to read the stars, to the aristocratic standing of this lady.[17] An exceptional case is that of András Suppony from Békés County. He was a witch, who probably called himself a *táltos* in front of the tribunal in an attempt to defend himself, however, in the usage of the court and the witnesses, as far as our data reveal, when referring to him the word had a negative connotation, and carried the meaning of "witchery" (in 1721).[18]

---

[14] Táltos No. 5–10, 13,14, 24, 25 in Pócs 2017.
[15] Schram 1970, I:459.
[16] Komáromy 1910, 91.
[17] Herner 1988, 86.
[18] Oláh 1886/1887, 149–61.

"*Táltos* of Faith" with a *Táltos* Identity and *Táltos* Attributes

There are two *táltos*, whom we can safely place in this category, although naturally it is possible that further such *táltos* are concealed behind one of the brief mentions. In 1740, Zsuzsanna/Zsuzska Kőmives stood trial before the court of the council of the town of Miskolc in the company of another woman and a man.[19] This is the only *táltos* trial in which *táltos* activity is clearly the single charge for which they are tried. (It is known that one of these persons was also a healer, but the court dialogue does not make a connection between this and *táltos*hood.) According to witness statements, the *táltos* identity and activity of the accused was the subject of daily conversation in the town – even the individuals themselves readily talked about it. The number of indirect accounts about heavenly battles is remarkably high, they seem to have been the central motif of their *táltos* activity. When the time comes, they have to go into battle – and regularly at that, during Whitsuntide and on St. John's Day. Witnesses also describe the order of battle among the opposing heavenly hosts. They also talk of – partly based on the accounts of the *táltos* and partly as eyewitnesses – the ways in which these *táltos* fall into trance. They speak of "gazing into water" and, uniquely also of *táltos* maidens turning into animals. One witness citing a supposed eyewitness says, "After a while she [the *táltos* maiden] shook herself, turned into a fish and vanished, not to return for three days".[20] (They also speak of turning into a pigeon and a fox.) The wounds received in the heavenly battles, described as direct combat fought with swords, are also perceptible here in earthly life.

> Zsuzska Kőmives herself was heard saying that she was a *táltos*, indeed, she showed her body to people, how they had fought in that battle; and the witness had seen that her body was quite blue all over … The shoulder of her blouse was also seen all torn due to cuts she received.[21]

There is also talk of some kind of duel among *táltos* with the purpose of testing their strength against each other, as well as seeking out the helping spirit of a horse. These texts present the *táltos* as participants and actors of a genuine and coherent complex of rites and beliefs. Although first person narratives of otherworldly experiences are absent, I believe, at least in the case of Zsuzsanna Kőmives, that here we see a *táltos* of real faith who truly lived her otherworldly experiences. One proof of this is that in these accounts of communication with the supernatural, events and experiences are described in a highly personal, lived and spontaneous manner, free of stereotypes. It is quite probable that in this case we have found a unique instance of a *táltos* who prac-

---

[19] Bodgál 1960, 308–11. In more detail about this *táltos*, see Pócs 2017, táltos Nos. 2–4. Gábor Klaniczay studied this trial particularly closely, especially with regard to heavenly battles and the motif of "initiation"; he mentioned almost every related fact re-discussed here: Klaniczay 1990a, 1990b.

[20] Bodgál 1960, 309.

[21] Ibid., 310.

tices her vocation as *táltos* and accepts and admits this identity without any misgivings. The stereotyped motif of showing off otherworldly injuries acquired in the course of heavenly battles fought to protect the town served as proof of genuine *táltos*hood as well as legitimation and a means of garnering a positive reception both from the *táltos*'s pre-trial community and from the court during the trial.

Unfortunately, we cannot find much information regarding the *táltos's* professional practice beyond the use of the trance technique. We do not know why and whom these three *táltos* were fighting in the heavens or what their specific role was in the life of the small town. What is clear is that, contrary to the trend customary at the time, these *táltos* do not seem to be implicated in the witchcraft accusations of small urban communities and play no part either as witches or as unwitchers. The court does not see being a *táltos* as witchcraft either, rather it merely considers it a "disgrace" and the culprits are told that they must discontinue their *táltos* activities.

Another important example among bona fide *táltos*, a woman from Cegléd called Mrs András Szabó, née Ilona Borsi, was taken to court in Bereg County between 1730–1736. I can only mention her in passing.[22] Ilona Borsi also acted as a healer (and a dedicated opponent to witches). What is most relevant in the present context: her truly unique, lively and interesting first person account of her heavenly battles and the *táltos* horses that aided her. In terms of mentality and those of her strategies that we can discern, there are many similarities between her and the previously mentioned *táltos*.

Fraudulent *Táltos* in the Role of Healer, Witch or Counter-Witch
Witch or *Táltos?*

A major group of *táltos* in the trials of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries comprises individuals who had become integrated into the local relationship network of witchcraft and were active both as healers/witches and in identifying witches. This seems to have been a characteristic role for *táltos* at the time. We have access to the full and rich documentation of a number of trials in which such *táltos* appear – here we have space to present one example.

The trial of Erzsébet/Örzse Tóth took place in Jászberény in 1728.[23] The charges were the practicing of magic and witchcraft, and the bewitchment of people and animals. She was also active in countering bewitchments and identifying witches – this must be how witchcraft accusations came to be levelled against her. Her role as weather magician *táltos* is doubtful, although she speaks of her heavenly battles against demons of hailstorms as a central element of her identity as *táltos*. According to certain tes-

---

[22] Lehoczky 1887, 304–5. Klaniczay, Kristóf és Pócs 1989, I:61–63. In more detail about this *táltos,* see Pócs 2017, táltos No. 5. Gábor Klaniczay also minutely examined and analyzed this trial document: Klaniczay 1990a, 1990b.

[23] Bessenyei 1997, I:460–69. See for more detail: Pócs 2017, táltos No. 13.

timonies, she could also "see" treasure, identify witches, and predict fires or death. She admits with impressive pride to each and every one of these roles, from weather magician to malefactor, in front of the court. Witnesses who describe her life prior to the trial speak of very few successful cases of healing but reproach her with numerous instances of failed healing or acts that they consider bewitchment. Her instances of healing occur embedded in cases of bewitchment where she acts partly as healer, partly as the person who identifies the source of the bewitchment, the harmful witch. Her activity was quite integrated in the local system of neighbourhood witchery. "Real" battles (in dreams) against unwitchers – as in so many other contemporary cases – were also reflected in night-time fights against spirits deployed purposely against her. During her activity in healing bewitchment, the spirits of the hostile witch hindered her healing work – at least according to her own accounts, which were guided by the narrative strategies she employed in an attempt to deflect witchcraft accusations. It seems that fear of accusations of bewitchment (or of bewitchment by the unwitcher?) was a stronger motif with her than the intent to provide aid one would expect from a healer. She is reported to have refused to help in hopeless cases, enlisting various excuses that included probable torture by hostile spirits. "I could cure them, to be sure, but I dare not, because the evil ones would come and torment me",[24] she is supposed to have said according to the recollection of a witness against her in court.

She is a clever manager of her affairs who does not shy away from self-promotion as a healer or someone who can identify witches. "You just have me taken to Alattyán, I will show everyone who it is that had bewitched Your Honour's sister."[25] She is not loath to criticise rival healers publicly and to threaten with bewitchment, or actually bewitch, those who seek a cure with somebody else.

Most of the cases of bewitchment that Örzse Tóth is proven to have committed are in fact baseless accusations, but it seems that she thinks of her vindictive threats and intent to harm as cases of "successful" bewitchment. She proudly confesses to them, indeed, she boasts of her cases of effective bewitchment. In most cases, her motive is to take revenge for some real or imagined grudge.

This woman lived deeply embroiled in the everyday system of village witchcraft of the early modern period. As a practiced and probably quite knowledgeable healer, she could take on any of the relevant roles, in accordance with her social, family and neighbourhood standing, her relationship to the village administration and to rival healers, last but not least, the needs of her healing practice as a business. If we merely consider the dimension of everyday reality within these witness statements, we see before us a woman who showed little sympathy for her patients, who was given to malevolence, spite, revenge and threats and who may have carried out true acts of bewitchment. She seems to have been the kind of person who even today would be referred to, symbolically, as a witch. Her contemporaries, it seems, did not mean it symbolically.

[24] Bessenyei 1997, I:462.
[25] Ibid.

For all these reasons, in her testimony, Erzsébet Tóth claimed to be a *táltos* and her conduct in front of the tribunal and the contents and style of her statement seem to substantiate this. Her witnesses also cite a great many remarks she made regarding her *táltos*hood and recall her bragging about this. She had spoken to many witnesses about the fact that she was a *táltos* or a *fél táltos* ('half *táltos*'), and that she had been born with teeth. She values the latter highly and apparently showed them to one of the witnesses, along with the wounds she had acquired in heavenly battle. She also encouraged one of the witnesses to touch her teeth but the person refused to reach into her mouth for fear she might bite her.

We can only surmise some sort of *táltos* pride to have lain in the background of these statements, which she clearly intended to use in order to enhance her prestige as a *táltos* in the eyes of the town community – where, it would appear, she was renowned as a witch rather than as a *táltos*. Apparently she tried to further support these claims by referring to her supposed heavenly patrons – she spread word all over town that she was a *táltos* and God's daughter and that she was "second person to the Lord God and Jesus Christ had covered her with his mantel".[26] Witnesses also recounted about her that "the Blessed Virgin goes to her and talks to her every Wednesday".[27] Indeed, she claims that one of her most useful medicines originates with Christ and forges a connection between him and the bodily marks of her *táltos*hood, – she had given one of her teeth to Christ.

References to her opposition to witches and Satan are also part and parcel of this strategy and combined with her talk of her heavenly patrons seem to have been effective. We do know about a remark she made which may be interpreted to mean that she had come by her healing abilities in "rapture" (in a state of trance), i.e., some sort of initiating heavenly vision. Knowledge brought from heaven is again contrasted in this statement to witchcraft, "… and I do this not driven by witchcraft but because I have been carried away and thence I know it".[28]

This is the strategy that dominates her commentary on her heavenly "*táltos* battle". Indeed, this soul battle, which is the most important item of the beliefs surrounding the "true" *táltos*, does not come up again in any other context throughout the trial. The court accuses her of allying herself with the devil, but in defence she claims – indeed boasts – that as a weather magician she had a serious responsibility to protect the town from the disastrous hailstorms that threatened its grain and grape harvests and also from assault from hostile witches who had attacked the grain fields of her town. Her heavenly battles took place under the patronage of her Christian calling and guardian spirits and she was also given the keys to the gate of heaven by her heavenly patrons. "… when there is lightening, and the *táltos* are fighting, she, too, is present there and she must have gone there through the air with God's help and there she does battle", as some of the witnesses testifying in her favour recall her statement.[29]

[26] Ibid., 460.
[27] Ibid., 465.
[28] Ibid., 463.
[29] Ibid., 468.

Whatever the truth regarding the practice of this professed weather magician, she was well acquainted with the beliefs related to weather magician *táltos*, and her urban environment must have been similarly familiar with them. These beliefs and the related narratives that must have been common knowledge were suited to continuously feed her *táltos* pride and build her *táltos* identity. The statements of this woman and her witnesses allow us to discern the outlines of a *táltos* mythology and the fragments of the practice of a weather magician. However, there is a rather sharp contradiction, hard to resolve, between the personalities of a *táltos* responsible for the community and that of a malevolent witch. The question emerges whether Erzsébet Tóth ever really had a genuine practice as a weather magician or healer, whether she was a *táltos* at all (if we use the criteria of soul battles to avert hailstorms and the belief of being born with teeth, as she suggests by her statement made at court)? It is possible that all this talk of Örzse Tóth's *táltos* identity, her attributes and Christian guardian spirits is but a show put on for the urban public to enhance her prestige and to threaten her opponents in the town and later in court. Some kind of a *táltos* identity or pride and, as I have said, at least an awareness of the activities and beliefs of *táltos* are present in her mind and constitute one of the basic pillars of her narrative strategy.

It seems that Erzsébet Tóth put her energies as *táltos* not into soul battles experienced in a trance as much as into threatening the leadership of the town with bewitchment. Her main point of defence is that she emphasised her *táltos* identity while at the same time bragging about her acts of bewitchment. Central to her strategy was to stress her role in protecting the community – among others from an earthquake – emphasising her power over the entire town and threatening her opponents and the administration. A witness cited her bragging thus: "… had I not circumambulated the town of Berény, it would have sunk …, but do you know that at the time when that earthquake came, had it not been for me, one third of Hungary would have been lost?".[30] She flaunted her power as a witch based, apparently, on her proud identity as a *táltos* – this is more than what could be expected of an ordinary community healer, no matter how successful. It is some kind of (*táltos*) sense of calling with which she was invested at birth. Was she then a *táltos*? Having no direct evidence either for or against, all we can say is that she is more likely not to have been one. More accurately: she experienced and lived her *táltos* role as a witch, healing or harming as the occasion demanded.

This kind of intertwining between witchcraft and *táltos*hood is also true for several other cases that show similarities to the above discussed example in terms of the mentality displayed and strategies used. For example that of Mrs. István Szathmári, née Anna Belényesi[31] who was accused at Hajdúszoboszló in 1715 and of a Mrs András Barta, née Erzsébet Balási,[32] a *táltos* woman from Debrecen, whose case unfolded in 1725–1726. Unfortunately, I have no room here to present these cases in detail. I could

---

[30] Ibid., 460, 466.

[31] Balogh 1958, 313–18; Klaniczay, Kristóf és Pócs 1989, I: 283–89. See a detailed discussion of her and several similar persons in Pócs 2017, táltos Nos 10–12.

[32] Komáromy 354–56; Bessenyei I: 389–400; Her activities and the *táltos* beliefs related to her are discussed in detail in Ildikó Kristóf's book: Kristóf 1998, 97–98.

mention a few other ambivalent witches who displayed both a harming and healing tendency all of whom were referred to as *táltos* (for instance, the diviner Anók Fejér, who was spotted at a number of localities in North-East Hungary over a decade and a half between 1716 and 1732). In their trial documentation, *táltos* traits, if they are mentioned at all, seem to serve no purpose other than that of a set of stereotypes used to heighten their prestige and/or serve as defence against witchcraft accusation.[33]

Money-seeing *Táltos* and Fraudulent Treasure Diggers with the Reputation of a *Táltos*

The shared characteristic of *táltos* belonging to this group is that their sole or most important *táltos* activity was to see money (i.e., to "see" through occult means things that had been buried in the ground, or from fingernails that had been moistened by saliva or with mirrors), as well as to organise such activity or have others carry it out. It is beyond the scope of the present study to describe in detail the trial documentations of such cases that do in fact, offer exceedingly interesting and relevant information.[34] Treasure diggers of this age tended to work in gangs and to employ "seers" they would hire in order to find the treasure. This is what treasure diggers appearing in court cases had done. All of them were likely to defraud their clients as well as their subcontractors. Neither was such subterfuge alien to genuine *táltos*, who used true occult or magical means, but frauds and swindlers abounded and they got involved in pretending to seek or dig treasure with the sole intention of fraudulent profit-making.

In order to disguise their deception, these people tried to fabricate a *táltos* identity for themselves, either by making reference to what they knew to be stereotypical *táltos* traits (being born with teeth, fighting heavenly battles against the Turks or the Germans), or by inventing "*táltos* stories". Thus, for instance, the trial documentation of the famous money-gazer of Debrecen, Mrs. Mihály Szaniszlai[35] reveals that she had hired some workers to dig for treasure and asked them to give her money for some *táltos*, because – as she often declared – as a *táltos* she had money-seeing power over the entire town. She also sought to enhance her prestige as a *táltos* by spreading the rumour that she had learnt money-seeing in Turkey. Oddly, mention of Turkish (or, in one case Crimean Tartar) origin crops up repeatedly with the intent of enhancing a *táltos*'s prestige. Another fraudulent money-gazer, who "had called herself a *táltos*, tempting a great many people by money-seeing, digging", is said to have boasted having a Turkish "*táltos* mistress" from whom she had supposedly learnt the *táltos*' art. Taking advantage of her reputation as a *táltos*, she tried to obtain money for treasure-digging.

---

[33] Pócs 2017, táltos No. 23; Komáromy 1910, 227–33; Kristóf 1998, 96. Judit Kis-Halas's study provides a detailed overview of the case of Anók Fejér as a healer and a witch identifier: Kis-Halas 2016.
[34] For a more detailed account, see Pócs 2017, táltos Nos. 13 and 26–31.
[35] Pócs 2017, táltos No. 27.

"She had the diggers swear that they would give up some of the money they found for the *táltos*." She, too, emphasised her *táltos* power over the whole town. "… God had created her wise, she was a half-*táltos*, and if she wanted to she could have plenty of power." "If she wants to give up the money, she will, but the whole town of Debrecen cannot take it from her."[36] Mrs. Szaniszlai even enlisted the stereotype of a heavenly *táltos* battle fought against the Turks in order to enhance her authority. "She had done battle three times against German *táltos* and had won."[37] Péter Késcsináló – in order to trick his Debrecen community – went so far as to call himself the emperor of the *táltos*. Mrs. János Jámbor, née Jutka Virág admitted at her trial at Kalocsa in 1764[38] that she had stolen and cheated and was unable to find buried money (for this she was sentenced to death). She had presented herself as a *táltos* and is said to have asked her deceived clients for bed linen for some supposed *táltos officer*. She even explained that she had sent the items on to the officer's palace in Buda where he was supposedly lying ill. In a trial held in Eger in 1748, Demeter Farkas was proven to be a swindler and a fraudulent money-gazer. He used a twelve-year-old girl, whom he proclaimed was a *táltos*, to cover up his incompetence. Erzsébet Barna,[39] as a virgin, saw money on commission from her employers. She had no *táltos* attributes of any kind, but her teacher and employer had spread the rumour that she was a "*tátos*".

We could mention a whole line of further data about fraudulent money-seers who claimed to be *táltos*, both in court and in their own communities. They too emphasised their *táltos*hood in court since this was considered a far lesser offence than fraudulent treasure-digging. Let us also note here that fraudulent money-seers were not the only people to use the name *táltos* to cover up their dishonest intentions and to enhance their reputation. Other impostors also appear in these trials, such as the horse-thief from Debrecen or the swindler from Kecskemét[40] who visited members of the local population pretending to be a *táltos*, threatening them with bewitchment and thus coercing them into giving him clothes or food.

Another swindler worth mentioning is Mihály Szvetics. In his 1752 trial[41] conducted in Latin before the episcopal manorial court of Pécs, in addition to *táltos* beliefs, there were allusions to the persons and activities of notorious magical specialists of the day and even to priestly benedictions, primarily in the testimony of the accused. Apparently, Szvetics wished to bolster his reputation in the eyes of the tribunal with these references. In the Latin text, he is referred to with the Hungarian term "*táltos*", which is also how he identified himself. He was brought before the judges for fraud relating to treasure-seeing, participation in thievery, quackery and arson. The trial documents

---

[36] Komáromy 1910, 249–55. For more detail see Kristóf 1998, 95–97; Pócs 2017, táltos No. 28.

[37] Komáromy 1910, 253.

[38] For more detail, see Pócs 2017, táltos No 32.

[39] Széll 1892, 111–12; Klaniczay, Kristóf és Pócs 1989, I:290–92. For more detail, see Kristóf 1998, 98; Pócs 2017, táltos No 28.

[40] Pócs 2017, táltos Nos 33 and 35.

[41] Szentkirályi 1917; Klaniczay, Kristóf és Pócs 1989, I:38–45. For more detail, see Pócs 2017, táltos No. 34.

outline the character of a clever swindler who was a drifter who did not belong to any permanent community, provided for himself with casual work, begging and stealing. The accusations of thievery, participation in treasure digging and practicing certain magical procedures (for instance quackery with the severed little finger of a hanged man) seem to be borne out. He was also accused of causing fires and hailstorms; in relation to the latter accusation the mythical motif of the swindling *garabonciás,*[42] who studied with the Devil, appeared in the witness testimonies. He defended himself from the charge of causing hailstorms by claiming that his role as a *táltos* was precisely to fend off hail, and that he merely practiced the profession of chasing away rainclouds in order to protect the crops; that two years earlier he had performed this procedure in Buda at the request of a Buda commissioner. His success was due to his being the "seventh son" of his mother, which meant that he was born a *táltos.* Consequently, he had "secret powers" to prevent sorcerers from sending lightning. In his account, he went out as the first hail drops fell from the sky and said: "Go away, you have no place here". If this was not sufficient and the sorcerers kept on sending lightning, he chased them away with angry words.

This is an amusing story, which the court might have accepted, but it has little to do with "real" *táltos* capabilities; the motif rather recalls the ecclesiastical benedictions to ward off storms, elements of which could have been known to Szvetics, as he could have witnessed clerical practices. It is likely that to protest his innocence against the charge of causing hail, Szvetics relied on elements of beliefs that were part of living traditions in Southern Hungary, even in the twentieth century – such as the belief in the special capabilities of the seventh child (fortune-teller, *táltos*, weather magician, etc.) – as well as on the positive reputation and prestige of the weather magician practice of the *táltos* at the time. Although his claims do not prove that he was a *táltos*, his playing the role of the *táltos* in court proves that he did know about the profession of weather magician *táltos*; moreover, this also confirms that the role still had a certain amount of prestige. Apparently, it was worth trying to pretend to be a *táltos* as a defence against the accusation of fraud before the episcopal judges in Pécs.

Faith, Doubt, Pretence

I think even on such a small sample the characteristics of the global processes mentioned in the introduction could be captured: the loss of credibility of magical/religious specialists, changes in their roles, and what goes hand in hand with this: doubt gaining ground at the expense of faith. The fact that among the people who called themselves *táltos* only a very few turned out to be "genuine" *táltos* (also practicing his/her supposed "original" weather magician function) shows unequivocally the disappearance of their communal role which was supposed to have still existed in the

---

[42] A weather wizard, wandering student appearing in eighteenth–twentieth-century popular legends, who had learnt his craft at the school of the Devil.

Middle Ages. Of the few *táltos*, who referred to heavenly battles, only two seem to have had genuine *táltos* identity. The others participated in "neighbourhood witch-craft" that came to characterise early modern Central Europe, at the same time they also were active in the increasingly common activity of treasure gazing (in keeping with their capabilities as seers and healers). In comparison to the "original" weather-magician type of *táltos*hood, these roles are secondary. This is also evident from the fact that, despite the changing roles occupied by them, their denomination as *táltos* had remained. It also seems certain that, although they must have always existed, the number of swindlers increased during the Enlightenment and this process continued during the nineteenth century.[43] We could mention for example the person of the "treasure-seeking" Ferenc Csuba, discussed in detail by Péter Tóth G. in this volume. Csuba became quite famous in the late eighteenth century, he claimed that he was a "genuine *táltos*" and that he was a member of the "order of *táltos*;" he attempted to convince the tribunal that the troops of *táltos* had five kinds of duties: "healing, money gazing, preaching, begging and husbandry" and "he belongs to the money gazers."[44] An example of an even later appearance of a swindler is that of Bábi Sárközi, who called herself a *táltos* in an 1848 witch trial at Szekszárd.[45] All this, even as the number of impostors increased, indicates that the prestige of *táltos* and the faith in them – or its vestiges – were alive even in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is also clear that by this time the *táltos* concept merged completely with that of digging for treasure; in the self-presentation of these more recent impostors weather magic was never even mentioned. As for the last period of *táltos* beliefs, the twentieth–twenty-first century, by this time, the figure of the *táltos* only survived in narratives (about his extraordinary birth, initiation, battle for good weather or about his treasure digging activity). We have no record of functioning weather magician *táltos*, *táltos* pride, belief in the power of *táltos* or the prestige of *táltos* from any rural community from recent times. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a *táltos* nicknamed "Pénzásó Pista" ("Money digging Steve") became quite famous for actually digging for treasure on the outskirts of Tiszafüred, the stories told about him do not reflect any belief in the possibility of seeing treasure; he was considered to be insane.

In conclusion, let us see to what degree I was able to substantiate and refine my presuppositions regarding faith, doubt and deceit through a micro-analysis of some court cases of seventeenth–eighteenth century *táltos*. What did we find out about the relationship of faith and doubt from the point of view of the main actors: the real or imagined *táltos*, that of their village or small town milieus as well as of the momentary speech community of the court?

The continuous use of the term *táltos*, even among the more recent treasure digging swindlers and other impostors indicates the traces of the prestige of *táltos*hood during the nineteenth century and genuine *táltos* beliefs in the eighteenth century,

---

[43] As demonstrated in Péter Tóth G.'s paper in this volume in which he discusses this topic in detail.
[44] Nagy 1957, 298–302 (cited in Péter Tóth G.'s paper in this volume).
[45] Szilágyi 1987, 510.

that is to say a belief in the genuineness of the profession. However, this does not prove the personal belief of any given *táltos*. As we have seen, the faith or lack thereof or doubts of the *táltos* in their own "*táltos*hood" and its mythical/religious aspects did not become directly manifest in courtroom dialogues, although some tell-tale signs perhaps indicated the possibility of true "faith" among some *táltos*. All such cases were rather doubtful. Nonetheless, certain differences are discernible: while Örzse Tóth's manipulations to make her *táltos* status credible appeared to be phony, Zsuzsanna Kőműves and her fellow *táltos*, as well as Ilona Borsai, shared with their community the mythical and narrative marks, even the supposed bodily proofs of their *táltos* identity freely: in their case, this indicates possible genuine *táltos* beliefs. Only Örzse Tóth speaks of her activities as a storm *táltos* with the pride of someone who protects the community as a *táltos*, Zsuzsanna Kőműves seems to know nothing about the communal tasks of the *táltos*, about the objective of heavenly battles. However, the "genuine" *táltos*hood of Kőmíves and Borsai seems to be supported by the fact that a coherent set of *táltos* beliefs are associated with them (birthmarks, heavenly legitimation, initiation, the ability to fall into trance, heavenly soul battle) rather than the "inventions" of swindlers, for example the hodgepodge of beliefs presented by Mihály Szvetics. The main argument in favour of considering their *táltos* beliefs to be genuine was that both of them told the tribunal and/or their own communities about their visions as subjective experiences, as if they had truly experienced them. Naturally, the doubt of the researcher remains; a vision can always be pretended, or imagined. The one thing that is certain is the knowledge behind all this: regardless of whether the person truly experiences the heavenly soul battle in a trance state, or recounts it subsequent to a pretended trance, she knows what a genuine *táltos* "should" see and experience, and also knows how she should "credibly" perform the ritual to her village audience.[46] The knowledge of a community or a specialist seer is after all based on the one-time (if not the present) genuine practice and belief in the reality and efficacy of otherworldly battles (i.e., that the *táltos* is able to protect her community from hail by means of winning the soul battles fought against storm demons.) However, this knowledge is only the condition but not the proof of faith, it can equally be the basis of either doubt or of faith. Regardless of whether a specialist believes or not or perhaps doubts, he can make use of beliefs about the figure of the *táltos*. Familiarity with them constitutes part of his knowledge, and they can be part of narrative constructs retold for the community or the tribunal and can be used to support or strengthen his own *táltos* belief, or to legitimize his role in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of the community or the tribunal. Thus, faith and knowledge, just as doubt and knowledge, go hand in hand – at least with regard to practicing this specialised profession.

---

[46] We have no data based on observation on pretended *táltos* activity or for the fictive account of a non-existent otherworldly vision among Hungarian *táltos* since the phenomenon is extinct. It should be noted, however, that in Eurasian shamanism these are commonplace occurrences. See e.g., Hamayon 1993 or Vargyas 1994.

We have to be aware that this might also be role-playing for the benefit of the community or the court. However, it is a seeming paradox that play-acting does not necessarily exclude belief, not even if the *táltos* uses her knowledge as publicity or with intent to deceive. In this respect, she may have used the different facets of her knowledge in different ways: she may have had faith in the efficacy of the above mentioned generalised *táltos*-ritual, in her own *táltos*hood and independently of this, she may or may not have believed in the non-Christian spirit world: in storm demons, dragons bringing hail, or "evil ones" attacking the community. Since she was Christian, it seems likely that she believed in the Christianized superiors of the *táltos* (Christ, God, the Virgin Mary). The supposed one-time Hungarian *táltos* beliefs were fundamentally non-Christian, rather, they were pagan relicts that co-existed with Christianity. Naturally, *táltos* did not distinguish between pagan or Christian ritual practices, however, most likely the tradition of Christian legitimation and the necessity to reinforce their *táltos* beliefs with their own Christian faith, or to advertise their own *táltos*hood with it, or use it in their own defence at court was part and parcel of their knowledge. What seems certain is the important role of *táltos* beliefs as objects of prestige and points of reference.

We have concrete proof for the coexistence of *doubt* and *faith* in the village or small town communities of the *táltos*, as well as in the courts, thus we can safely assume that doubt was part of the subjective faith of the *táltos*. Besides the knowledge necessary to practice her craft, she may have equally, and concurrently, had faith and doubts regarding her calling or the world of spirits that was in contact with her. It was also possible that along with a generalised scepticism her faith would come forth only at certain times – in crisis situations. When using her *táltos*hood as a defence ("I am not a witch but a *táltos*"), or to cover up her fraud in front of the tribunal, her knowledge would definitely have to come into action but so could – in an ad hoc and temporary manner – her faith. Besides the expectations of the court, her own expectations of her role as well as the requirements of the magico-religious market, and the hope of financial gain could all play an auxiliary role in the possible maintenance of her faith or its actualization as needed.

The situation is very different, and all our scholarly doubts regarding "faith" disappear, when we examine the belief invested in the healing and bewitching activities and abilities of *táltos* acting in the role of witch or unwitcher. In general, we can state that the long-term survival of witchcraft beliefs must have been aided by the fact that supernatural capabilities for both healing and bewitching had solid, Christian connotations, approved by the church elite: they both took place with the help of God or Satan. With regard to the cases examined here: none of the actors we hear from in the trials examined – the accused, the witnesses or the court itself – leave any doubt about the fact that unlike the disappearing *táltos* beliefs, witchcraft beliefs were extremely vigorous. Everyone believed in the possibility of causing and removing harm and in the abilities of witches and unwitchers to accomplish either. All of their statements – also reflecting their subjective views (good or bad intentions, empathy, helpfulness or anger, revenge, threatening, murderous intentions) – indicate this. It seems that in several cases *táltos* belief remained strong precisely because of its intertwining with

witchcraft beliefs (see for example Örzse Tóth's proclaimed *táltos* power that mani-
fested itself in threats of causing harm). Mrs András Bartha, *táltos* from Debrecen,
spoke as a believer about the opposition between witches and *táltos*, and similarly to
Örzse Tóth, she also held that *táltos* power was "superior" to witchcraft and relied on
this idea in her own defence in front of the tribunal. (She declared that her deceased
brother was a "mighty *táltos*," were he alive he would protect her from the night attacks
of witches).[47] Belief in the ability to heal – especially in the case of *táltos* who functioned
as unwitchers – becomes more nuanced in our sources (they place more trust in the
healers of other communities than those of their own.) Doubt is likely also to have been
part of the belief in the supernatural capabilities of healing and causing harm; we can
find traces of this in some concrete cases (the healer is not a good healer, she is incom-
petent, she is not the one who was supposed to do the healing because she was not the
one who caused the bewitchment, etc.).

It is difficult to say anything about the "faith" of the treasure diggers, who were
mostly con artists. "Genuine" treasure seers – who, however, cannot be distinguished
from the impostors – most likely believed in their own ability to "see" and in the real-
ity and usefulness of their activity, even if they had doubts. Beyond this, what we can
conclude is merely that both genuine and fraudulent treasure seers used *táltos* beliefs
and the communal knowledge and narratives about them to increase their prestige
while some used them to cover up their scams. They were building on past or current
beliefs, but what they themselves believed remains a mystery. Perhaps it is a tell-tale
sign that the last two fraudulent treasure seers used the word *táltos* as a magical threat
– using it as a synonym for "harmful wizard", "witch": as if inspired by a belief that the
power of the *táltos* surpassed that of witches (similarly to fraudulent *táltos* bragging
about *táltos* power).

As for the faith and doubt manifested among the communities of the persons exam-
ined here, we can find out quite a bit about this from the statements of the witnesses
and the *táltos* themselves. *Táltos*hood still had prestige, and its mythology and narrative
– as we saw – was quite familiar to some eighteenth-century communities. Those speak-
ing about it – "genuine" ones and fraudulent ones alike – must have supposed that
their communities and their audiences believed all this (even swindlers found it worth
a try to rely on the common font of knowledge about *táltos*). Perhaps it was a sign of the
"greater" strength of the *táltos* beliefs of a community when an individual was given the
táltos byname, which, as we have seen, was a rather frequent occurrence. When mem-
bers of a village or small town know the identity of the community's *táltos* it may also be
an indication of the existence of genuine *táltos*; the *táltos* themselves also speak of their
*táltos*hood openly, they do not hide it as we could see in some of our cases. However,
we cannot know who in the given community believed them and who doubted them
– most probably both attitudes were present everywhere. When members of the com-
munity ask for "material" proof from the person claiming to be *táltos*, it can be taken to
be a clear sign of doubt on their part. This is not so much doubt in *táltos*hood as such,

[47] Bessenyei 1997, 395.

but in whether a given person was a *táltos* or not: for example Örzse Tóth offers to show the tooth she was born with to the person doubting her, or Zsuzsanna Kőműves shows the scars on her arm left over from the heavenly battle she fought.

Belief in witchcraft was likely to have been general both among the individuals examined here and the communities they hailed from. Threats of bewitchment or natural disasters addressed by *táltos* to communities or their prominent leaders also indicates such a generalized belief. Members of the communities hoodwinked most likely took it for granted that treasure-seeing was possible, their credulity may have been aided by the fact that the treasure-seeing *táltos* advertised their own Christian credentials and the Christian faith of communities at the time could not be doubted, although individual variation in the degrees of faith of individuals was entirely possible.

Finally, with regard to the courts, the above described global processes of the spread of scepticism and the loss of credibility of magical crafts did not leave them untouched either. Changes in the elite's views of witchcraft, diabolical help and magic and in the laws affecting them, on the one hand may have influenced the knowledge of the courts that served as the basis of their ideas about *táltos* and witch beliefs, on the other hand the courts channelled these changes to those, who found themselves in front of the tribunal. The concrete manifestations of these changes were primarily the verdicts of the trials. These reflect a multiplicity of attitudes: at times the courts treated *táltos*hood with neutrality, as a harmless craft, at times they considered it to be fraud, or to be coming from the devil; the latter cases also indicate the presence of some vestiges of the "*táltos* beliefs" of the judges themselves. The same can be said about the evaluation of treasure diggers, although in this case the willingness to declare the case to be fraudulent seems to be greater. In contrast, the solid, unswerving survival of witch beliefs can also be deduced from the verdicts, and perhaps the same can be said about beliefs regarding healers with supernatural abilities. There are very few statements about them in courtroom dialogues; if there are, then the healers' capabilities are contrasted with witchcraft, the capacity to cause harm by bewitchment. Presumably, this indicates strong belief in both crafts on the part of all actors: the accused, the witnesses and the judiciary alike.

The declarations of the accused in defence and justification of themselves (and sometimes the similarly motivated statements of the witnesses) help us refine the supposed processes. Regarding *táltos*hood and treasure seeking, we do not have relevant data, using Christian attributes as a defence (besides being personal beliefs) can primarily be taken to be mere appeals to the *Christian* faith of the court. The vigorousness of witchcraft beliefs is also demonstrated by the denials expressed in defence.

Although we could surmise that the examined court cases of *táltos* were also part of the global processes of change, it was not possible to establish from the declarations of the courts and the statements addressed to them a clear temporal change, the unequivocal process of the spread of scepticism (perhaps our sample was also too small for this). The coexistence of a multitude of opinions indicates parallel processes of differing rates of change in the relationship of "faith and doubt."

Conclusions

Without wanting to overgeneralize the results of my examination based on a limited number of cases of Hungarian *táltos* trials, I can draw the following conclusions with regard to the question of the relationship of faith and doubt.

Religious faith and doubt cannot be proved directly, we can only surmise their existence (taking into consideration certain secondary evidence), or rather, there always remain some (scholarly) doubts, and even then, we can only suppose their existence for the community, not so much in the case of individuals. Thus, whether the few *táltos* who can be designated as "genuine" believed in their own *táltos*hood and its mythical correlates or not, cannot be known, only surmised.

Based on indirect evidence we can conjecture that among actors and their communities/audiences besides faith, doubt is always present. However, doubt does not mean non-faith, instead it accompanies faith. Neither do pretence, make-believe or cheating mean non-faith, rather, they show the existence of faith at another level.

Religious faith and its transformations are multi-layered phenomena with various coordinates – differences in the religious, social and geographical environment, temporal differences, different beliefs of ordinary people and the elite, the faith of the clerical and the secular elite, the varying roles of the officials of the community, the faith of the actors and of their communities/audiences – that rarely overlap; processes of change take place on different planes in tandem at differing time and space intervals.

References

Balogh, István. 1958. "Egy bűbájos pere 1715-ből" [Trial of a witch from 1715]. *Néprajzi Közlemények* III (1–2): 313–19.

Bessenyei, József, szerk. 1997. *A magyarországi boszorkányság forrásai I* [Sources of witchcraft in Hungary]. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.

Blix Hagen, Rune. 2012. *The Sami-Sorcerers in Norwegian History. Sorcery persecutions of the Sami.* Kárášjohka-Karasjok: ČálliidLágádus and Authors Publisher.

Bodgál, Ferenc. 1960. "Egy miskolci 'tátos' 1741-ben" [A "tátos" from Miskolc in 1741]. *Néprajzi Közlemények* V (3–4): 308–16.

Campagne, Fabian Alejandro. 2007. "Charismatic Healers on Iberian Soil: An Autopsy of a Mythical Complex of Early Modern Spain." *Folklore* 118: 44–64.

Dillinger, Johannes. 2012. *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America. A history.* Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Diószegi, Vilmos. 1958. *A sámánhit emlékei a magyar népi műveltségben* [Memories of shamanic beliefs in Hungarian folklore]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Hamayon, Roberte N. 1993. "Are 'Trance', 'Ecstasy' and Similar Concepts Appropriate in the Study of Shamanism?" *Shaman* I (1–2): 17–40.

Herner, János. 1988. *Bornemisza Anna megbűvöltetése. Boszorkányok Erdély politikai küzdelmeiben 1678–1688* [Anna Bornemisza's enchantment: Witches in the political struggles of Transylvania,

1678–1688]. Adattár XVI–XVIII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, 21. Budapest: MTA Könyvtára.

Kis-Halas, Judit. 2016. "Fejér Annók. Egy 18. századi boszorkányazonosító pályafutása" [Annók Fejér. The career of an eighteenth-century witch identifier]. In Smid Bernadett, szerk., *Minden dolgok folytatása. Tanulmányok Deáky Zita 60. születésnapján,* 12–28. Budapest: ELTE BTK Néprajzi Intézet.

Klaniczay, Gábor. 1990a. "Shamanistic Elements in Central European Witchcraft." In Id., *The Uses of Supernatural power: the Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* 129–50. Cambridge: Polity.

–. 1990b. "Hungary: The Accusations and the Universe of Popular Magic." In Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds. *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries,* 219–55. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

–. 2006. "Shamanism and Witchcraft." *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft,* I (2): 214–21.

Klaniczay, Gábor, Ildikó Kristóf és Éva Pócs, szerk. 1989. *Magyarországi boszorkányperek. Kisebb forráskiadványok gyűjteménye,* I–II [Witch trials in Hungary. A collection of smaller source publications]. Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutatóintézete.

Komáromy, Andor. 1910. *Magyarországi boszorkányperek oklevéltár* [Source-book of witch trials in Hungary]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.

Kristóf, Ildikó. 1998. "*Ördögi mesterséget nem cselekedtem*". *A boszorkányüldözés társadalmi és kulturális háttere a kora újkori Debrecenben és Bihar vármegyében* ["I have not done any diabolic deeds": The social and cultural foundation of witch-hunting in early modern Debrecen and Bihar County]. Debrecen: Ethnica.

Láng, Benedek és Péter Tóth G., szerk. 2009: *A kincskeresés 400 éve Magyarországon. Kézikönyvek és olvasóik* [Four hundred years of treasure hunting in Hungary: Handbooks and their readers]. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Lehoczky, Tivadar. 1887. "Beregmegyei boszorkányperek" [Witch trials of Bereg County]. *Hazánk, Történelmi Közlöny* VII: 304–5.

Macfarlane, Alan. 1970. *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. A Regional and Comparative Study.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Muchembled, Robert. 1979. *La sorcière au village (XVIe au XVIIe siècles).* Paris: Gallimard et Julliard.

Nagy, Gusztáv. 1957. "A csökmői sárkány története a korabeli okiratok tükrében" [The story of the dragon of Csökmő in light of contemporary documents]. *Ethnographia* 68: 292–305.

Oláh, György. 1886/1887. "A boszorkányperek Békésvármegyében. Művelődés történelmi vázlatok a múlt századból" [Witch trials in Békés County. Cultural historical outlines from the last century]. *A Békésvármegyei Régészeti és Művelődéstörténeti Társulat Évkönyve* 13: 30–161.

Pócs, Éva. 1999. *Between the Living and the Dead. A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age.* Trans. Szilvia Rédey and Michael Webb. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.

–. 2017. Shamanism or Witchcraft? The *táltos* before the tribunal. In Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs, eds., *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania,* 221–89 (Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

–. 2018. "The Hungarian *Táltos* and the Shamanism of Pagan Hungarians. Questions and Hyphotheses." *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 63: 149–96.

Scheutz, Martin. 2006. "Die große Hoffnung, die Abstiegangst und die Magie. Schatzgräber und -beter in den österreichischen Erbländern der Frühen Neuzeit." In Joachim Bahlcke et, al., Hrsgs., *Religion und Magie in Ostmitteleuropa. Spielräume theologischer Normierungsprozesse*

in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Religions- und Kulturgeschichte in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 8. Berlin: LIT Verlag.

Schram, Ferenc. 1970. *Magyarországi boszorkányperek, 1526–1768.* I–II [Hungarian witch trials]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Sugár, István. 1987. *Bűbájosok, ördöngősök, boszorkányok Heves és Külső-Szolnok vármegyében* [Enchanters, possessed and witches in Heves and Külső-Szolnok Counties]. Budapest: MTA Könyvtára.

Szendrei, János. 1904. *Miskolcz város története 1000–1800.* Vol. II [History of the town of Miskolc 1000–1800]. Miskolc: Forster Jenő nyomda.

Szentkirályi, István. 1917. "Garabonciás-per Pécsett" [Garabonciás trial in Pécs]. *A Pécs-Baranya-megyei Múzeum Egyesület Értesítője* IX: 1–7.

Széll, Farkas. 1892. "Törvénykezési adatok alföldi babonákról. Debreczen város törvényszéki jegyzőkönyveiből" [Legislative data about superstitions in the Great Hungarian Plain. Judicial records from the city of Debrecen]. *Ethnographia* III: 110–16.

Szilágyi, Mihály. 1987. "Boszorkányperek Tolna vármegyéből" [Witch trials from Tolna County]. *Tanulmányok Tolna vármegye történetéből* XI: 437–513.

Tausiet, María. 2009. "Healing Virtue: *Saludadores* versus Witches in Early Modern Spain." *Medical History.* Suppl. 29: 40–63.

Vargyas, Gábor. 1994. "Un chant brou à l'esprit auxiliaire." Avec la collaboration de Annick Lévy-Ward, Jean-François Papet, et Sita Sithamma. *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* 35: 122–76.

Edward Bever

Scrying and the "Sieve and Shears":
Sociocultural Roles and Neurophysiological Bases
of Traditional Divinatory Techniques[1]

In 1594 an investigation into the town bather in Cannstatt, Hans Brüchner, revealed that he used an illicit magical technique as part of the healing services he provided.[2] It was not unusual for a bather to practice simple medicine as part of his services, but Brüchner crossed a line when he told Fuchs Jäger's wife that "her illness came to her from evil women," whom he "could see" in a reflection in a glass plate. Specifically, he told her that she was made sick by "a goat cheese given to her to eat" by Margritha Ludwig, the widow of a town official, who, he said, lived on a lane populated by "malevolent people". Jäger's wife "became belligerent toward Margritha", but since Margritha and her neighbors were "honorable notables", the magistrates began to investigate the bather. They soon learned of another incident in which Brüchner had also said that a sick boy "was afflicted by evil women", and offered to let the boy's father see for himself who did it "in a mirror". Under interrogation, Brüchner protested that Frau Jäger had told him she had become sick from eating the cheese, said that he must have been drunk when he slighted the honorable people, and denied that he had a mirror.[3] However, the fact that two different witnesses testified that he had boasted of his ability to detect witches in a reflective surface suggests that this last statement was an evasion, for he had told Frau Jäger he saw the witch "in the window", and he did not tell the boy's father whose mirror he would use.

The divinatory technique Brüchner used, called scrying, was a common form of divination that worked by inducing a subjective experience, in this case a visual one,

---

[1] Note that the substance of this paper was drawn from Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and is reproduced with the permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

[2] Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (hereafter: HSAS) A209, büschel (hereafter: b.) 723, document (hereafter: d.) 2.

[3] Ibid., d. 3.

whose content appeared to be relevant to the issue at hand.[4] It could be practiced by anyone, but in many cases, like this one, it was undertaken by specialists, and it was used it not only to identify suspected witches, but also to identify thieves and other unknown malefactors, locate missing persons and hidden objects, and foretell the future. Variants of it utilized windows and mirrors, as in Brüchner's case, crystal balls, as, for example, a fortune-teller who worked for Anton Fugger used, sword blades, water in a bucket, or even polished thumbnails.[5] All involved staring into the reflective surface until an image that supplied the desired information appeared.

Historians commonly focus on the fact that these techniques could be manipulated by an unscrupulous practitioner who could merely pretend to see an image to support a conclusion he or she had already reached consciously. However, if undertaken earnestly scrying had the potential to reveal genuine insights. Since "the brain knows more than the mind reveals" and "much of what we know can't be stated", scrying can bring out unconscious knowledge by altering the practitioner's consciousness and prompting visual hallucinations.[6] Scrying promotes an altered state of consciousness that enhances access to unconscious knowledge because gazing steadily induces a focused concentration and dissociation similar to hypnosis, if it is relatively brief, or the stronger tuning of the nervous system and simultaneous discharge of the ergotrophic and trophotrophic nervous systems associated with shamanic trance if it is strong. In either state, although to different degrees, "subconscious neural processing can dominate mental activity, producing … unusual … thoughts and images" and "an occasional … flash of insight".[7]

Gazing into a reflective surface promotes visual hallucinations in particular because it focuses attention on visual processing. Furthermore, the ambiguous visual experience reflective surfaces create provides a favorable field onto which to project internally generated images, for even a clear mirror creates a disjunction between the reflection and the background imagery, and many of the types of surfaces used, like windows or water, introduced distortion to the reflected image as well. Vision routinely integrates recent visual memory and internally generated imagery based on expectations and older memories with actual incoming sense data, and the internal inputs can be spontaneously superimposed on the external to create powerful visual experiences that manifest internally generated elements in apparently external perceptions.[8] Scrying harnesses this process deliberately in a more controlled and directed way. Most if not all people are capable of attaining at least fleeting impres-

---

[4] Thomas 1971, 186; Briggs 1996, 182; Walther 1929, 67. Other ways of inducing such subjective experiences included the use of hallucinogenic drugs, including, in Europe, henbane (Duerr 1985, 138, n. 6); and mandrake (Priesner 1993, 37); see also Harner 2001, 199; and Doblin de Rios 1984, 203.

[5] Bever 2006.

[6] Hollan 2000, 540; Norrentranders 1998, 300; Neher 1990, 54.

[7] Neher 1990, 37; Hutton 1999, 96; Winkelmann 1990, 323.

[8] Examples and discussion in Bever 2008, 29–33, and 83–85.

sions in this manner, and roughly one person in twenty by one estimation can generate not just a fleeting impression, but actually a sustained moving image.[9]

A case from Murrhardt that took place 130 years later, in 1729, contains evidence of another form of divination commonly used to identify thieves as well as witches that was also used widely throughout Europe.[10] The case began when a man complained that another man who had lost some money went to a "devil incanter" who said the first man's daughter had taken it. The magistrates investigated and found that the cunning man was a potter named Hans Jacob Schiller who had been "divining for people where lost objects had gone" and who had taken them for well over a decade, and he had also told a man named Christoph Ernst Dumme that a poltergeist in his house was caused by the son of a man involved in a lawsuit against him.

The technique Schiller used was called "sieve driving" (*Sieb treiben*) locally, and "sieve and shears" in England.[11] In one common form, it involved balancing a sieve on the tip of a pair of shears, which was held pointing upward while the names of suspects were recited until the sieve began to rotate, which was taken to indicate that the guilty party had just been named.[12] The general procedure had been known since antiquity, was commonly used across Europe, and was transmitted through oral channels as well as in writings by Agrippa and Mathers' version of the *Clavicula Salomonis*.[13] Since the Middle Ages the technique had been embedded in a ritual including a short blessing invoking "St. Petrus, St. Paulus, St. Kilian, in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit" to introduce each name in turn, which served to mark off the activity from daily routine and helped focus the participants' attention.[14]

Like scrying, sieve driving could be manipulated consciously to validate a predetermined conclusion, but when the ritual was conducted ingenuously it could also manifest unconscious knowledge. In contrast to the process of visual overlay in scrying, which induced a subjective experience whose content was relevant to the issue at hand, the sieve and sheers method created an objective, physical outcome whose meaning was interpreted. While it may seem to us that the sieve's movement must have been random when not deliberately manipulated, it was more likely due to a process known as ideomotor action or the ideomotor effect. In this process, "quasi-independent modules in the brain … initiate motor movements without necessarily engaging the 'executive module' that is responsible for our sense of self-awareness

---

[9] Tuczay 2005, 225, 230, n. 12; Briggs 1996, 182.

[10] HSAS A209, b. 1656, d. 13–5–1729.

[11] Thomas 1971, 213.

[12] Other configurations of the objects were used (for example, the technique discussed at http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100505125 and illustrated at http://www.cunning.org.uk/tools.html), but the general principal of how they functioned seems consistent with the one discussed here.

[13] Mährle 1998, 252; Walther 1929, 75; Martin 1989, 119–20.

[14] HSAS A209, b. 1338, d. 3.

and volition."[15] As a consequence, "our muscles will behave unconsciously in accordance with an implanted expectation" while "we are not aware that we ourselves are the source of the resulting action." Indeed, the actions generally "feel as though they are being propelled" by an external force.

The effect was first investigated by the German Jesuit Althanasius Kircher, who in his 1640 Latin folios reported that pendulums and divining rods only move when held in someone's hand, and not when held by a rigid support. It was first ascribed to unconscious muscular movements by his protégé Gaspard Schott in the late 1650s.[16] The French chemist Michel Chevreul rediscovered and investigated the effect in the early 1800s, and the psychologist and physiologist William Carpenter named it and invoked it as an alternative to spiritualist and paranormal explanations of a number of related phenomena in the late 1800s.

William James expanded on the concept to explain volitional as well as non-volitional movement since, he wrote, "whenever a movement … immediately follows upon the idea of it … all sorts of neuromuscular responses come between … but we know absolutely nothing of them." The only difference, according to James, is whether the original impulse was generated by conscious or unconscious processing. Recent research goes even further than James and suggests that all decisions originate in unconscious processing and consciousness serves at most as a check that enables us to voluntarily suppress impulses that are on the verge of being executed, a capacity that, in contrast to "free will", has been dubbed "free won't".[17]

After James, psychologists' interest in ideomotor action declined, and today it is mainly mentioned by skeptics as an alternative to paranormal explanations of apparently anomalous physical phenomena involving contact with people. They tend to emphasize its potential to channel external suggestions and preconceived notions into apparently significant events, just as, to the extent that historians and anthropologists pay regard to the efficacy of rituals involving it, like rituals involving scrying, they tend to emphasize their potential to manifest and validate pre-existing awareness of socially defined roles or individual interests.[18] Of course, these divinatory techniques can and do do all of these things, for the brain's unconscious processing is notoriously complex, integrating biological urges, cultural scripts, longstanding and self-reinforcing patterns of thought and behavior, and ongoing calculations of immediate interest, which would seem to be why the clergy regarded divination as one of the devil's snares.[19]

---

[15] Benes 1995, 130–31; Hyman 1999, posted as "How People are Fooled by Ideomotor Action" at http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/ideomotor.htm.

[16] Barrett 1924, posted by SurvivalAfterDeath.org at http://www.survivalafterdeath.org/articles/barrett/years.htm; John n.d. http://www.phact.org/e/z/dowsepro.bak; Hatch 2002, http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhatch/pages/03-Sci-Rev/SCI-REV-Home/resource-ref-read/major-minor-ind/westfall-dsb/SAM-S.htm.

[17] Schwartz and Begley 2002, 307.

[18] Thomas 1971, 208, 216–17, 242–44; Macfarlane 1970, 110, 123; Blécourt 1994, 297; Waardt 1993, 35; Dillinger 1999, 142, 144.

[19] Briggs 1996, 184.

However, in emphasizing the illusory and self-serving aspects of scrying and the sieve and shears, modern scholars are somewhat Whiggishly advancing the point of view of one side of the debate about magic in the early modern period, the religious, and later scientific, critics. To fully understand these practices, practitioners, and their clients, though, it behoves us to understand what about them really worked, and why, as well.

People perceive, evaluate, and react to stimuli unconsciously, and they can become aware that this has taken place through "gut feelings" and intuitions.[20] These forms of cognition manifest as visceral sensations and "images … verbal input … [or] a general sense of knowing" since gut feelings are "the conscious experience of involuntary autonomic nervous system activation … triggered by the limbic system", and intuitive insights are "transient, spontaneous altered states of consciousness consisting of particular sensory experience or thoughts, coupled with strong emotional reactions" that are generated by "the tuning in of emotion-based unconscious processing and the tuning out of logical operations".[21] These forms of understanding emerge spontaneously in consciousness strongly enough to form the basis for action or persuasion only sporadically because they are often fleeting or obscure, because they are difficult to articulate and rationalize, and because there are often strong social and psychological pressures not to acknowledge or act on them.[22] Forms of divination like scrying and "sieve driving" tap these visceral and intuitive sources of knowledge deliberately in order to "access information channels of the limbic brain and lower brain centers, behavioral, nonverbal, and emotional communication processes … [and] protomentation, paleomentation, and emotomentation" to help people "negotiate their lives, make decisions, cure ailments, and reknit [or acknowledge and adjust to tears in] social fabrics".[23]

Scrying and sieve driving are particularly useful in determining the source of ailments associated with witchcraft – by which I mean, ailments caused or contributed to by stress resulting from interpersonal conflicts – for several reasons. Before discussing these, however, I think I should expand on the relationship between witchcraft and disease that I have explored in articles and my book *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe.*[24] It is widely recognized there is an intimate, constant, and variegated connection between a person's somatic health and psychological state. A person's psychological well-being, in turn, is highly sensitive to disturbances in interpersonal relations, which means their somatic health is as well. Psychic distress can cause not only hypochondria and psychosomatic ailments, but also a wide variety of psychophysical illnesses and even a propensity for accidents, mainly through the effects of chronic stress. Stress can be triggered and sustained through a variety of

[20] Bever 2008, 23–27.
[21] Hobson 2001, 92; Alexander et al. 1990, 118–19.
[22] Anderson et al. 1999, 401.
[23] Winkelman and Peek 2004, 10, 7; Alexander et al. 1990, 118.
[24] Bever 2000; 2002; 2008, 11–37, 309–12.

conscious and unconscious hostile displays manifesting interpersonal animus, some of which are explicit and consciously recognized, but others of which are subtle and therefore subliminally perceived and processed. Witchcraft in this sense is the conscious or unconscious manipulation of these connections between minds and bodies to manifest one person's animosity as another person's malady.

It was in cases involving unconscious forms of communication and processing that divination played an important role. First of all, awareness or acknowledgement of an interpersonal conflict, or the strength of such a conflict, may be suppressed because of socio-cultural constraints or individual psychodynamics. Secondly, awareness of the specific interpersonal situation generating the stress may not be available to consciousness to begin with. In either case, the process of divination can bring this awareness to consciousness either directly or indirectly.

The process of divination will be direct if the person involved conducts the divination, and indirect if a specialist undertakes the ritual. In the former case, the process is relatively straightforward. The ritual induces an altered state of consciousness, comparatively light in the case of sieve driving and deeper in the case of scrying. In the case of scrying, the person then envisions the neighbor or associate whose word, gesture, or expression triggered the stress, and perhaps even the word, gesture, or expression itself. In the case of sieve driving, the person reacts unconsciously to the name of the person with tiny muscle movements generating a circular motion at the tip of the shears, and hence in the sieve. As noted, both of these processes can be manipulated consciously, and can for various reasons lead the person to unconsciously see or name an innocent party, but these possibilities should not obscure the fact that, undertaken earnestly, these processes can help bring to consciousness previously unacknowledged awareness of who and what triggered the psychophysical processes responsible for the person's misfortune.

If the process of divination is indirect, with a cunning person performing the actual divinatory act, as Hans Brückner did for Fuchs Jäger's wife, the mechanism by which unconscious information is found is more complex. Of course, it is possible for the cunning person to work entirely from his or her own personal knowledge of the client and the potential subjects – Hans seems to have known Margritha Ludwig and the other people on her street, and appears to have known from Fuchs Jäger's wife that she had gotten some cheese from her – but in many cases people consulted cunning folk who lived at some distance and would not have known the client or the likely suspects beforehand. This is undoubtedly why cunning folk often encouraged clients to actually name names themselves, either simply supervising the divinatory process or, perhaps more commonly, acting almost like a psychotherapist to draw out unconscious or unexpressed knowledge by asking questions and suggesting possibilities.[25] In this latter case, and even more when the cunning person actually performed the divination him- or herself, the process involved an intricate interplay between the client and the specialist.

---

[25] Macfarlane 1970, 123–24; Briggs 1996, 180.

Having the specialist do the divination basically involved a trade-off. On the one hand, as we have seen, different people have different capacities to enter trance and bring unconscious information to consciousness, and a cunning person was not only a specialist in this, but also, as a disinterested party, would be less susceptible to the social and psychological pressures to suppress or distort insights than the client.[26] On the other hand, though, the cunning person obviously did not have the kind of direct knowledge of the people involved, their relationships, and the specific interactions that might have led to the malady in question.

A cunning person's ability to do the divination therefore depended on his or her ability to "read" the client, to detect and register on an unconscious level body language, intonation, turns of phrase, unconscious activation of vocal cords during subvocalization, and other subliminal cues, as well as to assimilate this information with a general understanding of people based on life experience and any overt information given during any preliminary discussion.[27] The actual process of divination could involve an ongoing process of both overt and subliminal interaction between diviner and client or the diviner could withdraw and conduct the actual divination in private, but in either case, the cunning person was sensing the unconscious knowledge of the client, on the one hand, and manifesting it in the form of the image seen or the movement of the sieve, on the other hand.[28]

This process would be even more complex in cases when a third party was involved, as in a case from Angoulême in 1596 when two young children were used to scry under the supervision of an adult diviner, which would have involved an intricate interaction between them, the magician, and the client before and quite probably during the ceremony as the different parties negotiated, possibly consciously but presumably unconsciously, a consensual image of the act of witchcraft and the witch they described.[29]

Detecting witchcraft appears from the record to have been the most common use for divination, but that may well be because it involved a capital crime, while other uses involved crimes that were less serious.[30] Identification of thieves was the second

---

[26] McClenon 1997, 1.

[27] Glucklick 1997, 13; Neher 1990, 31–32, 34; Alexander 1990, 120. Goodman 1988, 49, denies any role for "methods similar to a Rorschach test, or … game theory for randomizing results", placing all emphasis on the "religious trance … which the practitioner enters," but I think it is more reasonable to assume that diviners combine all these techniques, to different degrees in different cultures, traditions, and personal styles.

[28] Note that this explanation assumes that no truly paranormal process was being tapped that gave the diviner direct access to the information, since the existence of such processes is not accepted by a consensus of the scientific community; see Bever 2008, 36.

[29] Briggs 1996, 182.

[30] Bever 2008, 221. Note that identifying witches constituted about a third of the divination cases reported here, while treasure-hunting made up almost 60%. However, divination to detect witches (and thieves) was practiced throughout the early modern period, whereas treasure-hunting was rarely practiced except during the early eighteenth century, when it was a fad that generated numerous trials involving groups ranging from two or three to dozens of people. Therefore, while

most common use revealed by prosecuted cases, but it may well have been more common, given the ubiquity of theft across Europe and throughout the period, in contrast to the more varied intensities of witchcraft suspicions geographically and temporally. In any event, divinatory rituals like this were well suited for the problem of identifying thieves as well as witches because, while the crime itself did not involve the subliminal actions and reactions that characterized <u>maleficium</u>, the aftermath did involve a certain amount of deception since most thefts in villages and small towns appears to have been perpetrated by people who were part of the same community as, or one near to that of, the victims.

Of course, some missing items were undoubtedly simply misplaced, but they tended to be valuables that people would have paid special attention to, so there is no reason to doubt that many items that disappeared were in fact stolen. Some may have been taken by the vagrants who drifted across the countryside, especially during and after wars, and who would not hesitate to burglarize a house if the opportunity arose. However, such raids were by and large both infrequent and obvious because the presence of the vagrant in the neighborhood would likely be noticed, and the house would likely be ransacked. The kind of thefts people consulted cunning folk about were the mysterious disappearance of specific items, which were most likely taken by people with access to the house and knowledge of the members' possessions and routines. The thief would then have to live with the victim, and perhaps even rebuff inquiries and accusations, all of which would involve deception and lying.

Lying presents a complex social-psychological problem. On the one hand, "there is ample evidence that people behave differently when they are lying than when they are telling the truth" and these "differences in behavior … alert targets … that a lie is being perpetrated upon them". However, on the other hand, the evidence suggests that people are relatively bad at consciously recognizing that they are being lied to.[31] Perhaps because "lying is a fact of daily life" since "on average people tell … one lie in every five of their social interactions", accurately recognizing lies and calling people on them would simply be too disruptive socially.[32]

While this assessment is only suggestive since it is based on modern research, there is good reason to think that that if anything lying was more firmly engrained in early modern culture than in our own since village and small town communities are particularly vulnerable to fissures caused by interpersonal conflicts, and so need these to be suppressed to maintain social cohesion. For example, the magistrates of Murrhardt noted that Jacob Schiller's activities detecting thieves as well as identifying witches

---

treasure-hunting cases may have been more numerous, witchcraft (and thief) detection would have been more common; Martin 1989, 119; Thomas 1971, 253–54. As for the relative frequency of witchcraft vs. theft cases, note also that in addition to the sampled cases, I read many other related cases in the Haupstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, and of them only one included divination for witchcraft (A209, b. 529), while four included divination for theft (A209, b. 1338; A213, b. 8406/1765; A213, b. 8406/1773; A213, b. 8422/1747).

[31] Anderson 1999, 375, 382.

[32] Ibid., 377–78.

"created great bitterness between the best of friends" and "set hearts bitterly against one another, causing all sorts of evil consequences".[33] People had recourse to divination because, if more mundane clues or proof that a particular person had stolen something from them were not available, it could confirm their awareness of or bring to consciousness their unconscious knowledge of who in their immediate social circle was displaying involuntary signs that they were lying to them about it.

Historians have traditionally emphasized that people went to diviners because there were no police detectives with modern forensic techniques and technology available to them, which is true, but somewhat anachronistic. Scrying and sieve driving to identify thieves were used because they could tap peoples' real awareness of other peoples' unconscious signals that they were hiding guilty secrets, a real awareness that was often difficult to bring to consciousness and even more difficult to articulate in order to justify social action. The alternative was not modern criminology; it was to do nothing. These sorts of divination were not ineffectual substitutes for effective action, they were an effective action that, while not entirely reliable, was neither random nor inherently unreliable. Jacob Schiller was forced to admit on one occasion "that what he said at first was far off the mark", and on another that he had defended a man accused of assaulting another with a knife because he was drunk. In another case, though, a cunning-man said a woman was stealing milk, and later she was seen sneaking around her neighbor's property late at night.[34] While we cannot know the guilt or innocence of the accused in most cases, thefts do take place, and, outside the formal structure of law a suspect's protestations of innocence are no more inherently credible than a victim of theft's suspicions.

Beyond the fact that it is far from impossible for the most obvious suspect to be, in fact, the guilty party, there probably were often actually more than one possible suspect, either because more than one person had means and opportunity to commit the crime, or because the aggrieved party was at odds with more than one other member of the community, so that more than one had the motive. Historical analyses of divination to identify witches and thieves have generally proceeded from the assumption that there was only one pre-determined suspect, and the ritual was conducted merely to rubber-stamp their vilification. This approach overlooks the fact that there were generally several people in a community who were potential suspects, and that the aggrieved person may have been at odds with a number of people. In these cases, the ritual was conducted not to validate suspicion of a single suspect, but instead to decide among a number of potential ones. Finally, it is even possible that once in a while the aggrieved party was genuinely perplexed about who might have perpetrated the crime, and went into the ritual without any preconceived ideas about who might be guilty and ready to accept whatever answer the process revealed.

With these and similar divinatory techniques, some people in early modern Württemberg, like many people all over pre-modern Europe, tapped sources of knowl-

---

[33] HSAS A209, b. 1656, d. 13–5–1729 and d. 1. See also Zagorin 1990.
[34] HSAS A213, b. 8406, d. 6–2–1761.

edge beyond their conscious minds in order to identify people who wished them ill and people who had stolen from them, to locate missing persons, to find lost objects and hidden treasures, and to predict the future and obtain guidance for individuals and the community as a whole. In some cases this information came spontaneously; in most, the people sought it deliberately. In some instances, any validity of the knowledge these people might have gained could only have come by chance or from some process of information transfer that is on the fringe of or beyond modern scientific understanding. However, for the most part the insights and revelations, guidance and instructions can be explained most efficiently, as in the cases of scrying and sieve driving, as the results of unconscious cognitive processes that could rise to consciousness spontaneously, but access to which could also be cultivated through ritual and fostered by belief.

Just as the source of the knowledge revealed by divination and prophesy need not be mysterious to us, people's motivation for using them need not perplex us either. From one point of view, they did not have the Internet, forensic and meteorological sciences, branch libraries and research centers that are available to support our systematic rational and scientific analysis, so they had to rely more heavily on received knowledge and intuition than we do. From another, more relevant, point of view, they were not making the best of a deficit, but instead were simply making use of the tools and techniques they had available, which were better than the real alternatives.

Cunning men, for example, did not use the sieve and shears as a poor substitute for lie detectors, but instead as a good alternative to sheer guesswork, foredoomed searches for unlikely physical evidence, rational deductions based on all-but-nonexistent hard data, or simply shrugging their shoulders. Victims' unconscious reactions, too, were hardly infallible, but they were more likely to be accurate than ill-founded inferences, long-standing assumptions, haphazard guesses, casual prejudices, overt animosities, or consensual conclusions. We should not build into our discussions of scrying, sieve driving, and similar forms of divination an assumption that they were foolish, fraudulent, or nothing but comforting manipulations of symbols. Instead, we should start from the understanding that they manifested genuine power to tap sources of real knowledge that were normally unconscious or unacknowledged both because they were known in ways that were difficult to articulate and because, then as now, talking about them was likely to upset the social apple cart.

References

Alexander, John et al. 1990. *The Warrior's Edge.* New York: William Morrow.

Anderson, D. Eric et al. 1999. "Love's Best Habit: Deception in the context of Relationships." In Pierre Philippot et al., eds., *The Social Context of Nonverbal Behavior,* 372–409. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Barrett, William. 1924. "Some Reminiscences of Fifty Years' Psychical Research." Paper delivered to the Society for Psychical Research, June 17, 1924. n. p.
http://www.survivalafterdeath.org/articles/barrett/years.htm.

Benes, Peter. 1995. "Fortunetellers, Wise-Men, and Magical Healers in New England, 1644–1850." In Id., ed., *Wonders of the Invisible World,* 127–56. Boston: Boston UP.

Bever, Edward. 2000. "Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 30 (4): 573–90.

–. 2002. "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community." *Journal of Social History* 35 (4): 955–88.

–. 2006. "Divination." In Richard Golden, ed., *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft,* I:285–87. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio.

–. 2008. *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blécourt, Willem de. 1994. "Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests. On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition." *Social History* 19 (3): 285–303.

Briggs, Robin. 1996. *Witches and Neighbors.* New York: Penguin.

Dillinger, Johannes. 1999. *Böse Leute.* Trier: Spee.

Doblin de Rios, Marlene. 1984. *Hallucinogens: Cross-Cultural Perspectives.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Duerr, Hans Peter. 1985. *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wildness and Civilization.* Trans.: Felicitas Goodman. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Glucklick, Ariel. 1997. *The End of Magic.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Goodman, Felicitas D. 1988. *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP.

Harner, Michael. 2001. "Magic Darts, Bewitching, Shamans, and Curing Shamans." In Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley, eds., *Shamans Through Time,* 195–99. New York: Penguin.

Hatch, Robert. 2002. "Schott, Gaspar." *The Scientific Revolution* Westfall Catalogue – Scientific Community, The Scientific Revolution Homepage, n. p. http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhatch/pages/03-Sci-Rev/SCI-REV-Home/resource-ref-read/major-minor-ind/westfall-dsb/SAM-S.htm.

Hobson, J. Allan. 2001. *The Dream Drugstore: Chemically Altered States of Consciousness.* Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Hollan, Douglas. 2000. "Constructivist Models of Mind, Contemporary Psychoanalysis, and the Development of Culture Theory." *American Anthropologist* 102 (3): 538–50.

Hutton, Ronald. 1999. *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Hyman, Ray. 1999. "The Mischief-Making of Ideomotor Action." *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine,* Fall–Winter, 3 (2): n. p. http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/ideomotor.htm.

John, Gareth. n. d. "A Scientific Investigation of Dowsing, Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking." n. p. http://www.phact.org/e/z/dowsepro.bak.

Macfarlane, A. D. J. 1970. *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England.* New York: Harper.

Martin, Ruth. 1989. *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550–1650.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Mährle, Wolfgang. 1998. "'O wehe der amen seelen.' Hexenverfolgungen in der Fürstpropstei Ellwangen (1588–1694)." In Wolfgang Mährle et al., Hrgs., *Zum Feuer verdammt,* 325–500. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

McClenon, James. 1997. *Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Neher, Andrew. 1990. *The Psychology of Transcendence.* New York: Dover.

Norrentranders, Ted. 1998. *The User Illusion.* Trans. Jonathan Sydenham. New York: Viking.

Priesner, Claus. 1993. "Phantastische Reisen: Über Hexenkräuter und Flugsalben, Teil II." *Kultur und Technik* April: 34–39.

Schwartz, Jeffrey and Sharon Begley. 2002. *The Mind and the Brain.* New York: Regan Books and HarperCollins.

Thomas, Keith. 1971. *Religion and the Decline of Magic.* New York: Scribner's.

Tuczay, Christa. 2005. "Trance Prophets and Diviners in the Middle Ages." In Gábor Klaniczay, Éva Pócs, with Eszter Csonka-Takács, eds., *Communicating with the Spirits,* 215–33. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Waardt, Hans de. 1993. "From Cunning man to Natural Healer." In Hans Binneveld and Rudolf Delcker, eds., *Curing and Insuring,* 33–43. Hilversum: Verloren.

Walther, Paul. 1929. *Schwäbische Volkskunde.* Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer.

Winkelman, Michael. 1990. "Shamans and Other 'Magico-Religious' Healers: A Cross-Cultural Study of their Origins, Nature, and Social Transformations." *Ethos* 18 (3): 308–52.

Winkelman, Michael and Philip Peek. 2004. "Introduction: Divination and Healing Processes." In Id., eds., *Divination and Healing,* 3–28. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Zagorin, Perez. 1990. *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Eszter Győrfy

Faith, Doubt and the Dynamics of Change in the Interpretations of a Woman's Illness[1]

"You need to believe it, too, if you don't believe it, it doesn't take effect."

Introduction

From February to August 2015 I conducted fieldwork in a village in Transylvania, Romania. During these months I stayed with a local elderly couple, Maria and David.[2] I became aware of Maria's health problems in the first weeks of my stay: she told me briefly about the surgeries she has had and the special diet she has been following over the past few years and I also noticed some signs of her impaired health on a daily basis. As discussing each other's health issues is a common subject among villagers[3] I soon learned more details from her conversations with neighbours and family members when they came to visit or when I sometimes accompanied Maria on her visits to one or another of her many friends in the village. Also, local people, aware that I was staying in Maria's home, often asked after her health when in conversation with me.

[2] To protect the privacy of the persons involved, I will not disclose the name and location of the village and also have changed names and other non-essential details in the episodes presented here. I will quote texts from actual interviews, but will leave out details that could link actual people to the events mentioned in them.
[3] I need to add here that – as we will see later – this is only true to some extent. As health is highly valued in this community, people are mostly unwilling to make their own health problems – especially certain types – the subject of open discussion. It is very common, however, to politely inquire about each other's health when people meet on the streets or visit each other. In these conversations, most people are very careful of how they talk about their health: they usually mention only minor symptoms (e.g., cold, allergy, headache) or those that are relatively common in the village (e.g., hypertension, diabetes, back pain). Severe cases and those requiring permanent medical care do not go unnoticed, though, and are widely discussed among the villagers. Maria's case falls into this category as everybody in the community has been aware of her long weeks of hospitalisation and the family's struggle to find appropriate treatment for her symptoms.

However, others' inquiries after her sometimes seemed to be more than simple polite-ness, there was "something more" in the air. In June, for instance, I visited an eld-erly couple for the first time and the lady immediately started to ask questions about Maria's health. After I had briefly informed her she made the following remark:

> They've had enough problems. Poor people, they've had enough. This Maria ended up at the doctors' at a very young age… but she did not recover there, *some-thing else has happened* [my emphasis].

Being familiar with the community and the communication strategies of the locals, I knew that the insinuation was that bewitchment was the cause[4] of Maria's health problems. Thus, I started to ask for more information about her case. My questions gradually revealed a somewhat inconsistent, but intriguing group of narratives in con-nection with this woman's illness[5] and partial recovery, with many different actors involved. Since her health problems first appeared 40 years ago, she has consulted family members, other people from the village, doctors in various hospitals, priests and several folk specialists in order to find appropriate help. Sometimes she has accepted, at other times she has questioned or ignored their opinions and suggestions, while she has often not been sure of what she believed and what she should do.

Based on this short overview, it would be easy to assess Maria's case as an ordinary story of a person facing serious health problems and trying all viable solutions in order to be cured. It is a universal phenomenon that people – especially with chronic or severe diseases – explore a wide range of available remedies and visit different prac-titioners, who may apply a great variety of therapies.[6] What differ are the particular discourses and beliefs regarding ill-health and healing available and the "individual strategies of manoeuvre" among the options.[7] Maria's story does not merely demon-strate the syncretism of diverse interpretations of medical realities. Her going back and forth between different treatment options when a given method proved unsuc-cessful was only partly occasioned by the multifaceted nature of the local healing sys-tem, partly, she shaped and reshaped her ideas depending on changes in her condi-tion and the opinions of her family members and co-villagers.

During our many conversations about her state of health, I became aware of the coexistence of several competing assumptions and evaluations of her illness and of

---

[4] Other researchers of witchcraft have also noted that there are typical expressions or manners of speaking referring to bewitchment in a particular community. See for example Mencej 2016, 253–254; Hesz 2017, 364–372.

[5] The distinction between *disease*, *illness* and *sickness* has become commonplace in medical anthropol-ogy and here I will also distinguish between *disease*, defined through biomedical categories, *illness*, seen through the experience and beliefs of patients and their families and *sickness* as a social iden-tity. I will address these concepts in greater detail in the next section.

[6] Cf. Blum and Blum 1965, 88–90; Iancu 2010, 185. Since the 1970s medical anthropologists have recognised the pluralistic character of health care all over the world. Johannessen 2006, 3–4.

[7] Johannessen 2006, 15.

her wavering between different options when seeking solutions. Thus, Maria's case is a story of faith and doubt in a rather unusual sense: neither her beliefs in witch-craft nor her trust in biomedicine as a scientifically based and well-functioning form of medicine have ever been shaken or dismissed in general, but she has been in constant doubt regarding the interpretation of her symptoms and their origin, as well as the most appropriate way to cure them. Also, her story is not only about believing or doubting various explanatory models, but also about her trust in different specialists, the impact of her family and larger community on her decisions, her social position and the web of her relationships that all had a great influence on her beliefs, doubts and actions.

While certain changes in her life and health conditions seemed to confirm her explanations and actions, other situations and the recurrent health crises caused her to doubt her earlier beliefs and presumptions regarding her problems – making her redefine her illness again and again, and generating a process of continual transformation from certainty to uncertainty and vice versa. As this was a situation in which she was constantly asking herself (and other people) what to believe, how much to believe it and how to act on the basis of her beliefs and doubts I will analyse Maria's story focusing on the dynamics of this change.

In order to better understand Maria's alternatives and choices, I will sketch the context of her story in the first part of my study. After a short overview on some theoretical and methodological concerns, I will briefly introduce the village and the community and outline local ideas about illness and the health care system that provide the framework to manage it. I will follow up with a detailed description of Maria's case, focusing on the different options available in this particular case as possible explanatory and action models and also on the various factors that affected her when choosing between them.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

As they seemingly refer to the same condition of ill health, either we usually do not make a distinction between disease, illness and sickness or use the terms interchangeably. However, medical and social scientists identify the three categories as the – closely interconnected – medical, personal and social aspects of human ailment.[8] In a biomedical sense, *disease* is the medical practitioner's construction of patients' complaints in the terminology of a particular healing system, "a health problem that consists of a physiological malfunction",[9] that is to say, pathological states of organs or organ systems.[10] *Illness,* on the other hand, refers to the subjective response of the patient to

---

[8] Some important anthropological works: Fabrega 1972; Eisenberg 1977; Kleinman 1980; Twaddle 1994. On the fruitfulness of these concepts in scientific analysis see: Hofmann 2002.
[9] Twaddle 1994, 8.
[10] Young 1982, 264; Kleinman and Seeman 2000, 231.

being unwell, or – as Allan Young phrased it – "to a person's perceptions and experiences of certain socially disvalued states, including, but not limited to, disease".[11] It includes the ailing person's experience of ill health, the meaning he gives to this experience and also his response to his condition and symptoms. The third part of the triad, *sickness* refers to a socially determined role, or rather the process for "socializing disease and illness".[12] It is the process through which the poor health or mental problem(s) of an individual – causing the inability to perform expected social activities – are given socially recognizable meanings.[13] The "operation" of the triad could be summarized as follows: when a person – based on his and his environment's judgment and beliefs about worrisome behavioural or biological signs – feels ill, the medical profession is able to diagnose a disease by specialised examinations, independent of subjective experience and social conventions, and society grants him the "sick role" which provides dispensation from his normal activities but also requires him to overcome the health problems as soon as possible.[14]

As it is not the main goal of my study, I will not analyse these three aspects individually in Maria's case.[15] What I would like to highlight here instead is the social and cultural embeddedness of ill health and the health care seeking activity of the individual. Accordingly, the way Maria (and the community) perceives, experiences and copes with her affliction is also culturally shaped. Her beliefs and experiences – all embedded in a complex social and cultural setting – affect how she thinks and talks about her symptoms, when and to whom she goes for care, how she evaluates care and how long she has remained in it.[16] In addition, the explanation of her illness has never been static but has had a complex and dynamic character – like most elements of social life it has always been characterised by continuous negotiations and has been contested several times. Her problems have been interpreted and understood in different ways by Maria, various healers and other members of the local community concerning its etiology and appropriate treatment.[17] Thus, in order to understand the dynamics of the changing tendencies of faith and doubt in her case I first will feature the social and cultural context – including the local health care system[18] – that actually creates and shapes them.

---

[11] Young 1982, 265; Yew and Mohd 2014, 119.
[12] Young 1982, 270.
[13] Ibid.; Twaddle 1994, 11.
[14] Twaddle 1994, 9; Kleinman and Seeman 2000, 236; Hofmann 2002, 652–57; Delmouzou 2006, 106; Yew and Mohd 2014, 119.
[15] I will apply the terms illness, disease and sickness in the meaning that was described here, though. Also, the reason why I find the theoretical distinction between illness and disease particularly useful for the case studied here is that it was actually the discrepancies between the biomedical and "local" diagnoses that made her hesitant and uncertain time after time.
[16] Cf. Young 1982, 270; Yew and Mohd 2014, 120.
[17] Cf. Young 1982, 268–71; Kleinman and Seeman 2000, 236–37.
[18] I am using this term in the sense Arthur Kleinman does when he defines *health care systems* as cultural systems that integrate all the health-related components of society. Kleinman 1980, 24. For a more detailed overview see the next section.

I have been carrying out anthropological fieldwork in this community since 2014 with a primary focus on religious life. Hence, I came across Maria's case by accident. After I first became aware of the very heterogeneous local ideas and narratives concerning her illness in the summer of 2015, I tried to collect as much information as possible. I realised soon enough that I could only get piecemeal knowledge of the story and it would be very hard – if not impossible – to reconstruct what *really* happened[19] and map the entire sociocultural context of Maria's case, especially the interpretations and strategies of her family and wider community. The reasons for this are manifold.

The first time I heard about Maria's illness was more than 40 years after her health problems first appeared. In the timespan of four decades her case became well-known within the community, but people had different access and related diversely to it. Neither the biomedical explanation, nor bewitchment as a possible origin of her problems was accepted by the entire community: there have always been people to doubt the validity of either one or the other, and there were others who lived too far away to be informed about the details to form an opinion. People would also change their minds regarding their preferred interpretation as the case developed. Many neighbours, friends and relatives who were repeatedly consulted and (some of whom) also took an active role in the process of treatment had already passed away by the time of my research, others claimed they could not remember or did not want to talk about Maria with me for the simple reason that I was living in her household. Being a case of bewitchment this did not surprise me at all.[20] Although I did not find witchcraft a rare or particularly delicate topic of conversation, I was also aware of the fact that many people chose to hide their beliefs and opinions from me because they supposed the low prestige of their "superstitions" and wanted to hide their attitude in order to position themselves according to the estimated expectations of the "educated, urban" researcher.[21]

Given these circumstances I will follow Maria's own interpretation of the case and try to show her convictions and doubts and also the reasons behind the changes in her attitude and treatment strategies from time to time. My analysis is built upon the ethnographic data from repeated interviews and spontaneous conversations with Maria, and supported by the rather sporadic memories and reflections of other peo-

---

[19] Obviously this also derives from the characteristics of the narrative (re)construction of the past, i.e., that the memories regarding a certain episode are always told from the perspective of the present. Cf. Borneman 1996, 215–216.

[20] As other researchers have pointed out, witchcraft is not a simple explanatory system for certain types of misfortune but rather a "choice to interpret events in a particular way" (Blécourt and Davies 2004, 7), that is also effective in "negotiating the social relations of the parties involved" (Hesz 2007, 23). Thus, the interpretation of a particular event as bewitchment is constructed through complex processes of contestation, in many cases with obvious "strategic" intentions. Favret-Saada 1980; Hesz 2007; 2017; Mencej 2016, 255–60.

[21] Cf. Favret-Saada 1980, 42–43; Bartha-Balog 2001, 54; Mencej 2016, 255. See also Ágnes Hesz's paper in this volume.

ple in the village. Although the case will be presented from Maria's perspective, I am aware of the opinions of her family and the wider community behind her decisions, beliefs and doubts and will try to reveal how other people influenced her deliberations and actions.

Local Concepts of Illness and Treatments

The community I am studying is a mountain settlement that offers very harsh living conditions to its 450[22] peasant, mostly Hungarian-speaking inhabitants. The location is peripheral and very hard to reach: the nearest village is 20 kilometres away, there is no public transportation and the two unpaved roads leading to the village sometimes become unpassable. During the socialist era most men had jobs in industry and people could also sell milk and dairy products to the local milk cooperative, which provided decent economic conditions. The decades after the Romanian revolution brought significant changes for the villagers that can be characterised by the lack of employment opportunities and – as a result – economic decline. The main source of livelihood today is cattle-raising and illegal or semi-illegal logging. Most people also raise swine and poultry and grow potatoes and other vegetables for subsistence on their small family farms, and some try to support their family by taking on seasonal agricultural labour in Western Europe.

Being a peasant community, the life of the locals is regulated and scheduled by the everyday work that provides the subsistence of the families. For this reason health is considered to be one of the most important values and people tend to hide any kind of physical or mental disability as long as possible.[23] Complaining about some minor symptoms (pain, cold, allergic reactions, viral infection, etc.) is a common occurrence in everyday conversations, but these kinds of problems are by no means considered illness. Rather, they are seen as inconvenient physical states and it would be a great shame to fail in performing one's duties on the family farm or in the household because of them.[24] Chronic diseases and generally those requiring permanent medication (e.g., heart problems, hypertension, diabetes), cases that need immediate medical intervention (e.g., serious injuries, stroke, heart attack) and symptoms that would not pass within a relatively short period of time fall under a different judgement. Health problems are also characterised by their supposed origin: some are believed to have natural (i.e., biological) causes, while others have supernatural origins and of course the two categories require different treatments. There are no standard guidelines for choosing a correct response to a particular health problem,

---

[22] 464 people according to the 2011 census. source: http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2. Accessed 30 August 2016.
[23] Cf. Blum and Blum 1965, 63–67.
[24] For a more detailed overview about sickness as cultural behaviour see: Blum and Blum 1965, 91; Czégényi és Keszeg 2010, 429–34.

instead the individual needs to consider the alternatives and seek a solution within the local *health care system.*

Health care system is a term introduced by Arthur Kleinman and refers to all knowledge, practices and authorities which a given society associates with medicine. These include "beliefs about the causes of illness; norms of governing choice and evaluation of treatment; socially legitimate statuses, roles, power relationships, interaction settings and institutions".[25] Kleinman describes the health care system of complex societies as a cultural system composed of three simultaneously functioning and partly overlapping parts: the popular, the professional and the folk sectors.[26] The *popular* sector is the lay, non-professional sphere of the family and the wider community in which illness is first defined and health care activities are first initiated on the grounds of beliefs and values about illness that are shared by the community. The *professional* sector includes the organised healing professions – in my case it refers to doctors and nurses trained in medical schools. The *folk* sector is the non-professional specialist sector, encompassing both religious and secular healers.[27] Diagnosing and treating illnesses is carried out within this system that has the following general features in the village that I am studying.

In the 1980's a medical facility was established in the village and a doctor from the next village came to see patients once a month until very recently when the facility was closed due to its poor hygienic and technical conditions. While functioning, mostly people with chronic diseases would go there to get their prescriptions. Others preferred going to a nearby village or the nearest hospital in cases of urgent need for medical help. For several reasons there is some general distrust and fear of doctors and hospitals among locals, though. The nearest hospital is 30 kilometres away, but as there are no buses or trains available for the locals, they usually find it difficult and expensive to go there. Besides, hospitals are said to be crowded and dirty, and most villagers – especially the elderly – feel insecure about leaving home.[28] There is also a language barrier: as a lot of people in the village speak Romanian at a very poor level, they cannot communicate with doctors and nurses and it makes their stay very uncomfortable. For those who can manage transportation and are ready to pay more, another hospital (some 80 kilometres away) with mainly Hungarian-speaking staff is also an option.

Diagnosing and treating the sick person usually starts in the family or within a small circle of relatives and trusted friends. Most people in the village have knowledge of herbal and basic pharmaceutical products (e.g., painkillers), which they use as a first resort. For more specific advice people might also turn to the few elderly members of the community known to be experienced in treating certain symptoms. Locals are

---

[25] Kleinman 1980, 24.
[26] Ibid., 50.
[27] Ibid., 49–60.
[28] Richard and Eva Blum observed similar fears and opinions about hospitals among rural Greek people. Blum and Blum 1965, 82–84.

well aware of the fact that this sort of home treatment is rather symptomatic, so in case it is not sufficient, the patient's diagnosis is reconsidered in the family and this determines whether and from whom the sick person will seek further treatment. As villagers do not consider for example shortness of breath or a pain in the back an illness, but believe that they are one of those conditions (deriving from their hard physical work) that doctors cannot help, they will usually not consult a physician about it. If things get more serious – the intensity of pain increases, the extent of disability influences the person in performing her daily duties – people first tend to visit one of the well-known folk healing specialists or nowadays practitioners of alternative medicine.

As treatment by prescribed medicines or in hospitals is considered very expensive, disturbs one's daily routine and threatens loss of time from work, people usually decide to choose the biomedical forms of treatment only in cases of chronic and potentially fatal illnesses, serious injuries or symptoms that hinder the sick person in his or her work and that are not resolved after consulting folk specialists. It needs to be added, though, that there have been significant changes in people's attitudes towards biomedicine and their own afflictions in the past decades. The process could be characterized as the increasing level of "medicalisation of ideas"[29] within the community. Parallel with the easier availability of medical care and the larger amount of information available through mass media people have begun accepting and understanding medical ideas and viewing certain conditions as belonging to specific disease categories that need a specific kind of medical treatment. The "medicalisation of ideas" thus is reflected in the health-seeking activities of the locals and the "increased discursive power of biomedicine"[30] on patients' lives. Locals also tend to label more and more symptoms as signs of actual diseases and it seems to be easier to convince them to consult doctors. However, from the patients' point of view biomedicine is also rather symptomatic in that people see it as a treatment for the symptoms rather than the underlying causes of illnesses. Health workers seldom inform people about the precise diagnosis which often makes it hard for patients to understand how a particular medicine would treat their complaints and how much time it needs to take effect, so locals basically expect medicines to remove their symptoms. As a consequence, in cases where it takes too long or does not seem to be effective within a relatively short period people easily lose their trust in biomedical care. Courses of treatment are often terminated before time as people are not willing to return if the first one or two fail to bring significant changes in their condition.[31] Also, people often create their own "medical principles" or ideas and rely on their lay medical knowledge when dealing with health problems.[32] Generally speaking, efforts at treatment are usually empirical

---

[29] The process of medicalisation has drawn the attention of many scholars. Here I would only like to refer to Effrosyni Delmouzou, who in her study gives a detailed overview of the literature and also shows how different individual levels of "medicalisation of ideas" may hold people back from talking about their health problems. Delmouzou 2006.

[30] Delmouzou 2006, 108.

[31] Scholars have noted similar tendencies in European and African rural communities. See for example: Blum and Blum 1965, 88–92; Whyte 1997, 25–26.

[32] Cf. Blum and Blum 1965, 60–62.

and – as Richard and Eva Blum have phrased it – have a "trial-and-error pattern: if one method fails, another is tried".[33]

If none of the above treatments helps or the sickness worsens, and in cases of certain – sometimes unusual – symptoms people usually begin to look for underlying causes behind the sick person's miseries, that is they move from a symptomatic to an etiological approach. Although it is not the only possible diagnosis, this usually raises the suspicion of bewitchment. Belief in witchcraft and bewitchment is still vital in the community as a cause of personal or family misfortunes, including certain kinds of illnesses.

Local concepts of witchcraft are more complex than the "classical", suspicion-accusation centred witchcraft we know from many parts of Western and Central Europe. People in this community believe magical harm to be performed in two ways: bewitchment of a magical specialist or through curse masses (and accompanying rituals) of Orthodox priests.[34] The difference between the two types, however, lies not only in whether the act of bewitchment is performed by or attributed to[35] priests or lay specialists but "the two forms of bewitchment form an antagonistic pair on the basis of their ideology and function".[36] Bewitchment done by human agents is supposed to work through evil powers. There were (and according to my observations, still are) women in the village believed to practice bewitchment for their own malevolent purposes, but people could also have it performed by magical specialists living elsewhere.[37] Thus, anybody from the community could have been suspected as a bewitcher. Nevertheless, the objective of the bewitchment is often not to cause harm

---

[33] Ibid., 89. Cf. Whyte 1997, 205–9.

[34] Local ideas on witchcraft show many common features with those of other rural, Hungarian-speaking Transylvanian communities described by other scholars. See: Pócs 2001; 2002; 2004; Hesz 2007; 2017; Komáromi 2009.

[35] As I do not find it relevant to this case and also for the lack of data I will not address the question whether the bewitchment is actually *performed* by or only *attributed* to certain people. Although I observed the same tendencies as Ágnes Hesz in another Transylvanian community – namely that witchcraft mainly exists in narratives – I could also note what Éva Pócs has showed regarding two villages in Felcsík, Transylvania, i.e., that there might be actual deeds behind witchcraft accusations. Pócs 2002, 240–41; 2004, 175; Hesz 2007, 20–21. See also Willem de Blécourt's short summary on the topic: Blécourt 1999, 188–92. Obviously, I only had access to witchcraft cases through narratives and I cannot measure the dimensions of the actual cases of black magic.

[36] Hesz 2007, 21.

[37] Since it is not central to my paper I will not go into details regarding different methods of black magic believed to be performed, the types of bewitchment, their supposed effects and the various terms used by locals to differentiate between them. Instead, as the beliefs and techniques of witchcraft and its symptoms or outcomes highly correspond with those observed in other rural communities in Transylvania I will direct my readers to the findings of Éva Pócs and Ágnes Hesz: Hesz 2007; 2017; Pócs 2001; 2002; 2004. The terminology used in the community I am studying has a lot in common with the one described by György Takács in the Trotus Valley (Takács 2014); and Ágnes Hesz in another Transylvania community (Hesz 2007; and 2017). Similar to the communities they have studied, there is a difference – both in terminology and relevance – between the living magical specialists (or people whom others suspect of bewitching others) and the witch of the belief narratives, i.e., characteristics of "night witches/supernatural witches" never (or very rarely) concern living persons. The Hungarian term "witch" is seldom used for people whom others believe to have bewitched others. Cf. Pócs 2001, 424–29; 2004, 175–76; Hesz 2017, 388, footnote 27.

but to set right a previous bewitchment: to cure the sick person, to reveal the iden-
tity of a thief, to get stolen goods or estranged lovers back. The other way of getting
"just revenge" for damages or a cure from illness caused by supposed bewitchment is
through the curse masses of Orthodox priests or monks.[38] As the mass works through
the power of God, it is believed to operate as divine judgment and to fall back on its
initiator in case of unjust accusations.[39]

The two types of bewitchment are believed to work through diametrically opposite
transcendental powers, assigning different roles to the victims. While curse masses
are only supposed to affect the guilty and can never fall on innocent people by mis-
take, bewitchment of "private witches" or magical specialists may harm guilty and
innocent alike. In the case of bewitchment, victims are always considered innocent
and their bewitchers guilty, while in the case of curse masses victims are always held
guilty – either for being the victim of just revenge or the victim of their own unjust
accusation that turned back upon them. The symptoms of bewitchment, however, are
more or less the same for both types. Locals tend to interpret – to name but a few –
chronic, incurable or undiagnosable illnesses, sudden death, suicide, accidents caus-
ing serious injury or death, depression, estrangement of lovers, lack of economic suc-
cess (losing jobs, ailing animals, poor crop yields, cows going dry), permanent marital
disagreements, the inability of young people to get married and practically all forms
of misfortune that lack sufficient explanation as a result of magical harm.[40] As the
same event or series of events can be attributed to both, this also means that local
concepts of bewitchment form a complex and very "flexible interpretive framework,
which opened up space for various interpretations"[41] and leads to intense debates –
that is, processes of reflexion and formation – within the community when people try
to make sense of a particular misfortune.[42]

Diagnosing and curing bewitchment is also carried out within this system of beliefs,
with a wide range of lay specialists and priests involved. When supposing bewitchment
as the origin of their troubles locals usually visit unwitchers (mostly soothsayers work-

---

[38] Grievance/justice centred or "religious" witchcraft as called by Éva Pócs in her articles on the
witchcraft beliefs of two Transylvanian villages, in opposition to the "classical", suspicion/accusa-
tion type. Pócs 2001; 2002; 2004.

[39] Cf. Pócs 2004, 178–79; Hesz 2007, 21. A very expressive example of someone being the victim of
her own wrongful accusation is the case described by Dóra Czégényi (Czégényi 2008). Wishing to
punish the person who was responsible for her son's death, this woman paid curse masses for an
Orthodox priest, but as it was her behaviour that led to the suicide of the boy, the curse finally
turned back upon her causing her death.

[40] Cf. the findings of Éva Pócs, Ágnes Hesz and Tünde Komáromi: Pócs 2001, 433–35; 2004, 176–77;
Hesz 2007, 20–23; 2017, 353–59; Komáromi 2009, 72–100.

[41] Hesz 2017, 359.

[42] Researchers of witchcraft have shown the contested character of bewitchment cases in numerous
studies. As I have already mentioned, the large room bewitchment discourses open for negotia-
tion also derives from the fact that interpreting a particular case within the bewitchment discourse
may serve as a very effective "tool" in manipulating public opinion and (re-)negotiating one's so-
cial relations. For a more detailed analysis of the question and related bibliography see: Hesz 2007;
2017; Mencej 2016.

ing with various divinatory methods) or Orthodox priests to verify the fact of bewitch-
ment, find out the identity of the malefactor and find the way to recovery. Generally
it is also these specialists who are able to cure the bewitched by performing differ-
ent counter-rituals (sometimes also advising patients to perform some at home) and
prescribing prayers and fasting as complementary methods. It is a common belief
that votive masses paid to Roman Catholic or Orthodox priests are also effective in
both curing bewitchment and preventing further magical threats.[43] Different efforts
in treating bewitchment are usually applied simultaneously: besides going to priests
and carrying out various counter-rituals at home, people usually consult unwitchers
as well. In finding good specialists they mainly rely on the recommendations of family
members and close friends, but the time, effort and expenses that the visit to a partic-
ular specialist would require are also considered.

   As the religious world view and religion as a normative system has central impor-
tance in the everyday life of locals, Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests also have a
significant role in treating other types of illnesses.[44] Different sacraments are widely
applied to cure some "minor" symptoms: people, for instance use holy water to wash
the ill part of the body or cook food for the sick person with consecrated oil. Prayers
and votive masses for the recovery of sick family members and friends are also believed
to be effective, and so is the blessing by a priest upon the sick or the objects or pieces
of clothing of the person.

   The most important of these features is how interrelated the different sectors are
in diagnosing and treating illnesses. Biomedicine, folk beliefs and practices and reli-
gious means are complementary systems applied very flexibly by locals, which often
results in the simultaneous use of treatments based on different assumptions about
the nature and origin of a certain illness. Family and specialists diagnoses may differ
considerably from medical ones and even the most accurate medical diagnosis cannot
assure that the patient will believe it and even if he does he may visit another physi-
cian, folk specialists or priests as well in order to get a cure.[45] The fact that there might
be more acceptable explanations or diagnoses of the same case often induces uncer-
tainty or hesitation between the different options and intense negotiations with the
participation of family members, friends or other members of the community.[46]

---

[43] Cf. Hesz 2007, 25.

[44] As Laura Iancu has shown in her case study about a Hungarian-speaking community in Moldova,
the important role of priests and religious rituals in treating illnesses is also related to the belief
that some illnesses are the consequences of one's sins. Thus, examining one's moral life and rela-
tionship to God can also be part of the treatment. Iancu 2010, 189.

[45] Cf. Blum and Blum, 1965, 89–90.

[46] In accordance with these characteristics of pluralistic health care systems two studies have pro-
vided very useful analytical points for my case study: William Christian (Christian 1991) has shown
how and why a couple from Tenerife successfully mobilized their social capital in order to get both
religious and medical help for their daughter suffering from a potentially fatal illness; while Anne
Rowbottom (Rowbottom 2012) has discussed the tensions between traditional religious beliefs and
New Age spirituality in the changing worldview of an older woman from England in connection
with her illness that biomedicine was unable to cure.

The Case

Maria was born in 1952 and she was only 16 when she got pregnant with her daughter and married David. The young couple was hard-working enough to build their own house before the baby was born. Maria also gave birth to two sons over the following five years. In 1980 the couple was offered an outstanding opportunity that greatly improved their rather moderate economic state: as the man who used to collect milk from local farmers for the cooperative creamery could no longer carry out his task because of his age, David was asked if his family could take on the job. They were happy to say yes, and this determined the life of the family, their financial status and position in the community for the next two decades. David went for long rides on his cart to collect the milk every morning and evening, while Maria and the children prepared different dairy products from it at home. In the first year they rented an old house for this purpose, and then in 1981 they were able to build a more appropriate building on their estate, that was functioning until 2003.

Because of this job, David met practically everybody from the village on a daily basis and they also had a lot of guests (officials, directors of different factories, veterinarians, etc.) in their home. Hence, the family's web of relationships was far more extended than that of the average villager. As the village administratively belonged (and belongs) to a dominantly Romanian county, most of these relationships connected them to Romanian-speaking people from the nearest cities and also their job required them to speak the state language at a high level. Though they met a great number of people as a consequence of their job, their daily duties never allowed them to leave the village for more than a few days.

After the Romanian revolution, the cooperative creamery was abolished, but as there was still need for the dairy products they were producing, Maria and David managed to run the establishment until 2003. Its closing was a great shock for the family as it brought radical changes in their lifestyle and in their economic status. To supplement their very low pension, Maria undertook cooking jobs for larger gatherings (weddings, baptisms, etc.), David started to work in the nearby forests and raised a large number of cattle. Also, they transformed the building of the former cooperative creamery into a dwelling and they moved there, so that they could accommodate paying guests in their house. Today Maria and David are one of the few local families living in relative wealth. They have always been central and respected members of the community.

After the first few weeks of my stay, as we became more familiar with each other I got increasingly involved in their everyday life. They were ready to share their thoughts on all kinds of topics, including everyday issues, the most recent gossip as well as reflections on their relation to the supernatural world. As soon as they were able to overcome their – quite natural – fears of being ridiculed by a stranger for their "superstitions", both of them proved to be great storytellers with a rich repertoire of first-hand personal experiences and other local belief narratives of supernatural forces and beings. However, their attitude to these stories – even if they were convinced about the reality

of different supernatural experiences of their own and trusted others – was ambivalent. They usually placed them in the past, the time of their parents or grandparents and were also aware of the more rational viewpoint of "traditions of disbelief"[47] that questions the existence of such things. They seemed to share the opinion of many villagers that the decline of witchcraft and the vanishing of different supernatural creatures in the past few decades are due to the intense presence of priests and modernisation (e.g., street-lighting, cars) in the village. With both traditions (belief and disbelief) being available to them, they often wavered between them and confronted belief narratives with scientific, religious or common sense arguments when interpreting a particular story or set of events.

Maria's health problems started in 1974 when she was only 22 years old. One day she suddenly fainted and remained unconscious for 10–15 minutes, afterwards she felt some pain of unknown origin in her whole body. David called the ambulance and she was taken to the hospital of a nearby town. Doctors there could not give a precise diagnosis; she was curtly informed that it "might be something with her brain". She was prescribed some general medication and was advised to rest at home. A few weeks passed and Maria would still often feel weak and dizzy. As she was the mother of three small children and had to perform her many duties in the household and the cooperative creamery, the situation cried out for a solution. Her symptoms were quite unusual and clearly not curable with any basic folk methods. Biomedicine also seemed to be clueless at this point and pharmaceuticals did not help. The couple thought they might have to "look elsewhere" to discover the origins of Maria's troubles.

Following the advice of their friends, Maria went to consult a soothsayer who was also a famous witch-doctor. She laid cards for her and identified bewitchment as the origin of her symptoms, but could not specify the perpetrator. She prepared a special water for Maria by reciting some unwitching spells over it, and advised her to drink some every day in order to get well. Though this was a more specific indication to the probable reasons behind her illness than the rather unclear diagnosis she got in the hospital before, she was not sure about the effectiveness of the unwitching ritual. To get all possible causes covered, so to say, she also made efforts to find another doctor to have further tests done. A few months passed without any visible success: she was able to perform her basic duties but she was constantly in discomfort and was weak, while none of the further physicians she consulted could name a specific disease as the origin of her condition. In a little while, however, Maria was told a curious story by one of her neighbours.

The old lady informed her that some time earlier she visited a magical specialist with Maria's uncle and his wife and she believed "they were up to no good", that is, she suggested this being the very occasion when Maria's bewitchment was made, apparently by her close relatives. As their relationship was very tense with the uncle and his

---

[47] Gillian Bennett – following David Hufford – speaks about two "contrasting sets of expectations" in contemporary Western culture: "traditions of belief" and "traditions of disbelief". Bennett 1999, 31–38.

wife, this explanation was easy to accept for Maria's family. I also think that it was very easy for their neighbour to link the case with Maria's illness. Her symptoms could not remain unnoticed in her environment and she discussed her visit to the soothsayer with some of her friends and trusted neighbours, so the lady already had information and assumptions about the case. Living close to the family she was also aware of the problematic relationship of the two families, so it seemed to be obvious to link her observations with Maria's affliction.

Maria, on the one hand, did not feel the need for any special counter-actions or healing rituals other than the votive masses she paid to both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests for the health of the family. Relatives and friends were also asked to pray for her recovery. On the other hand, she did not give up her efforts to get biomedical diagnosis and medication for her problems. She went to another hospital and consulted different doctors based on recommendations of friends and acquaintances. Tests finally showed a small blood clot in her brain and so she could get the appropriate prescription for that. Maria soon started to feel better. As we can see, there were two different interpretations of her symptoms at this point, with both having legitimacy from Maria's point of view. As she had some unwitching rituals and special masses performed earlier and also took the medicines prescribed by doctors, it seemed to be impossible to find out which actually helped. Nevertheless, she was more convinced by the biomedical "version", as she explained to me.

Still, bewitchment remained an open possibility and came to the centre of the family's attention nearly a decade later when the wife of Maria's uncle passed away. She had been suffering a lot and – as locals usually phrase it – was unable to die for a long time. As villagers usually believe this to be a consequence of the maleficent deeds of the person,[48] this would have been enough to suppose that she had a bad conscience but in addition she also apologised for "all the bad things" she has done to Maria's family. This way the diagnosis of bewitchment made by a specialist years earlier, and also the suspicion that was cast on a close relative – based on the existing tensions between the two families that provided a good reason to do magical harm to the opposite party – was confirmed by the "strange" events surrounding the death of the aunt. As Maria seemed to be in good health and the constant fights between their families also calmed down a bit, the death of the supposed bewitcher put an end to her troubles at this point.

In 1996, however, Maria started to have respiratory problems. At first she did not pay too much attention to the symptoms and tried to follow her normal daily routine, but her condition worsened day by day, and after she woke up gasping for breath one night David and her children convinced her to get biomedical help. Her past experience with doctors and the quality of medical care in the nearest hospital made her want to look for a better option, though. Luckily, one of their friends – a veterinar-

---

[48] It is a well-known motif in the witch-beliefs of the Hungarian-speaking population that witches or those who have bewitched others have unusual deaths and cannot die for a long time. Cf. Pócs 2001, 426; Hesz 2017, 370–71.

ian in a nearby village – could help them to get Maria into a hospital with a very good reputation in Bucharest. A great many tests were made and some serious malfunction of her thyroid was detected that also affected her heart, causing additional problems. She got medication and had to follow a very strict diet. Five weeks later, with her state being less critical she was operated upon in the same hospital and was sent home pretty soon with new medicines and an instruction to rest a lot. Instead of getting better, things got desperate again later in the same year when Maria developed jaundice. Again, she was unwilling to leave her work to get biomedical treatment, so she used the well-tried folk remedy: tea made from the roots of willow gentian (Gentiana asclepiadea), even though she knew that it only removed her symptoms but did not cure the liver.

With her liver problems being unattended, her condition became severe in 2003. She felt nauseous all the time, could not stand certain smells and could not perform her daily duties properly, so there seemed to be no other choice but to consult doctors again. It took a considerable amount of time to figure out the cause of her troubles. Several friends and acquaintances in different cities were mobilised to help with finding the appropriate hospital and doctor. Tests were made in three different hospitals, several physicians were consulted. Some of them supposed it was leukemia, but finally she was diagnosed with a serious liver problem, got medication for it and had to follow a special diet again. A few months passed without much improvement in her condition that – considering the amount of time that has passed without success in curing her – made the family think of other potential causes. Other current events of that time also strengthened the suspicion that there might be "something else" in the background.

As I have already mentioned, the creamery that Maria's family had owned and run for decades was closed in the same year, taking away their main source of income. It was a great shock for the whole family and Maria got into a state of serious depression. Adding to this, the marriage of their younger son was falling apart and the two parties were irreconcilable. Given these circumstances – Maria's health problems and depression, the family's shaken economic status and the conflict-ridden family life of their son – bewitchment was the only explanation that could cover all the troubles that seemed to have hit the family out of the blue.

Several competing assumptions emerged within the community regarding the family's problems. Some people suggested that since the bewitchment made years ago by Maria's relatives has never been cured with the appropriate counter-methods, it was still having a harmful effect on the members of the family. Maria, on the contrary, believed the previous bewitchment to have passed away with its perpetrator, her uncle's wife. Another possible explanation was to link their problems to another long-existing bewitchment story – connected to an old woman living in the neighbourhood – that was well known to the villagers. Maria's case (both from the community's and the family's point of view) could easily be integrated into this story. Several bewitchment cases had been attributed to this woman, including the drying-up of cows and love magic. Those who were involved – victims, family members, friends, a local sooth-

sayer, etc. – agreed that Maria's ailment was also caused by her malevolent practice. Maria and her family were fully aware of these earlier cases; moreover, they supposed that the suspected woman had "taken away the milk from their cows" several years earlier. Also, some people from the neighbourhood claimed to have seen the old woman throwing a "suspicious" object into Maria's courtyard, thus conveying the bewitchment to the family members.

However, the most important reason for Maria's family to interpret their misfortunes in terms of bewitchment lies in the main motivation local people believe to stand behind most bewitchment cases: envy.[49] Maria and David managed to make great economic progress with their family business and according to community standards they were successful and wealthy with all their children running their prosperous farms and living a happy family life as well. As their economic and social position and prosperity provided more than a good target for envy, Maria and David supposed that someone – being jealous of their economic success and peaceful life and willing to destroy it – might have bewitched them so that their creamery had to be closed, their son's life became embittered with constant fights with his wife and Maria fell seriously ill.

Thus, bewitchment was an adequate and likely explanation of the different misfortunes that fell upon the family. In order to unravel the identity of the bewitcher and to find a way to cure bewitchment it seemed necessary to visit a specialist again. Maria wanted to choose the right one very carefully, so she started to ask some friends in and outside the village about it. Finally she decided to consult a Romanian soothsayer living in a town some 250 kilometres away where David sometimes went to sell timber.

Before proceeding with the story, I would like to add some remarks on Maria's doubts and convictions in this situation. As we have seen, locals tend to visit a wide spectrum of specialists in order to confirm and cure bewitchment. Visiting an Orthodox priest or monk when people suspect bewitchment as the cause of certain misfortunes is probably the most common practice of the locals, but they would often do it simultaneously or soon after their visit to a lay specialist. Nevertheless, Maria has never visited any priests to seek help. Knowing that she was Orthodox and spoke Romanian fluently – so she did not need an additional person to accompany her in order to translate – this was rather surprising for me first. Later, when I got to know about her personal "conflicts" with Orthodoxy, her reasons became clear to me.

Maria's parents were Roman Catholics but she – following the local practice – converted to Orthodoxy, the denomination of her husband when they got married. She also sometimes attended Roman Catholic liturgies and raised their children in the Roman Catholic faith, although they were baptised in the Orthodox Church. David did not mind it at all, and they never argued on religious issues. As Maria could not tolerate the intense nationalist propaganda that she believes to have found its way into the local Orthodox church, she went back to her original denomination in 2013, fol-

---

[49] Studies of witchcraft have shown that "most cultures identify envy as the basic drive for bewitchment". Hesz 2007, 28–29. See also: Whyte 1997, 183; Blécourt 1999, 206–8; Hesz 2017, 355.

lowed by one of their sons in 2015. David accepted her decision and today they both go to the Roman Catholic church. As for her bewitchment in particular, her reasons for not wanting to visit any Orthodox priests or monks were manifold. First, there was her long-existing aversion to Orthodox liturgy and religious rites. As she explained to me many times, she had the constant feeling that *their* rites were strange and distant for her, she could not really understand them and therefore she never believed they could be particularly helpful in such a human crisis.

> I already told you, I paid no regard to this, because I have never liked the… their ceremonies, you know. … It goes like… there are people who believe in this. Yet me, I am the kind of person who does not believe in anything else but God. I do not believe in those wonder-working priests.

Although having (curse) masses performed by Orthodox priests is basically understood as a form of divine justice, where individual cases are delegated to God in order to punish the guilty, I have spoken to numerous people in the village who claimed it as something "unclean" that should not be practiced at all. By stating that she "does not believe in anything else but God" Maria also connected to the argumentation that says it is not nice to wish bad luck upon anybody,[50] and as God will punish all those who deserve it in due time, people should not try to impose justice through these ordeal-like masses.

Yet she mostly had a good relationship with the Orthodox priests serving in the village and had paid many votive masses to them for the health and prosperity of the family in the course of her illness. Also, she asked for the help of the local Orthodox priest when their milking cows once went dry.[51] She told me that she never actually believed Orthodox priests to have greater power or more effective prayers than Roman Catholic ones,[52] but she was ready to resort to their "services" as potentially helpful in treating different kind of problems.

Soothsayers, in contrast, are specialists whose competencies and power has always been evident for her. I have listened to many stories about her family members and friends that illustrated how the predictions of different divinatory specialists came true and unlike the Orthodox priests she showed firm belief in the credibility of soothsayers and the effectiveness of the help they could provide in times of crises. Her visit to the second soothsayer also made a great impression on her. The woman worked with coffee-grounds and started the session by revealing a lot of personal details about Maria, her living environment and her family members' life without knowing her at all.

[50] Cf. Hesz 2007, 21–22.
[51] Although this has also been a case associated to bewitchment, the counter-rites performed by the local Orthodox priest have fallen under different judgment than a curse mass, mainly because he only used prayers and holy water in order to cure the animals. Also, as the Roman Catholic priest was not willing to perform those rites, there seemed to be no other option to handle the problem.
[52] Scholars have reported this to be a common belief among Hungarians living in Transylvania. Pócs 2004, 178; Komáromi 2009, 92–98.

She did not mention bewitchment or any kind of magical harm as the origin of the family's troubles, though. What she predicted instead was that Maria will have another operation and some serious problems with her leg – things that surprised and frightened Maria very much, and made her think over what she had been told again and again in order to somehow make sense of it. There were basically two options to interpret the woman's words: either she was a fraud who could not see that she was indeed bewitched, or she was right and there were further health problems to come. Maria herself never doubted the credibility of the soothsayer, especially after some events she disclosed about her younger son – information unknown to Maria before – proved to be true later when she asked him. Rather, she explained the surprising outcomes of the session with the possibility of some "signs" being misinterpreted by the soothsayer. She believed that the woman saw her past operation at the bottom of her coffee cup and also that the fact of her family's earlier bewitchment remained unnoticed by her for some reason. Still, she might have been right as well, so Maria was completely uncertain of both the origin of her illness and her future at this point.

Regardless of her evaluation of this visit to the soothsayer, she soon had to go to the hospital to receive further treatment as her health condition became critical again. Another friend – this time the family doctor from a nearby village – suggested that she go to Iași, where his wife worked in a hospital that was famous for successfully treating severe liver problems. Following his advice Maria finally found a doctor she could fully trust, so she agreed to undergo some more examinations and tests and to take some new medicine as treatment. She was advised that surgery was necessary, but with her condition being very unstable she had to spend 6 weeks in the hospital until doctors could finally operate on her.

During the long weeks of her hospitalisation several things happened that put her health problems in a new perspective. First, unlike before, she got a very accurate clinical picture of her state, where different disorders were identified as the causes of her symptoms. Doctors and nurses made efforts to explain everything in detail – which was a very unusual experience for Maria. In previous years she was always informed about the results of the tests and was sent home with medication and dietary guidelines but she never really understood the biomedical diagnoses. I could clearly observe this difference in our conversations about her illness: while her previous medical diagnoses seemed to be rather blurry assumptions and she was unable to speak in detail about her diseases, when we got to this point she was able to inform me about the pathological states of her organs and explain how these malfunctions caused her symptoms. As I already pointed out regarding local concepts of illness and treatment, I think the lack of information about the diagnosis and underlying causes "downgraded" biomedicine to a symptomatic form of treatment for Maria and her family. As she was unsure of what they were treating, Maria only expected medicines to temporarily remove her symptoms but never really believed them to be able to cure her. Thus, bewitchment and its treatment as an etiological approach of her problems could appear on the horizon again and again with the hope of a full recovery. Now the clear and understandable biomedical diagnosis, also focusing on the underlying

causes of her symptoms became an equally relevant explanation – only from a very different point of view.

Second, Maria got appropriate medication for her disease and was under medical surveillance for 6 weeks – unlike in the previous years when she could not always manage to follow doctors' instructions after she was sent home, nurses made sure she was getting enough rest and followed her very strict diet. As a consequence she showed signs of improvement day by day. The third important factor that, I think, put her illness into a new perspective was that during her stay in the hospital she could discuss her story with some other patients. They were of different opinions about her case, but none of them seemed to truly share the idea of bewitchment as a possible origin of her troubles. Lastly, with this second operation the words of the soothsayer proved to be unquestionably true for Maria. If she was right about everything else, why would she be mistaken regarding her bewitchment (i.e., there was no bewitchment at all) – she asked herself repeatedly.

However, this did not make her completely dismiss bewitchment as a potential cause, mainly because of the opinion of her family and other villagers. Her husband, sons and friends were still sort of sceptical about the effectiveness of biomedicine in this particular case. Their doubts were strengthened by the fact that Maria was not fully recovered after six weeks of hospitalisation, although she felt much better than before. Also her younger son's family problems got worse during her absence, and bewitchment was still the only acceptable explanation for both. Maria felt there was nothing to be done to completely remove doubt regarding the origin of the family's troubles, even if she left the hospital with some kind of certainty about her own disease. In order to calm the worries of her family members and friends and to make sure she tried all possible solutions available, she started to pay votive masses on a regular basis again, both to Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests. As she has repeatedly told me: "If it won't help, it also won't harm – I thought." She also did her best to follow doctors' instructions, went to regular medical check-ups and experienced some more improvement in her state.

Six years passed like this. Maria's condition was sufficient, but the family started to realise that she would never be fully healthy again. This very fact put bewitchment in the spotlight once more, especially because some people from the village kept insisting that all the family's problems derived from bewitchment (be it the one made by her relatives or the one made by the old lady in their neighbourhood) which is probably impossible to cure now and will affect the family forever. Besides Maria's chronic health problems, the constant fights between her son and daughter-in-law constituted another proof.

Considering all her assumptions and doubts, Maria decided to put an end to the family's troubles and two years ago she went to consult another specialist – a soothsayer again. The fortune-teller laid cards for her and "she said something like my problems were caused by an Orthodox priest. I doubted it, and I still doubt it" – she commented. No wonder she did not want to believe it: as I have mentioned it before, suffering from a priestly curse always proves the bewitched guilty and puts the person

in a very unfavourable light. This interpretation also made her husband and sons doubt that their problems were caused by magical harm, so the whole family started to distance themselves from the idea of bewitchment. They also made an effort to keep this last interpretation highly confidential, and as far as I know they were successful in not making this narrative public. However, just like before, this last attempt to find the origin of their problems failed to give definite answers. Instead, it has brought more uncertainty for David and his son, who had earlier rather favoured the "bewitchment interpretation" of their problems.

Maria, however, could not fully reject what she had been told by the soothsayer. Especially after the predictions of the woman she visited before came true, she had a very strong faith in divination and the ability of soothsayers to see things that are invisible to ordinary people. She wanted to somehow make sense of this version of their story, so she came up with an idea that offered an explanation for the problems in his son's family. As she was always against her son's marriage and could never really understand why he wanted to marry the girl, she suspected that the girl's mother or someone from her family had some love magic done in order to get them together.

> And I had this thought all the time, but all the time when they got together and it was not good, that they have gone somewhere. … People used to say before that those who get married this way, with this kind of bad things, unclean thing, there was no rest there. There was no good life there.

– Maria explained to me. She knew of many rumours about people using love magic in order to make someone fall in love with them, and she had also heard a story from her father that had made a great impression on her. There was an elderly couple living near Maria's family who had a lot of misfortune in their lives. Maria's family had always felt sorry for them, but when Maria's father learned from a Gypsy soothsayer that the lady's mother "made them get together" with love magic she had performed, they became sure about the origin of the couple's miseries. Maria thought there might be something similar with their son, and this could also provide an explanation for all the troubles that had hit the family in the previous decades.

Yet Maria was not completely sure about this interpretation being right, and never told David and her son about it. Also – regardless of it being right or wrong – she did not want to start another long and expensive process of seeking solutions based on this interpretation, so she refused to resort to the unwitching rituals offered by the soothsayer, actually stating that she didn't believe in the explanation offered by her. On the other hand, given the great trust she put in soothsayers' forecasts, this last visit to a specialist helped her to separate her son's case from her own illness. While she gained new evidence of her son's marital problems being caused by magical practices, she also started to believe that as the two women she consulted about her illness had never confirmed her bewitchment, it might have been an ordinary disease, after all.

As a consequence, she took the "rational" position regarding her case, claiming that it did not have anything to do with bewitchment. When asked these days, she usually

states that there have been two separate sets of events: once she was bewitched by her relatives but its harmful power ceased when the perpetrator died; later on she somehow developed a very severe disease which was hard to diagnose and became chronic after being unattended (or at least not treated the appropriate way) for many years. In other words, at a certain point she *decided* that she will not consider her recent illness a bewitchment any more. Of course this does not mean that Maria now doubts the possibility of bewitchment in general, it rather seems to be her conscious choice between two possible options that are equally likely interpretations of her illness.

Parallel with this process of rejecting bewitchment, Maria also internalised the arguments of the local Roman Catholic priesthood regarding witchcraft, stating that human beings will never be able to alter God's will and harm others by using evil practices. In my opinion, both the folding of their family business and Maria's recent conversion to Roman Catholicism had a great impact on her religious life. As soon as she had more free time and felt free to attend Roman Catholic services, her religious life became more intense: she started to attend church more frequently, religion and different forms of devotion became central elements of her everyday life – things that clearly made her put more emphasis on religious arguments in connection with her illness as well. The whole process is very clearly reflected in the following text.

> Well, I don't know how much of that was true, or what exactly happened. …
> *But do you also believe that someone has done it out of spite?*
> We used to think that, back then, because someone told us so… there were a lot of people believing it, and someone here told us it was bewitchment, but then I became reconciled that it wasn't. There was no way to do it.
> *Did you know who it was?*
> Well, yes, yes, but then I started thinking about it and calmed down with the idea that maybe it wasn't so. You know, when something like this arises, there are always some scapegoats [*sic*], but… …
> *And haven't these soothsayers said anything about it?*
> They haven't said anything at all, the ones I told you I have visited haven't said anything. So I calmed myself down with this thought. I cannot suppose any more that people are strong enough to work against God. I know this, I … inside of me, I tell you, I do not doubt it.

Even if she intends to express firm conviction at the end, the initial sentence also shows her recent doubts: the possibility of her bewitchment is still evident in her story, showing that she could only limit uncertainty and never managed to completely rule it out in connection with her illness.

Concurrently with reshaping her interpretation like this, Maria also became somewhat disenchanted with biomedicine. "I ate more medicines than food … I ate them all and still I am sick." – she explained her reasons. As a consequence, she has refused to take any more medicine in the past two years, and only consults her physician in cases of emergency. At the same time she became interested in alternative medicine in

which she has always been supported by some of her friends living in nearby cities and suffering from similar diseases. They often make long phone calls to talk about the newest products and methods and always inform each other about the effects of different remedies. Nowadays, Maria only uses herbal teas and takes some nutritional supplements in order to treat herself. She thinks that she will never be completely healthy again, but as long as her health condition is good enough and does not hinder her in her everyday life and work routine, she does not want to undergo further treatment.

When asked about her illness, she keeps her answers short and simple: instead of complaining about her symptoms or going into details she usually just reassures the inquirer that she is doing well enough for her age and case history. Also, when I first started to ask questions about her illness, she seemed to be quite uncomfortable with the situation, but as our relationship slowly became more intimate, we got deeper into her story. She began to consider our interviews as possibilities for confirming her thoughts and beliefs and removing her doubts – efforts to convince me also worked to convince herself. Obviously, everything she told me about her illness was filtered through the prism of her recent interpretation, but as we have seen, the process of continual transformation from certainty to uncertainty and back was still reflected in her accounts and despite her struggle to remove doubt from the story, there seems to be no unambiguous explanation of her case.

Conclusions – Changing Tendencies of Faith and Doubt

Maria's story has clearly shown that doubt is a human disposition that is particularly relevant to dealing with affliction. The wide spectrum of possibilities to interpret and treat her symptoms has made Maria utterly confused and uncertain as to what was wrong with her. While trying to figure out why she was experiencing certain symptoms, she was being pushed into different medical realities by her family and friends, and also had to consider different social factors and current events that resulted in the continuous shaping and reshaping of her ideas about her illness along with the changing tendencies of faith and doubt. However, none of the interpretations were capable of convincing her fully. New, sometimes contradictory clues have continually emerged and disturbed her creation of meaning. Assuming that the existence of treatment alternatives in itself promotes some uncertainty (in that there are no standard guidelines for choosing a correct response to a particular problem), my case study has hopefully also highlighted other factors in this process.

Besides the changing tendencies of faith and doubt regarding the possible explanations and treatment options, I would also like to point out the dynamic interactions between the different "actors" and "areas" of faith and doubt in Maria's case. First, there were her own (pre-existing) beliefs and doubts about different explanatory models and specialists that were changed or at least challenged by the beliefs and doubts of others many times when she asked for advice in order to find out what was going on. These external challenges sometimes strengthened, sometimes under-

mined her beliefs. Second, this also worked the other way around: Maria challenged the knowledge and authenticity of the specialists she visited. It was not only the question whether she should consult a doctor or a soothsayer with her problems, but also whether the one she chose to seek help from was good or not. In my opinion this is also important to note if we want to understand why she did not lose her trust in a particular treatment method when it did not seem to help. She always had to consider the possibility that it was simply not the right specialist of its kind – she never doubted the ability of doctors to cure diseases or soothsayers to diagnose and cure bewitchment in general, but the fact that she had found the right one to help her. While this mostly motivated her to take further actions and reconsider her beliefs, doubts and choices, I think it also made her unable to draw a clear conclusion on her case.

As there seems to be no hope to find a permanent cure for it – be it biomedical or any other –, there is still a considerable amount of doubt surrounding her illness. From her recent point of view biomedical diagnoses and bewitchment as possible causes of her health problems might both be relevant explanations. Maria's case is a vivid example of the coexistence of seemingly contradictory "traditions of belief" with their own argumentation and legitimation that seem to be equally valid for and very flexibly applied by the members of the community, thus offering not only competing but also complementary perspectives and cultural options. This case study has also showed that people do not necessarily choose between these options, and even if they do so, they might change their opinions or be dubious about certain details.

In light of this, Maria's story has shown the role of doubt as something that motivates people to move on, but also pointed out the fact that at the same time it might hold them back from making further efforts in solving their problems. After forty years of struggle with her affliction without considerable success she failed to completely remove her doubts and find a definitive answer to the question of what exactly has happened to her. For this reason she took the position of the "non-believer", claiming that she neither believes in her health problems being caused by bewitchment, nor doctors and medicines being able to help her. Although this standpoint does not help with ruling out her doubts, at least it seems to liberate her from the social expectations of finding a way to recover. This most recent point of view is clearly reflected in the motto of my study: by rephrasing the common saying of locals that bewitchment only affects those who believe in it, she once explained that counter-rituals, medicines, visiting different specialist and priests are efforts in vain without believing in them, as they only take effect on those who do not doubt their efficacy.

I hope to have shown with Maria's case the complex and intense processes of negotiation between different discourses, explanatory models and medical realities when interpreting and treating a severe and chronic health problem. Beliefs and doubts – based on and caused by many different factors – had a central role in these processes, as they have both affected her actions by constantly transforming assumptions and the treatment methods based on them, and in the end pushed Maria towards a "neutral" position of rest after not being able to force a resolution or get to an exclusively acceptable interpretation for more than four decades.

References

Bartha-Balog, Emese. 2001. "Hit és kétely a hiedelemszövegekben" [Faith and doubt in belief narratives]. In Czégényi Dóra és Keszeg Vilmos, szerk., *Emberek, szövegek, hiedelmek,* 47–76. Kriza könyvek 7. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság.

Bennett, Gillian. 1999. *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse.* Logan: Utah State UP.

Blécourt, Willem de. 1999. "The Witch, Her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher: The Continued Existence of Traditional Witchcraft." In Stuart Clark and Bengt Ankarloo, eds, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Vol. 6: The Twentieth Century,* 141–219. London: The Atlone.

Blécourt, Willem de and Owen Davies. 2004. "Introduction: Witchcraft Continued." In Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies, eds., *Witchcraft Continued: Popular magic in modern Europe,* 1–13. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Blum, Richard and Eva Blum. 1965. *Health and Healing in Rural Greece. A Study of Three Communities.* Stanford: Stanford UP.

Borneman, John. 1996. "Narrative, Genealogy, and the Historical Consciousness: Selfhood in a Disintegrating State." In E. Valentine David and Jeffrey M. Peck, eds., *Culture/contexture: exploration in anthropology and literary studies,* 214–34. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Christian, William A. Jr. 1991. "Secular and Religious Responses to a Child's Potentially Fatal Illness." In Eric R. Wolf, ed. *Religious Regimes and State-Formation. Perspectives from European Ethnology,* 163–80. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Czégényi, Dóra. 2008. "Kollektív hagyományok az egyén hiedelemtudásában" [Collective traditions in individual beliefs]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *"Vannak csodák, csak észre kell venni." Helyi vallás, néphit és vallásos folklór Gyimesben I.,* 77–92. Studia ethnologica Hungarica VIII. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Czégényi, Dóra és Keszeg, Vilmos. 2010. *A beteg ember. Betegségek, betegek és gyógyítók* [The sick person. Diseases, ill people and healers]. Emberek és kontextusok 4. Marosvásárhely: Mentor.

Delmouzou, Efrossyni. 2006. "Re-examining the Medicalisation Process." In Helle Johannessen and Imre Lázár, eds., *Multiple Medical Realities. Patients and Healers in Biomedical, Alternative and Traditional Medicine,* 105–20. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Eisenberg, Leon. 1977. "Disease and Illness: Distinctions between Professional and Popular Ideas of Sickness." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 1: 9–23.

Fabrega, Horacio. 1972. "Concepts of Disease: Logical Features and Social Implications." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 22: 583–616.

–. 1974. *Disease and Social Behaviour: An interdisciplinary perspective.* Cambridge, MA: Massachusets Institute of Technology.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne. 1980. *Deadly Words. Witchcraft in the Bocage.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Hesz, Ágnes. 2007. "The making of a bewitchment narrative." *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 37: 19–34. http://www.folklore.ee/Folklore/vol37/

–. 2017. "Talking Through Witchcraft – on the Bewitchment Discourse of a Village Community." In Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs, eds., *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania,* 349–93. Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hofmann, Bjørn. 2002. "On the Triad Disease, Illness and Sickness." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 27 (6): 651–73.

Iancu, Laura. 2010. "Világkép, vallás és betegség Magyarfaluban" [World view, religion and illness in Magyarfalu]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Mágikus és szakrális medicina. Vallásetnológiai fogal-

mak tudományközi megközelítésben, 184–202. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VII. Budapest: Balassi.

Johannessen, Helle. 2006. "Introduction: Body and Self in Medical Pluralism." In Helle Johannessen and Imre Lázár, eds., *Multiple Medical Realities. Patients and Healers in Biomedical, Alternative and Traditional Medicine,* 1–20. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Kleinman, Arthur. 1980. *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture. An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine and Psychiatry.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kleinman, Arthur and Don Seeman, 2000. "Personal Experience of Illness." In Gary L. Albrecht, Ray Fitzpatrick, and Susan C. Scrimshaw, eds., *Handbook of Social Studies in Health and Medicine,* 230–42. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE.

Komáromi, Tünde. 2009. *Rontás és társadalom Aranyosszéken* [Bewitchment and society in Aranyosszék]. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság.

Mencej, Mirjam. 2016. "Discourse of Witchcraft and uses of Witchcraft Discourse." *Fabula* 57 (3–4): 248–62.

Nordenfelt, Lennart. 1994. "On the Disease, Illness and Sickness Distinction: A Commentary on Andrew Twaddle's System of Concepts." In Andrew Twaddle and Lennart Nordenfelt, eds., *Disease, Illness and Sickness: Three Concepts in the Theory of Health,* 19–36. Studies on Health and Society 18. Linköping: Linköping University.

Pócs, Éva. 2001. "Átok, rontás, divináció. Boszorkányság a vallás és mágia határán" [Cursing, bewitching, divination. Witchcraft on the borderline of religion and magic]. In Ead., szerk., *Két csíki falu néphite a századvégen,* 419–59. Örökség 2. Budapest: Európai Folklór Intézet–Osiris.

–. 2002. "Boszorkányság a vallás és mágia határán" [Witchcraft on the borderline of religion and magic]. In Ead., *Magyar néphit Közép- és Kelet-Európa határán,* 239–64. Válogatott tanulmányok I. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

–. 2004. "Curse, Maleficium, Divination. Witchcraft on the Borderline of Religion and Magic." In Blécourt and Davies eds. 2004, 174–90.

Rowbottom, Anne. 2012. "Chronic Illness and the Negotiation of Vernacular Religious Belief." In Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, eds., *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life. Expressions of belief,* 93–101. Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox.

Takács, György. 2014. "Kantéros, gurucsás, buszkurja, fermekás. A boszorkányság hatóköreit leíró kifejezések a Tatros menti csángóknál" [Expressions describing witchcraft's spheres of action among the Csángós by the Tatros river]. In Klaniczay Gábor és Pócs Éva, szerk., *Boszorkányok, varázslók és démonok Közép-Kelet-Európában,* 455–97. Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Közép-Kelet-Európából 1. Budapest: Balassi.

Twaddle, Andrew C. 1994. "Disease, Illness and Sickness Revisited." In Andrew Twaddle and Lennart Nordenfelt, eds., *Disease, Illness and Sickness: Three Concepts in the Theory of Health,* 1–18. Studies on Health and Society 18. Linköping: Linköping University.

Whyte, Susan Reynolds. 1997. *Questioning Misfortune: The Pragmatics of Uncertainty in Eastern Uganda.* Cambridge Studies in Medical Anthropology 4. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Yew, Vivien W. C. and Noor Azlan Mohd. 2014. "Anthropological Inquiry of Disease, Illness and Sickness." *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 9 (2): 116–24.

Young, Allan. 1982. "The Anthropologies of Illness and Sickness." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11: 257–85.

Ildikó Tamás

The Voice of the Devil (?)
The Sami Song in the "Cross"-fire
of Various Discourses

And she started to *yoik*. … it was my father's *yoik*. And one of the mentally clear patients says: "No, you must not sin!" "Sin", my mother says, "I am *yoik*ing my husband!" "Yes, yes, but you must pray for forgiveness because you *yoik*ed." This did not deter my mother, however, so she finished her *yoik*ing. And then, after a little while, she says that perhaps she has sinned. It was as if she woke up. "No", I said, "you haven't. You have *yoik*ed your husband out of love, so don't think about what the others are saying". … I have still not been able to understand why *yoik* is the work of the Devil. I don't get it. … Because when I *yoik* I *yoik* a specific person because I am thinking of that person. When I know that they have a *yoik*, when I know their *yoik*, I *yoik* them. … To us *yoik* is something happy; it reminds us of people. But here [in this town] it is very often seen as the work of the Devil.[1]

The above is taken from Ingrid Hanssen's 2011 study, *Yoik as an example of the importance of symbolic cultural expression in intercultural communication/health care*. For her research, Hanssen interviewed the residents of a retirement home and their relatives. These conversations revealed that the controversial attitude towards the *yoik* articulated in the quote above was not just experienced at that one site but is characteristic of the entire Sami[2] society. *Yoik* has both profane and sacred interpretations. I investigate the question of how a genre of lyrical folklore can gain central importance in matters of faith, and how all this is connected to larger cultural and political discourses going beyond religion. Nowadays, the attitude of the Sami people towards the *yoik* is still strongly connected to religious and ethnic problems, to the uncertainty of the Sami vision of the future and to the desire for realising a sound strategy for ensuring their

---

[1] Hanssen 2011, n. p.

[2] In my study I use the internal ethnonym *Sami* instead of the *Lapp/Lappish* denomination used colloquially and until recently in the (scientific) literature. *Lappish* is an offensive term in Scandinavia.

survival. In the original process, the *yoik* was deemed pagan and partly for this reason was disdained by the colonizing power as anti-Christian and used to undermine the belief of the Sami both in themselves and in their worldview. The revival of *yoik*ing takes place along the more secular line of identity formation but questions of faith and identity are often intertwined.

The Genre and Contexts of *Yoik*

Yoiking is a vocal singing tradition of the Sami (or Lapps, a minority indigenous group in the entire region of Northern Europe) that carries many features of sacred and profane symbols; its scope of application goes far beyond the usual connotations of folk songs or ritual songs. It has numerous functions: it is a means of communication; an expression of identity; an instrument of entertainment; it is, furthermore, a system to classify and identify the society and the environment of the Sami; it is a sort of synopsis of the experience and knowledge acquired of the world that reflects and expresses their worldview.[3] The Sami believe that there is a strong bond, an essential congruity between the *yoik* and the subject of the *yoik*; they never say that they *yoik* "of" someone or something. They always use the accusative: they "*yoik* [sing] someone/ something", since the *yoik* is a type of musical representation, a concept inseparable from the person or the object it is about. Once *yoik*ing extended to all areas of life of the Sami; the present study, however, does not provide a framework in which to discuss its diverse uses, rather it highlight certain characteristic functions.

It was possible to become part of the community through the *yoik*: after birth children were immediately assigned an individual *yoik* (*mánnávuođaluohti*, or 'childhood *yoik*') that accompanied them into their adulthood until they received their personal *yoik*. Only those having a personal *yoik* could become fully-fledged members of the community. *Yoik* played a crucial role in everyday communication as well. This form of expression so different from ordinary talk operated primarily through rhythmic and musical means; aside from a few syllable-like elements (or panels, such as *loi-lo, nu, nun-nu, go, lei*, etc.) there were no "real" lyrics. If two people met, they usually sang each other's *yoik* as a form of greeting. Due to the particularity of its vocalisation, the *yoik* can be heard from a great distance, and on the Tundra, the herders would communicate with one another with *yoik*s. One could use *yoik*s as a means of education, of reprimand, and as a way of signalling location. It is also clear that *yoik*ing was central to special occasions, such as weddings, for which new *yoik*s would be composed. It was basically a fundamental expectation for everybody to be able to compose a *yoik*. The primary means of sacred communication was also the *yoik*; this practice is the one most often referred to by observers. Medieval and early modern sources (usually authored by travellers and missionaries) all mention it without exception as a symbol of paganism, as a magical, diabolical song constituting part of the shaman's ritual ceremony. Giuseppe Acerbi, for instance, describes this song form as resembling more the song

[3] Tamás 2007, 78–79.

of the birds, the bellowing of reindeer or the moaning of the wind, than human sing-ing.[4] In addition to the image of the *yoik* there was the general belief already articu-lated in early sources, that the Sami were all sorcerers, witches and devils. In 1555, Magnus Gothus wrote: "Among the population of Pohjanmaa and Peräpohjola there are wise men and shamans… They are especially talented illusionists who can trans-form their own faces and that of others, thereby masking their true image with false appearance. They can also see into the future."[5] In the following description from more than two centuries later, *yoik*ing appears as part of the initiation ritual for sha-mans: "The young men who were shaman candidates received visions from the gods in different ways: sometimes in the form of a *Saivo* creature,[6] or sometimes in the form of a dream, etc. … The shamans gathered … The young shaman started *yoik*ing, he sang his shaman *yoik* and was beating his drums."[7]

Similar stereotypes even filtered down into literary works. In Henryk Sienkiewicz's, *The Deluge,* one finds the following[8]:

Sadovski gave explanations as they passed, saying:

"This is the Smaland regiment of the royal guard. This is the infantry of Delekar-lia, the very best."

"In God's name, what little monsters are these?" cried Zagloba on a sudden, point-ing to a group of small men with olive complexions and black hair hanging on both sides of their heads.

"Those are Laplanders, who belong to the remotest Hyperboreans."

"Are they good in battle? It seems to me that I might take three in each hand and strike with their heads till I was tired."

"You could surely do so. They are useless in battle. The Swedes bring them for camp servants, and partly as a curiosity. But they are the most skilful of wizards; each of them has at least one devil in his service, and some have five."

"How do they get such friendship with evil spirits?" asked Kmita, making the sign of the cross.

"Because they wander in night, which with them lasts half a year or more; and you know that it is easier to hold converse with the Devil at night."

"But have they souls?"

"It is unknown; but I think that they are more in the nature of animals."

Kmita turned his horse, caught one of the Laplanders by the shoulders, raised him up like a cat, and examined him curiously; then he put him on his feet, and said:

"If the king would give me one such, I would give orders to have him dried and hung up in the church in Orsha, where, among other curiosities, are ostrich eggs."[9]

---

[4] Acerbi 1802, 73.

[5] Author's translation from the Finnish publication, Järvinen 1999, 123.

[6] The collective, emic denomination of the helper spirits of the shaman.

[7] Author's translation from the Finnish publication. After Erik Johan Jessen 1767. In Pentikäinen 1995, 185.

[8] I thank Enikő Szíj for the literary reference.

[9] Sienkiewicz 1904. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37308/37308-h/37308-h.htm. Accessed 9 June 2016.

The "incomprehension" experienced by many outsiders when confronting the genre of *yoik* is reflected by Szomjas-Schiffert, who wrote in the middle of the last century:

> When recording … the yoik series of Näkkäläjärvi, Stoor and Ruotsala I had the painful feeling – as someone having studied solo singing and being a practicing singer at the time – that I would not be able to sing these melodies with my voice as my Lapp singers did. … As a professional of vocal studies I have suspected such *fioritura*, florid embellishments, that are particularities of vocal technique, which seemed extremely complex. … *I was able to understand all of a sudden why Scandinavians and even the Finns were unable to grasp and to learn these songs of the Lapps.* [emphasis added] … The problem left me restless, and during one of the bright nights listening over and over again with a tape recorder lowered by an octave I managed to learn a section of a Lapp yoik from Martti Stoor, which sounded like the howling of a wolf and the lyrics of which was "*Wo*".[10]

It was not the lyrics of the *yoik*s (if they can be called lyrics at all)[11] that provoked Szomjas-Schiffert's reaction, rather it was the sound, the peculiar way of singing and the real or imagined context. Since the rituals of the *noaide* (Sami shaman) were also accompanied by *yoik*ing, it seemed logical to associate the two. An uninitiated audience would have trouble comprehending these dissonant melodies performed with a distinct vocal technique and which seemed to be "unmelodious" compared to the songs they would be familiar with. Visitors could not tell the difference between the ritual songs of the shamans and the common "folk songs"; moreover, both were referred to with the emic denomination: *yoik*. The stereotyping (external) label of "shamanism" was easily applied to any *yoik*, regardless of it having anything to do with shamanism or not. Thereby one of the external categories, the stigmatising concept of "pagan" became firmly embedded in the notion of *yoik*ing over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Historical Background

The negative stereotypes surrounding the Sami and their songs were not only fabricated in the everyday, informal discourse of the people living nearby or settling on their territory. The official ecclesiastical and lay authorities, besides the stories enriched with various beliefs, deliberately transformed the image of the Sami, and thus, the Sami people themselves. Driving all of this were political and economic interests. Until the early eighteenth century, the Sami populated a large territory, which reached further to the south than their current territory; they never formed an

---

[10] Szomjas-Schiffert 1996, 26.

[11] Except for the *koltta,* Lappish *yoik*s represent an epic singing tradition. The style of these *yoik*s is very different from the *yoik*s of the western territories, which are the subject of my study.

independent state, however.[12] Over the course of their history, due to cyclical migration and the accompanying border crossings they often had to pay taxes to more than one state; aside from this their way of life remained comparatively undisturbed. From the seventeenth century, nevertheless, the Swedish state's influence and interference in the Sami people's way of life grew; furthermore settlers started to flow into the northernmost regions, usually appropriating lands cultivated by the Sami; there was no compensation. By the mid-nineteenth century the area over which the Sami could roam freely had shrunk to a fraction of what it had been, this state of affairs extended to the farthest territories and had an even more drastic impact on the reindeer-herding Sami groups; they were unable to follow their former migration routes. The Sami recognised private property but when it came to land, they always determined their borders in terms of natural phytogeographical and climatic factors. As the Swedish and Norwegian settlers pushed them further northward, the Sami had to confront new circumstances such as having to pay fines for reindeer wandering onto a settler's land. The general attitude of the Sami towards these conflicts is reflected in the words of Johan Turi:

> The Sámi have much the same nature as the reindeer. Both want to be on the move east and west in the manner that they are accustomed to. And both are sensitive. And because of their sensitivity they have been scared away from everywhere. And because of this, the Sámi today have to live in places where no one else is living besides Sámi …[13]

The greatest changes in the life of the Sami came in the period between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. Although they began building churches already in the sixteenth century in Lapland, the most intense period of missionising occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During these times the practice of shamanism and *yoik*ing, which was considered diabolical by outsiders, were prohibited and punished by both the religious and the lay authorities, in both an arbitrary manner and within a legal framework. The fact that the *yoik*, besides its other functions, was also part of the Sami shaman's rituals was enough to see *yoik*ing declared prosecutable under official ecclesiastical law.

The Sami did not even attempt to protest against the political and religious limitations, intimidation and economic paralysis; the only significant uprising (although, it involved only a small number of people) was suppressed and the participants either executed or imprisoned. This augmented fear and made the Sami even more reserved. The fact that the death penalty could be imposed on anyone singing a *yoik* the practice fell into decline and those brave enough to continue did so "underground". All of this meant that by the beginning of the twentieth century, when folk music research-

---

[12] For more on the reasons behind this, see: Tamás 2015, 415–45.
[13] From the work of Johan Turi, a Sami reindeer-herder written at the beginning of the twentieth century: *An Account of the Sámi* (Turi 1960, 38). Accessed 10 June 2016.

ers started to collect and study the vocal folklore of the Sami they realised that there were barely any regions where *yoik*ing could still be found. Amras Launis, an ethnomusicologist who for years collected among the Sami at the turn of the century, was convinced that due to the decades of intimidation the current generation of elderly Sami and *sorcerers* [*sic*] would take the *yoik* to the grave with them:

> Once you have heard this type of singing it rings in your ear as the swan-song of a prehistoric age. The melody, however, seems much too distant to have an effect on a contemporary Lapp child. The *nocturne* of past times is not consistent with the song of tomorrow. But if you listen to it intensely an irresistible desire awakens in you to go back to yesterday evening. You are captivated by the magic of this ancient song. You want to listen to it over and over again, because you can feel its evanescence. You can suspect that once the sorcerers will no longer be around, the door on this mysterious world will shut for good. Because, even if we succeed in preserving these for posterity, we will not be able to reconstruct and reproduce their spirit, their internal intensity with the help of inanimate and expressionless notes. The singer will take the magic power of his melodies to the grave.[14]

These negative undertones regarding the Sami were accentuated by a new (political and scientific) discourse unfolding at the beginning of the twentieth century (as an offshoot of evolutionism and racial theory) divorced from religious foundations, in which *yoik*ing was described as an inferior, despicable and shameful custom along with any other phenomena associated with the traditional lifestyle of the Sami. School served the purpose of raising awareness of this, becoming an institution to re-educate and "civilise" the Sami; here, in order to achieve their aim the children were often physically abused in order to humiliate them for wearing or demonstrating any ethnic sign or symbol (such as owning traditional Sami clothing, Sami objects or speaking their native language). This external, ethnocentric and "stigmatising" discourse, which can also be considered an instrument of Scandinavian nationalism, went hand in hand with the above discourse, which had placed the *yoik* into the category of religious "evil". The two discourses together embedded the *yoik* into an ideological and political context. This complex, stereotyping imagery charged with such negative connotations saw a shift in the Sami people, a desire to change their self-image and their relationship with their culture.

Above I have primarily examined the outside forces that sought to suppress a once robust identity-shaping cultural practice: *yoik*ing. However, what is also of key importance in terms of the demonisation of the *yoik* is the development of an internal movement that appeared among the Sami in the middle of the nineteenth century.

---

[14] Cited by Keresztes 1983, 512.

Laestadianism

Christian doctrines were initially received rather positively by the Sami; albeit, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources reveal that only the elements fitting into their worldview were retained and spread. The image of the creator merged with that of *Ibmil* (the god of thunder), the figure of the Virgin Mary with *Máttaráhkká* ("mother god", "mother earth"). Christian symbols became decorations on the drums of shamans (see fig. 1). For a long time the Sami referred to the Virgin Mary by the name of *áhkká* (mother earth, mother god).[15]
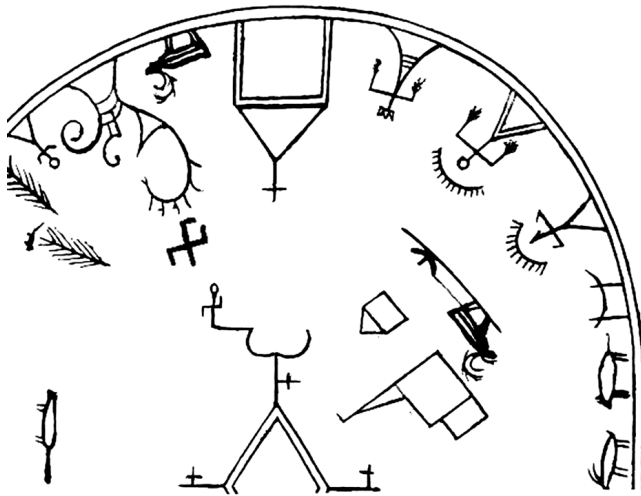
1 Christian symbols (church, cross) on an eighteenth-century shaman drum from Porsanger
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horagalles. Accessed 26 January 2016

There were obviously measures taken by the Church that were highly unpopular and were incomprehensible to the Sami. One such act was the banning of certain items of women's clothing, especially the *ládjogahpir*, a headdress in the shape of a sickle with an interior bracing, that the contemporary discourse of the Lutheran Church compared to the tongue of the devil. These accessories were considered symbols of Evil to such an extent, that they were publicly burned at the stake together with confiscated shaman drums. Such acts did not contribute to the spread of Christianity; on the contrary, they engendered resistance in the Sami, despite the fact that priests made efforts to accommodate the indigenous population in other ways, for instance, evangelising the Sami in the open air as opposed to in churches (see fig. 2).

---

[15] Pettersson 1957, 31.

2 Evangelising outdoors. The missionary wears Sami clothes!
Drawing by Knud Leem, 1767 (Solbakk 2006, 56)

Missionary activities were intertwined with the issue of schooling from the very beginning. The first steps to establish Sami literacy are related to Swedish missionaries who considered it important to reach the indigenous people in their own language. The first alphabets and psalm-booklets appeared as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century; but due to the migratory lifestyle of the Sami, converting and schooling them proved very difficult. However, nineteenth-century sources suggest that in certain regions the majority of the Sami could read. In a letter dated 6 October 1840 Antal Reguly wrote from Vaas, Finland: "One more thing about the Lapps, there are barely five in a hundred who could not read."[16]

A significant change was introduced thanks to the activities of a charismatic Lutheran pastor, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) who was of Sami origin on his

---

[16] The content of the letter was published in the journal *Athenaeum,* first half-year, no. 37 (1841): 577–83. The cited sentence is on page 182. I thank Enikő Szíj for the reference.

3 Samuel Rheen's illustration of a Sami shaman from 1671
https://ansatte.uit.no/rune.hagen/shaman.html. Accessed 28 January 2016

mother's side. The superficial or dissimulated Christianity prevalent until the nineteenth century was gradually replaced by a Lutheran faith based on deep experience and conviction. The success of Laestadius's puritan movement was partly due to his efforts to contain the increasingly destructive alcoholism prevalent at that time; and partly because he managed to successfully "resolve" the alien nature of the Christian worldview by using elements and natural symbols of Sami mythology in his sermons. Because of his origins he was familiar with the ancient shrines of the Sami: the *seita*s, therefore he was able to draw parallels in order to illustrate that drunkenness is nothing but idolatry: "he who drinks, has taken his stomach as his god", and he compared the person who persisted in his abuse of alcohol to a wild reindeer pursued by the wolf.[17] Laestadius managed to convince the Church that a positive response by the Sami to the Christian message would require its modification, thereby intimating that he wished to create a Sami variant of Christianity.

   This commitment was also manifested in Laestadius's efforts to establish and to propagate Sami literacy, the earliest example of which is his work written in the north Sami language: *Tåluts Suptsasah, Jubmela pirra ja Almatji pirra* [Ancient Tales of God and Men].[18] While the contemporary Lutheran view generally advocated eradicating Paganism and eliminating "the works of the Devil",[19] Laestadius had a more nuanced

[17] Laestadius 1978, 28, 24.
[18] Laestadius 1844.
[19] Hallencreutz 1987, 174–75.

attitude towards the worldview of the Sami; moreover, he hoped to learn more about their worldview. "It was characteristic of Laestadius's working method that he not only studied Lappish mythology, but lived wholeheartedly inside their 'inner household' – as he aptly called the mentality and the religion of the Lapps."[20] In his monumental work on Sami mythology written in the 1840s, the *Fragmenter*,[21] he tried to describe the phenomena and investigate their origins all the while employing the rigorous academic standards of the age.

Alongside his proselytising, Laestadius criticised the Church and the foreign settlers, which endeared him to the Sami. He contrasted the puritan lifestyle of the Sami (who exploited the goods given by nature only to satisfy basic needs) to the uninhibited profit-seeking of the settlers. His manuscripts reveal that he actually appreciated the Sami more than he did the Swedes and Norwegians living around them.[22] His sermons were mostly given in the Sami language; he also considered it important for the other ministers to adapt to the migratory lifestyle of the Sami who spent "the summer … 160–200 km distant from the church" therefore could not attend services. "For the same [he organised] a 3–4 week an intensive course during the weeks before Easter with the actual confirmation ceremony taking place on Good Friday."[23] He also made efforts to visit the summer residence of the Sami at least once a year, quite a distance from the centre of the parish district.[24] He distributed printed treatises among the people, so that they could read them with their Bibles during the periods spent away. There has never been a greater diligence manifested among the elders and the youth to learn to read.[25]

The popularity of Laestadius had also to do with how he highlighted the role of women. In Protestantism, the figure of the Virgin Mary is peripheral; Laestadius, however, included in his concept of Christianity the (mythological and real) Sami female figures who played a significant role in his life and who were generally important characters among the Sami. In Laestadius's theology, the mother or "heavenly parent", whom he also calls "the reflection of the Redeemer" is set in the centre. He had already discussed female deities in *Fragmenter*, divine figures who in Sami mythology fulfilled the functions of protectors, leaders and life-givers. He linked his own religious awakening to an encounter with a young woman named Milla or Maria Clemetsdatter. The strong faith of the pietistic girl, her deep repentance had such an impact

---

[20] Pentikäinen 2001, 21.

[21] Laestadius 1997. The manuscript was written between 1840 and 1845, yet, more than a hundred and fifty years passed before its publication, in 1997 in Swedish and in 2000 in Finnish, and in 2002 the English critical edition was published.

[22] Laestadius 1949, xii.

[23] Hallencreutz 1987, 172.

[24] "His visitation diary reveals that the pastor has visited every Lappish accommodation on the territories of his congregation", Pentikäinen 2001, 22.

[25] The popularity of another awakening movement contributed to the success of this. The Communities of readers, which formed outside of the official ecclesiastical frameworks, promoted the importance of individual and collective reading of the Bible; they organised public readings in their homes or outdoors on a regular basis.

on him that he later referred to her as the "Lappish Mary" who "sits at Jesus' feet"[26] and who was the "spiritual mother"[27] of his creed.

In light of how strongly the Sami worldview influenced the Awakening movement it might seem inexplicable that Laestadius would forbid *yoik*ing. The real reasons for this have not been discovered, neither in the works of Laestadius, nor in the literature about *yoik*ing and the Lutheran theological texts. It is possible that Laestadius shared the official view on *yoik*ing of the Church; and it could have been a compromise with the ecclesiastical leaders, since his "infringements" were often frowned upon (although the effectiveness of his work meant that they left him in peace). His writings only reveal that he did not think much of *yoik*ing in a musical sense.[28] Another possible explanation could be associated with the frequent ecstatic manifestations occurring in Laestadian groups. Considering that not that long before shamanistic techniques were actively practiced (and, in some cases, still were but in secret) among the Sami (fig. 3), the trance state and the manifestation of the supernatural were naturally (and customarily) associated, thus it was integrated as a familiar phenomenon into the new (Christian) religious practices. Moreover, for some of the Protestant Awakening movements forming in the nineteenth century the practice of inducing altered states of consciousness (ASC) or ecstasy were not unfamiliar. Within the Christian context (such as during the service) it was considered to be the individual and collective manifestations of deep faith. In Scandinavia, the activities of peasant prophets (such as Paavo Ruotsalainen, 1777–1852) also shaped the ideas of people about faith and made them susceptible to accepting certain phenomena that were earlier alien to Protestantism. Laestadius himself had visions; he often entered an emotionally heightened state during his sermons. Emilie Demant-Hatt describes Laestadius's sermons as follows:

> He introduced the public confession of sin into practice: the sinner had to repent his or her sin, the sin had to be confessed publicly, loudly and the sinner had to ask for absolution from the community. It was done in a trance-like state and the community, the believers of the parish entered an ecstatic state and mutually forgave the sins of their peers; as a sign of this atonement they embraced each other and rocked back and forth, as if they were dancing, for hours.[29]

A possible reason for Laestadius being so reluctant to accept the *yoik* might also have been – and here it must be emphasised that this is but an assumption – to draw a clear line between "sacred" and "diabolical" ecstasy. While the *yoik* was "generally regarded" as the shaman's means of attaining ecstasy; in the Christian interpretation the state of ecstasy should be a manifestation of repentance and of experiencing faith. Although

---

[26] Laestadius 1988, 36.
[27] Laestadius 2002, 29.
[28] Hirvonen 1999, 143–44.
[29] Demant-Hatt 1983, 280.

the fear of punishment was very successful in repressing the practice of the *yoik*, the sermons of the much-respected and popular Laestadius, and the Christian Awakening movement that he had launched resulted in an even stronger repression of this vocal tradition. After that it was not out of fear that many Sami did not *yoik*, but because they were convinced that it was a sin and an instrument for "conjuring the Devil".

Laestadianism had already found followers among the non-Sami, mainly the Finns, over the course of the nineteenth century. The Laestadian movement has become especially important in the self-definition of the Finnish minority in Sweden; to such an extent that they have now asserted their linguistic (*meänkieli*) and cultural identity.[30] The primary defining characteristic of their identity remains Laestadianism within the Lutheran Church. The movement spread across Europe (even reaching the United States and today there are numerous separate branches. The significance of Laestadian Christianity in shaping the identity of the Sami continues to be great even today.

The *Yoik* and the Sami Revival

In a sense the strength of the Laestadian movement provided a sense of security for the Sami within the congregation. In the public sphere, however, from the end of the nineteenth century those who insisted on keeping their Sami identity had to fear loss of prestige and discrimination. They were not allowed to use their native tongue in public, and everything associated with the Sami existence, such as the *yoik*, became stigmatised.[31] In Sweden, attempts to prove the inferiority of the Sami scientifically were made through institutions established for the study of racial biology, which continued to operate until the mid-1970s.[32] All this was accompanied by concrete measures, such as sterilisation. In the territories inhabited by a mixed population, especially where the Sami were in the minority, the native language, *yoik*ing, and Sami traditional clothing became things that had to remain exclusively within the walls of private homes, carefully hidden from view. Harald Eidheim explains in his study[33] of Sami living among Norwegian fishing communities in seaside settlements that the struggle against stereotypes such as low intelligence, being dirty, worthless, ridiculous, and so forth, led to the Sami eradicating all external traits of their culture in order to protect themselves. Although this did not mean they completely broke with their former lives; they gradually became used to practicing certain aspects of their culture condemned and disparaged by Norwegians or Swedes (such as speaking the Sami language or *yoik*ing) in secret, behind closed doors, often even hidden from their own children. Speaking in Sami in front of Norwegians or Swedes was considered

---

[30] M. Bodrogi 2009.
[31] Eidheim 1971.
[32] Bjørklund 2000.
[33] Eidheim 1969.

a provocation and wearing traditional clothes was social suicide. As a result of this strong dichotomisation in hope of "being exempt from being labelled, they overemphasised all that they thought to be part of the majority culture. But in their private life, behind the scenes, they always spoke in Sami and often expressed their common identity".[34] All this led to a deep crisis in Sami identity and to the conscious switching between externally demonstrated and internally experienced identities. There is, however, another side to the coin, which Thomas Hylland Eriksen describes as a "paradox".[35] The instruments of assimilation (banning the Sami language, having to integrate into the Norwegian, Swedish or Finnish social structure) later allowed the Sami to efficiently represent their own political goals. They had acquired the modern toolset of nationalism and survival.

A significant change came in the last third of the twentieth century when a few Sami intellectuals began to revive the *yoik* tradition, and more and more people joined them in their endeavour of ethnic and cultural revitalisation. In order to establish effective and meaningful communication they had to locate central symbols that could be used to assist in the process of Sami nation building. Since the Sami lived on the territories of four countries and their linguistic and cultural divisions were significant, the establishment of these symbols involved highlighting linguistic and cultural features of certain regions. This is how an almost forgotten genre, the *yoik*, could come to occupy a central position in attempts to raise cultural and ethnic consciousness among the Sami. In the southern regions assimilation was stronger, and the rights of the Sami in Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula were very limited as the institution of minority rights had not yet become part of a significant international discourse. Therefore, the instigators of this push for a "Sami society" were the northern Sami of Norway, who were the best informed about political advocacy and whose economic situation was the most advantageous (the largest Sami population lived on the territories of Finnmark Vidda County forming a majority in the region). Thus, the revival and the symbols attached to nation building first emerged from this central region, and its most important symbol proved to be the *yoik*, but it did not happen immediately.[36] Giving the *yoik* so fundamental a role in bringing the Sami together faced numerous obstacles, primarily within the Sami communities themselves. However, by the early seventies a change in the legal environment in Scandinavia was a serious opportunity for progress: democratisation, secularisation and the recognition of minorities had become such widespread ideas that legal discrimination against the Sami became impossible.[37] The revival of a vocal tradition that some despised and others considered frightening, is associated with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001). He

---

[34] Eriksen 2006, 360.

[35] Ibid.

[36] For instance, in the regions of Nunnanen, Finland, Kautokeino and Karasjok, Norway, the *yoik* was still a living treasure of folklore, which is how György Szomjas-Schiffert was able to collect *yoik*s in Northern Finland in 1966, on the eve of the revitalisation movement (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996).

[37] In spite of this, my experience is that a considerable part of the larger society still discriminates against them in everyday life.

gathered around him youth who could *yoik*, recorded them and put *yoik*ing onto the stage. In the beginning, even those who might have been expected to support such a project were shocked. In the film[38] about Valkeapää, the *yoik* singers said that when *Áilohaš*[39] had asked them to help organise a *yoik* concert and to take part in recordings they all despaired. They thought it would not be appropriate, nobody sang *yoik* in public, they were afraid the people would despise them. After overcoming the initial hostility, the initiative proved to be very successful and in a surprisingly short time (for instance, in the 1982 Eurovision Song Contest the Norwegian Sverre Kjelsberg and Mattis Hætta entered the competition with a song about the abusive acts carried out against the Sami, which included a *yoik*). The scheme's success, however, was not only due to political changes, but also to indigenous movements simultaneously developing at the international level. In these new, anti-colonialist discourses old, almost forgotten and disparaged cultural traits and phenomena were restored to their former positions as cultural and identity markers.

The *yoik* was reintroduced into public consciousness in the 1970s and, over time, it became once again part of everyday Sami life and celebrations. Moreover, the style of singing once disparaged and considered irritating in a religious or aesthetic sense gradually became a phenomenon worthy of admiration and respect in non-Sami circles as well. This is well illustrated by the 2014 *Talang Sverige* competition (Swedish musical talent show); in the preliminary auditions a Sami boy wearing traditional clothes was among the contenders. Jon Henrik Fjällgren was of indigenous Latin American origin and had been adopted as a baby by a Swedish Sami family. From the introduction before his performance, we learned that as a child he had been scorned and mocked for the colour of his skin, as well as for being a member of a traditional, reindeer-herding Sami family. Nonetheless, he was proud to present the values of Sami culture to the Swedish public, and performed a *yoik*. During his performance it was as if the studio had been filled with magic and everyone was paralysed; both the audience and the jury was overwhelmed with emotion. After the song, the audience and the jury gave a standing ovation with tears in their eyes and were speechless.[40] A few weeks and episodes later Jon Henrik left the show as the winner of the national competition. In 2015, he *yoik*ed in front of the royal family under the Swedish flag, accompanied by the Swedish military orchestra on the festival day of *Nationaldagen* [the day of the nation].[41] It has become a tradition to have a Sami performer at the Swedish national day celebration, and after Jon Henrik's success, several other Sami singers have become famous at the international level. These events have contributed to the revival of this threatened minority's position in Scandinavian states.

---

[38] The title of the film: *Váimmustan lea biegga* [My home is my heart]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ax8eWwrneVE. Accessed 4 January 2016.

[39] The Sami name of Valkeapää.

[40] The broadcast of the competition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woEcdqqbEVg. Accessed 18 October 2015.

[41] In recent years, the event had several Sami guests of honour: Sophia Jannok in 2013, Ingá Máret Gaup and Juuso Loreen in 2014.

The uncertainty and differences of opinion surrounding the *yoik*, however, have not disappeared. The reason for this is not straightforward: on the one hand, the *yoik* itself has gone through considerable changes over the course of the past few decades; on the other, although the genre lost some of its earlier negative connotations, the association of the *yoik* with shamanism remained; moreover, it even became stronger.[42]

Yoik in "Pagan" and Christian Discourses

The attitude towards the *yoik* divides people to this day: both the Sami and the Finns, the Norwegians and the Swedes living among them. Although the *yoik* was once a practice that had significance and meaning for many cultural activities, today it is largely known through its close association with shamanism (as it is in the historical sources, or in the time of missionaries and early Laestadianism). The designation of the practice as "pagan" which had previously provoked contempt, perhaps because of the social memory of stigmatisation, took on a new meaning and became the new symbol for national identity construction, paradoxically reinforcing the former stereotype itself. This interpretation of *yoik* is manifested in the performances of "celebrity" *yoik* singers, in movies and in literary works. All this is linked to the expanding discourse that connects those already possessing indigenous status with those trying to attain that status; a discourse that was in direct opposition to the mentality of the "conqueror majority society". The concept of "indigenous people" was still strongly associated with the image of the pre-modern "pagans" living in harmony with nature. From this perspective, Christianity often appeared as an imperialist, conquering power. The "natural worldview" was an almost self-evident connotation of indigenous status. Not only did it draw upon historical discourses, it also became validated in a contemporary global discourse that condemns the achievements of modernisation and the pollution of the natural environment, as well as in the neo-pagan knowledge register.[43] This provoked negative feelings from the majority of the Laestadian Sami who did not agree with the dominant symbolic language (that is, focussing on "shamanistic" symbols incompatible with Christianity) and had doubts concerning its long-term success. This was well-illustrated in an interview published in the Sami journal, *Ságat,* with the provocative title: *The Sami Flag is Ugly and Full of Occult Symbols.*[44] The interviewee, a Sami pastor, condemned the imagery on the flag: a circle representing the Sun, the

---

[42] I have to note that in the unanimous view of the scientific literature shamanism had disappeared from Sami culture by the mid- to late nineteenth century, thus the various ecclesiastical and social discourses only used the memory, or more specifically the image constructed of it.

[43] Hilder 2015, 109–48.

[44] Original source of the article: http://www.sagat.no/hovednyheter/2013/02/16/29982/. Accessed: 15 January 2016. The interview was published in several Norwegian newspapers, e.g., http://www.vl.no/troogkirke/pastor-h%C3%B8ster-storm-etter-kritikk-av-sameflagget-1.59464. Accessed 25 November 2015, and http://thornews.com/2013/02/16/pastor-the-sami-flag-is-ugly-and-full-of-occult-symbols/. Accessed 26 October 2015.

Moon and a shaman drum. He stated that it would be preferable to see the crucifix on it as the Sami have not been pagans for a long time and that he thought that people should be made aware that not everyone sympathised with shamanistic symbols and mythical/esoteric interpretations of the Sami. There are some, who think Christian symbols are missing from the process of Sami identity construction. This opinion, however, that the author has come across in the field, does not reflect the views of the majority due to the very controversial role Christianity had played in Sami history.

Laestadian and other groups with strong Christian ties do not reject Sami cultural traits in general, rather it is anti-Christian discourse that angers them. Sami traditional clothes, for instance, have been and are continuously present as festive clothing on religious occasions. The images and altars (even the crucifixes) of Laestadian Sami churches also reflect the Sami (colour-) world. The interior of the Kautokeino church (in Northern Norway), or the altarpiece of the Jukkasjärvi church (in Northern Sweden) – and we could list many other examples – are painted in the four colours of Sami traditional clothing and the Sami flag: blue, red, yellow, and green (see figs. 4 and 5).

4 Northern Sami women's wear
https://www.sapmifilm.com/film/30005. Accessed 28 January 2016

5 Sami children at confirmation
http://www.dagbladet.no/2011/06/27/nyheter/utdanning/samer/innenriks/
diskriminering/17081448/ http://thornews.com/2013/02/16/pastor-the-sami-flag-is-ugly-
and-full-of-occult-symbols/. Accessed 26 October 2015

The Discourses Converge (?)

It seems that despite significant resistance, the increasing popularity of the *yoik* has been able to breach the resistance of the rigid religious framework. Many among the Christian Sami youth desire to reconnect with their culture's music, while rejecting the pagan interpretation of *yoik*. Some of them not only try to remove the pagan connotations of *yoik*, but they specifically invest it with new, Christian meanings. The positive reception and the feasibility of this initiative can be seen in certain settlements or dioceses (mostly in Sweden). In some places, the *yoik* has already become part of the liturgy in spite of the reluctance of conservative Christians. Johan Märek, a priest from Jokkmokk employs a liturgy that includes the *yoik*, while the leader of the Sami Church Council in Sweden, Tore Johnsen has called for the rehabilitation and reintroduction of *yoik*ing in Norwegian Sami churches.[45] Official approval of this initiative is still pending, but if we look at the program of the annual Norwegian "Church Days" (*yoik* concert, sports events, museum exhibitions, drum performances, etc.) it is evident that attitudes are softening.

In the centre of the Norwegian Sami, in Kautokeino, they are not yet ready to have *yoik*ing in the church, but the most important *yoik* competition (*Sámi Grand Prix*)

[45] Hilder 2015, 117.

6 Frode Fjellheim (composer) in front of a poster of *Frozen*
https://www.rorosnytt.no/fantastisk-suksess-frode-fjellheim/. Accessed 22 January 2016

takes place, not in a church, but on the occasion of a religious holiday, at Easter; and numerous singers ("discovered" at these events) release albums of both *yoik*s and Psalms. Frode Fjellheim, the composer of Disney's *Frozen* (2013) combined religious cantatas and Sami *yoik*s when composing the movie's soundtrack. (*Cantus Eatnemen Vuelie*[46]) (see fig. 6). It is also worth mentioning that the psalms of the Laestadian congregation, which secludes itself from the *yoik* tradition, also recall the sound environment of *yoik*s; although if someone remarks on it they strongly object to the comparison.[47]

Other central pagan symbols that occur in the *yoik* discourse, such as the Sun, and ancient (mostly female) deities, are placed in new contexts by the Christianised Sami. In the etiological creation myths there is a recurring topic according to which the Sami are the sons of the Sun, and they live their lives following a cyclical migration pattern corresponding to the Sun's path.[48] The lyrics of the *Sámi soga lávlla,* or 'Sami national song (anthem)' draw partly upon this tradition when the Sami are described as "the Sun's sons".[49]

---

[46] The original soundtrack: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTNQAL4nV5A. Accessed 22 January 2016.

[47] One of the pastors in Tana in Northern Norway (28 June 2015) said: "Instead of singing church songs as it is in the score, they sing it with embellishments reminiscent of the *yoik*", and then he demonstrated with his wife how Lutheran songs sound when performed by the Sami.

[48] Gaski 2003.

[49] For instance, in the epic *yoik* texts collected and edited by Anders Fjellner. His work was also inspired by the already on-going Finnish folklore collections and publications, this is how the "Sami epic excerpts" entitled *Páiven párneh* [The son of the Sun] and *Pišša Paššan párdne* [The son of Pišša and Pašša] that reflect contemporary folklore text publication practices, which often granted creative licence to the collector (see Keresztes 1983).
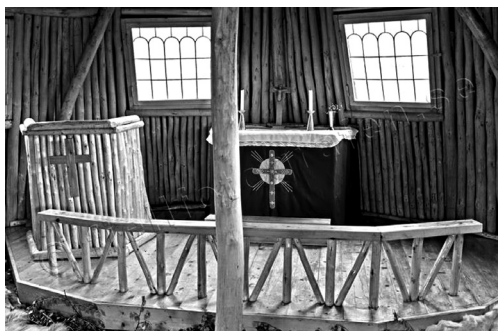
7 The Norwegian tent church in Mo i Rana is one of the venues of the Girkobeaivvit
[Church Days] festival. The fire in the centre of the tent is surrounded with reindeer fur
and antlers and burns throughout the festival even during sermons. Children dressed in
traditional clothes march with a crucifix entwined with blue, red, green and yellow ribbons,
the colours of the Sami flag
https://www.laponiapictures.com/Lapland/Farms+Cabins+Buildings/Staloluokta+
Sami+Church+teepee/@wic-20090709_01083. Accessed 22 January 2016

We have numerous other examples illustrating how pre-Christian cultural elements
have been Christianised and rehabilitated. There are Lutheran churches in which
motifs typically found on shaman drums (most frequently the sun and the *áhkká*s)
are displayed on the building's images and sculptures: from the church gates, to the
organ and the entire altar. Often the building of the church also evokes pre-Christian
times, or at least traditional Sami culture; such as the *goahte* (earth hut) church built
on a cultic site in the Swedish Padjelanta National Park related to *Stállu*,[50] a figure of
ancient belief; or the giant tent church in Mo i Rana, Norway, with a capacity of 800
(see figs. 7, 8, and 9).

[50] *Stállu* is a figure of the pre-Christian stratum of the Sami belief system. He is a hideous,
anthropomorphic creature of great strength who is both evil and stupid. He often appears in
folklore texts, attempting to kidnap a girl for himself, but the Sami typically outwit him. Johan Turi
commented on the popular *Stállu*-stories published in his book: *The stálut are now almost all gone,
but some Sámi are still related to them.* (Turi 1960, 108). http://www.tadubois.com/varying-course-ma-
terials/Muitalus-translation-without-articles.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2016.

8–9 A church converted from a traditional Sami earth hut (goahte) built on a pre-Christian cultic site ("Stállu hill") (Sweden, Padjelanta National Park)
https://www.huwans-clubaventure.fr/voyage/voyage-trek-et-randonnee/suede/esuedpad;
https://www.laponiapictures.com/Lapland/Farms+Cabins+Buildings/Sami+Church+teepee+
at+Staloluokta/@toj-bg2787. Accessed 11 January 2016

The *yoik* has merged with Sami identity over the course of the centuries, and reviving this tradition is seemingly one part of the Sami nation-building project. Among those who want to rehabilitate the *yoik* within the Christian worldview, there are many who have only discovered their Sami roots as adults, a consequence of the events of the twentieth century.[51] With their newly discovered heritage, they seek out the forums in which they can engage with and experience the Sami lifestyle and culture; they "cling" to every Sami symbol that seems emblematic.[52] No matter how far away they live, they holiday in Sami regions, they wear traditional Sami clothes and immerse themselves in the *yoik* tradition; compensating for and experiencing the things they missed are important motivators for them.[53] Discovering Sami identity and the desire to disseminate it engendered the idea that church events should happen "in a Sami way", for instance by integrating *yoik*ing.[54]

The debate about this has not yet waned among the Sami. However, the voices of moderates, those who consider the preservation and practice of the *yoik*ing tradition acceptable and even important are getting louder in the discourse. Nonetheless, the central and most commonly-repeated interpretation of the *yoik*, namely that which highlights the shamanistic angle, continues to dominate the media and to constitute a serious obstacle to a more nuanced interpretation of the *yoik*.

---

[51] A literary work on this theme is Uri 2015.

[52] Grundsten 2010.

[53] During my Norwegian field studies (June 2014), I met an elderly Sami woman in Kautokeino, a village at the very centre of Norwegian Sami culture, who had lived all her life in Oslo and only found about her Sami origins as an adult. She was over seventy years old, but every summer she drove thousands of kilometres to go up north to be among the Sami. One of her most important experiences was to hear *yoik*ing live and not from a recording.

[54] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V55V1RfQi6w. Accessed 12 January 2016. The opening ceremony of the Church Days' Festival is a good example of this.

10 The drum is a regular instrument at Sofia Jannok's yoik concerts
https://eszakorszag.blog.hu/2012/02/03/sofia_jannok_es_a_szami_joika
Accessed 11 January 2016

There are many who have grown up in Laestadian families among the most renowned and popular *yoik* singers (for instance Marie Boine Persen and Wimme Saari). Since *yoik*ing and secular music were forbidden at home and in the religious community, they were mostly exposed to "non-ecclesiastical" music as teenagers and/or adults.[55] Although their choice of career led to their being condemned by their religious community, these singers still maintain ties with their families and religious traditions. They usually have both *yoik*s and psalms on their albums, which aims to represent their concerted efforts to resolve the conflicts. Perhaps surprisingly, even they situate *yoik*ing in a shamanistic context, as is reflected in the visual world of their concerts and videos. This recalls the times when Christian symbols were included among the drawings on shaman drums: in the upper segment of the drum representing the "world above" the deities worshipped by the Sami were juxtaposed with crucifixes; this, obviously, was not sufficient for the Church to accept shamanism (see fig. 10).

---

[55] Lehtola 2010, 160–10.

Pagan Christianity (?)

Even posing the question of how one would locate the *yoik* in a Christian context scandalises many. This situation is very similar to the beginning of the 1970s when Nils-Aslak Valkeapää took the *yoik* on stage. For the historical reasons described above, at this time even the Sami considered it inappropriate to *yoik* in front of outsiders (non-Sami). A previously hidden, "shameful" thing exiled to the intimacy of private homes was suddenly brought out into the spotlight, accompanied by music and other instruments, previously completely alien to the genre. Most Sami had doubts about whether anything positive could be gained from this initiative. But Valkeapää, in spite of substantial resistance, believed in the success of his endeavour; and time proved him right because in just a few decades the *yoik* became the central and emblematic symbol of Sami society. His point of reference was that once the *yoik* had constituted the ontological foundation of Sami culture and that the genre might still have a strong mobilising and identity shaping power in the twentieth century.[56] The political and cultural restoration of the Sami is also a result of the musical movement he launched. Valkeapää wanted to present the cultural values of the Sami in the hope that they would be better understood and thus accepted by other ethnic groups living around them. The previously marginalised, disparaged musical tradition became a modern cultural construction and the predominant artistic trend of the Sami. This was more than just communication directed to the outside, it was also a signal to the Sami audience: firstly, it proved that the cultural values that some of them guarded as a precious possession and that others wished to forget could gain the recognition of others; secondly, the survival of tradition required change, and one had to accept that.

The integration of this ancient-modern tradition of *yoik* into the Christian worldview will most likely have to face further obstacles. Minority existence, the fear of assimilation, the threat of a globalised culture provokes the same counter reactions over and over again: the discourse of "primordiality" that was inevitably merged with the definition of an authentic Sami lifestyle. The elements evoking the imagined times before "colonisation" are enhanced and become part of an invented tradition.[57] In this post-colonial discourse everything that arrived with the conquerors, including Christianity, is necessarily bad, and everything that is ethnic and ancient is good This homogenising approach, however, creates tension among the Sami, which is often manifested in the Sami literature: "I do not live like that/ I do not have such a house/ I do not hunt. / Am I a Sami? // Yet, my desire is Sami / my thought is Sami / my soul is Sami / my tongue is Sami".[58] Many think that this retrospective approach is harmful in the long-run, because not only does it communicate cultural uniqueness, but also maintains the sharp divide that puts the Sami outside of the borders of modern society. Those existing between the two poles try to establish the principles whereby a worldview including

---

[56] Hirvonen 1999, 143–44.
[57] Kristóf 2007.
[58] Ravna Eira translated into English from the Hungarian translation by Johanna Domokos (Domokos 2003, 17).

11 Áhkkás (Sami female deities) next to the communion table. Uksáhkká (left) is the guard-
ian of the door and the goddess of family peace, Sáráhkká (right) is the goddess of birth
according to pre-Christian Sami beliefs. In the scene in the tent the Christian symbols are in
the sacred corner across the entrance
http://www.terre-des-sames.com/les-cent-ans-de-leglise-de-kiruna-2/. Accessed 11 January 2016

both the indigenous heritage and Christianity can exist. Evidently, the need for consol-
idation does not exclusively occur in relation to the *yoik*: we could mention numerous
parallel and partly religious dilemmas from reindeer herding to traditional clothing.[59]
When new trends emerge there are people who consider adapting to the contempo-
rary world more important, but there are also those who doubt this, who find it dif-
ficult to jettison ancient practices and ideas that bear witness to a considerable past
and have deep roots. It is interesting how both extreme positions stem from old, nine-
teenth-century discourses. If we examine thoroughly the ideological foundations, we
find that there are more parallels than oppositions in these seemingly irreconcilable
approaches. It is not uncommon to find individuals in the West who have doubts con-
cerning the prevalent dogma be it "modern" or "Euro-Atlantic", such doubts foster a
retrospective approach. Secularisation, environmental pollution, communities in cri-
sis, and the "nightmare" of rampant individualism engenders a belief in some that that
the "western lifestyle" has failed and a way out from the crisis is to return to the knowl-

---

[59] Certain reindeer herders believe, for instance, in agreement with Norwegian scientists, that due
to climate change the summer pastures should begin to be used two months earlier. Many Sami,
however, oppose this change to a schedule established over centuries, even at the cost of their
own reindeer herds; and they take the opinion of "outsider" Norwegian scientists as unwarranted
interference. In addition, they still do not allow the reindeer to graze in "sacred" places in order
not to anger the spirits of the earth.
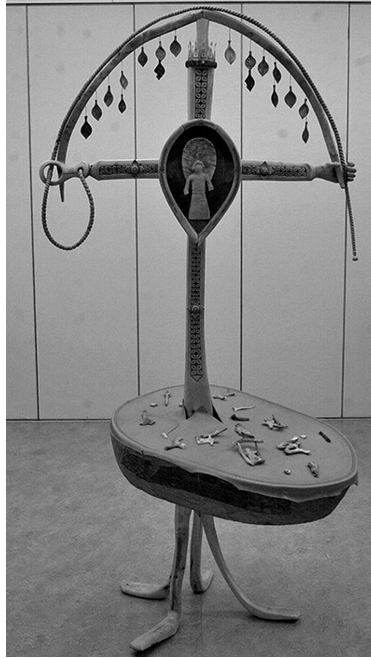
12 Work of Lars Levi Sunna (a crucifix stuck through a shaman drum
with a Sami lasso arched over it)
http://www.tidningenspira.se/2014/korset-moeter-urmodern.aspx. Accessed 11 January 2016

edge and practice of indigenous peoples. This is a fairly new phenomenon, consider-
ing that in the seventies Valkeapää wanted to make the *yoik* European. However, the
situation is surprisingly similar to the circumstances under which the Laestadian move-
ment arose in the nineteenth century. At that time, there were two cultures and world-
views (a more modern one and an "archaic" one) in opposition: that of the settlers and
that of the nomadic aborigines. Laestadius considered the latter to be more valuable,
while he was also led by modernising ambitions. Some of the elements of pre-Christian
Sami beliefs, even if in a latent way, were in fact transmitted by the theology of Laesta-
dius. This is a good point of reference for those who try to redefine what it means to
be Christian as a Sami by using elements of the pre-Christian beliefs. A good example
of this is the (Laestadian) presbyter with the same surname as Laestadius, Lars Levi
Sunna, who became acquainted with the pre-Christian Sami worldview as an adult. He
was twenty-five years old when he heard Sami stories from a few elderly men (in the
wood workshop they were working in). The stories made him so curious that he began
to explore the scholarly literature on this topic. What he learned had such a great effect
on him that instead of the household objects he had previously made, he started to cre-
ate sculptures of figures of ancient Sami beliefs (see fig. 11). It did not even occur to
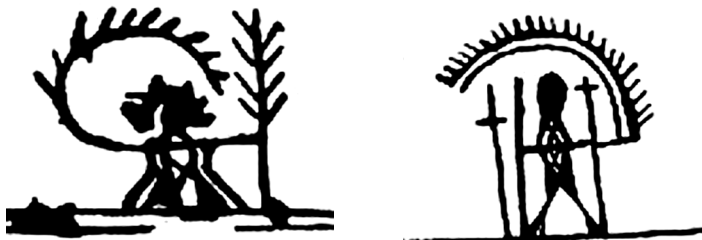
13 Representation of Sami gods from shaman drums
https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/234539093064495441/. Accessed 10 January 2016

him that he might thus renounce his Christian faith; moreover, the local ecclesiastical leaders also accepted his artworks with a positive attitude. They even put carved motifs of shaman drums on the altar of the Jukkasjärvi church, and he was commissioned by the Luleå diocese to make a travelling church exhibition (see fig. 12). The exhibition was an exploration of how a "natural" religion meets Christianity[60] (see fig. 13).

It seems that today the most important goal of Sami society is to maintain cultural (and thereby ethnic) singularity. The framework for this is provided on the one hand by Christianity, and on the other, by the shamanistic worldview; attempts to forge these two into one (or at least, to reconcile them) are more and more part of contemporary discourse. Outside observers (Norwegians, Swedes, Finns) see the advocacy efforts of the Sami in all this; as well as a world very different from theirs that they regard at times with exoticizing curiosity and admiration, at times with sympathy and at times with measured, even disapproving detachment.

Conclusion

By the turn of the millennium, the desire to approximate modern European standards in order to survive, which initially also characterised the work of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, no longer played a significant role in the dominant discourses. It has been replaced by the ideal of cooperation between indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, there is no single survival strategy among the Sami. Christian groups (although nowadays their voices are heard less) would rather build the Sami future on contemporary and Christian foundations. The phenomena unfolding in the twenty-first century suggest that there are many who, instead of choosing between discourses, would prefer to connect them, because these approaches have in common the need for cultural continuity. Laestadianism, just as in the tradition of *yoik*ing and the pre-Christian worldview retained the cultural specificities of the Sami in the public eye. Perhaps this is the reason why the consistent separation of ideologies is so hard to achieve (despite efforts to this end),

---

[60] http://www.tidningenspira.se/2014/korset-moeter-urmodern.aspx. Accessed 10 January 2016.

as the examples here have illustrated. The fear of assimilation is still present in the Sami mind-set, and the desire to preserve their cultural and ethnic singularity and independence will perhaps bring together the seemingly separate strands.

> I like to say that in one hand I have the Sami natural religion, and in the other I hold the cross. This makes me a whole man, and I believe that God wants it to be this way.[61]

<div align="right">(Lars Levi Sunna, 6 February 2014)</div>

References

Acerbi, Giuseppe. 1802. *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland to the North Cape in Years 1798 and 1799.* Vol. II. London: Mawman.

Barth, Fredrik. 1956. "Ecological Relations of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan." *American Anthropologist* 58 (6): 1079–89.

Bjørklund, Ivar. 2000. *Sápmi – nášuvdna riegáda* [Samiland: A nation is being born]. Tromsø: Tromssa Musea and Tromssa Universiteahta.

Demant-Hatt, Emilie. 1983. "Jegyzetek" [Notes]. In Johan Turi, *A lappok élete.* Budapest: Gondolat, 268–81.

Domokos, Johanna. 2003. "A számi írónők története" [The story of Sami women writers]. *Finnugor Világ* 1–2: 15–21.

Eidheim, Harald. 1969. "When Ethnic Identity is a Social Stigma." In Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference,* 39–57. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.

–. 1971. *Aspects of the Lappish Minority Situation.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2006. *Kis helyek – nagy témák. Bevezetés a szociálantropológiába* [Small places, large issues: Introduction to social and cultural anthropology]. Budapest: Gondolat.

Gaski, Harald. 2003. *Biejjien Baernie – Sámi Son of the Sun.* Karasjok: Davvi Girji.

Grundsten, Anna. 2010. *The Return of the Sami. The Search For Identity and the World System Theory.* Lund: Lunds Universitet, Department of Social Anthropology.

Hallencreutz, F. Carl. 1987. "Lars Levi Laestadius' Attitude to Saami Religion." *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 12: 170–84.

Hanssen, Ingrid. 2011. "A Song of Identity: *Yoik* as Example of the Importance of Symbolic Cultural Expression in Intercultural Communication / Health Care." *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 40: 27. http://immi.se/intercultural/nr27/hanssen-ingrid.htm.

Hilder, Thomas R. 2015. *Sámi Musical Performance and the Politics of Indigeneity in Northern Europe.* Lanham, Boulder, NewYork, and London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Hirvonen, Vuokko. 1999. *Sydämäni palava.* [My burning heart] Oulu: Oulun Yliopisto.

–. 2008. *Voices from Sápmi: Sámi Women's Path to Authorship.* Kautokeino: DAT.

---

[61] Quote from an interview with Sunna on 6 February 2014, published on the Sami National Day. http://www.tidningenspira.se/2014/korset-moeter-urmodern.aspx. Accessed 10 January 2016.

Järvinen, Minna-Riikka. 1999. *Maailma äänessä: Tutkimus pohjoissaamelaisesta joikuperinteestä* [World in sounds. *Yoik*ing tradition of the Northern Sami]. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Keresztes, László. 1983. "Lapp költészet" [Lappish poetry]. In Id., szerk., *Aranylile mondja tavasszal.* Budapest: Európa.

Kristóf, Ildikó. 2007. "Kié a 'hagyomány', és miből áll? Az Indigenous Studies célkitűzései a jelenkori amerikai indián felsőoktatásban" [Who does tradition belong to, and what does it consist of? The aims of indigenous studies in contemporary American Indian education]. In Wilhelm Gábor, szerk., *Hagyomány és eredetiség. Tanulmányok,* 153–72. Tabula Könyvek 8. Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum.

Laestadius, Lars Levi. 1844. *Tåluts Suptsasah, Jubmela pirra ja Almatji pirra* [Ancient Tales of God and Men]. Hernösand.

–. 1949. *Dårhushjonet l–2. Helsingfors: E. Bäcksbacka.*

–. 1988. *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness* ([1852–54]. *Ens ropandes röst i öknen.* The Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America. http://www.laestadiusarkivet.se/ERR_katalog. htm.

–. 2002. *Fragments of Lappish Mythology.* Ed. Juha Pentikäinen. Trans. Börje Vähämäki. Beaverton, Ont.: Aspasia Books.

Lehtola, Veli-Pekka. 2010. *The Sámi People. Traditions in Transition.* Inari: Kustannus-Puntsi Publisher.

M. Bodrogi, Enikő. 2009. "A nyelvi önállósulás Skandináviában mint revitalizációs stratégia" [Linguistic independence in Scandinavia as a reviatlisation strategy]. In László Diószegi, szerk. *A moldvai csángók és a változó világ,* 19–30. Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány and Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem Savaria Egyetemi Központ.

Pentikäinen, Juha. 1995. *Saamelaiset. Pohjoisen kansan mytologia,* [The Sámi: *Mythology of a Northern People*]. Helsinki: Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seura.

–. 2001. "Lars Levi Laestadius születésének 200. évfordulójára" [For the 200th anniversary of the birth of Lars Levi Laestadius]. Trans. Márta Csepregi. *CREDO. Evangélikus Műhely* 3–4: 19–24.

Pettersson, Olof. 1957. *Jambek and Jabmeaimo: Comparative Study of the Dead and the Realm of the Dead in Lappish Religion.* Lund: Lunds Universitetets Arsskrift.

Sienkiewicz, Henryk. 1904. *The Deluge. An historical novel of Poland, Sweden, and Russia. A sequel to "With fire and sword."* Trans. Jeremiah Curtin. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37308/37308-h/37308-h.htm. Accessed 9 June 2016.

Solbakk, John Trygve. 2006. *The Sámi People. A Handbook.* Karasjok: Davvi Girji.

Szomjas-Schiffert György. 1996. *Lapp sámánok énekes hagyománya* [Singing tradition of Lapp shamans]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

Tamás, Ildikó. 2007. *Tűzön át, jégen át. A sarkvidéki nomád lappok énekhagyománya* [Through fire and ice. The singing tradition of the arctic nomadic Lapps]. Budapest: Napkút.

–. 2015. "A sarki fény színei. Szimbólumok a számi nemzeti identitáskonstrukció folyamatában" [The colours of the northern lights. Symbols in the process of Sami identity construction]. *Ethno-Lore* XXXII: 415–45, 539–42.

Turi, Johan. 1960. *An Account of the Sami.* (A Translation of Muitalus sámiid birra, as re-edited by Mikael Svonni with accompanying articles.) Trans. Thomas A. DuBois, Chicago, Illinois zip. http://www.tadubois.com/varying-course-materials/Muitalus-translation-without-articles. pdf. Accessed 20 June 2017.

Uri, Helene. 2015. *Szavak a múltból* [Words from the past]. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

JUDIT KIS-HALAS

"I was Angry with the Angels for F*cking Me Over"
Angel-cult and UFO-religion in Hungary[1]

This study provides an insight into the world of contemporary angel spirituality[2] and of UFO and ET religions.[3] On the one hand, life situations, interpretation strategies and thinking mechanisms will be presented that illustrate the formulation and shaping of individual worldviews created in the context of contemporary alternative spiritualities. On the other, the information channels through which the global phenomena leading to change reach local small communities and, eventually, the individual, will also be explored. The investigation is built on informal conversations and semi-structured interviews, as well as the personal observations of the author gained over the course of various ritual and social events. Postmodern angel beliefs and esoteric UFO and ET religions are all global phenomena; online transmitted ideas and online religious-spiritual discourses play a crucial role in their diffusion,[4] which is why an

---

[1] The research leading to these results was financed by the European Research Council, according to the ERC grant agreement nr. 324214 of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (2007–2013).

[2] Cf. Gardella 2007; Draper and Baker 2011;Utriainen 2015; Gilhus 2012; Kis-Halas 2008.

[3] Both trends belong to recently emerged new religious movements, see Partridge 2003a. "The religious currents revolving around notions of UFOs and extraterrestrial visitations … offer cosmologies where our existence on this world is part of a larger cosmic scheme … offer a worldview that is strikingly focused on our terrestrial concerns and offer soteriologies of intervening benign aliens alleviating our worries or offering rapture … from impending disasters. … these religious currents aim in a sense to retain and update ancient religious themes and motifs and clothe them in a perceived scientific language" (Östling 2016, 426–27).

[4] In their seminal study Cowen and Hadden (2004, 120) consider the internet as the social context of communication on religion (*religion online*) on the one hand, on the other hand they call it a new site of religiosity (*online religion*). Further on this topic see for example Højsgaard and Warburg 2005; Possamai 2012; and Trosper Shorey 2016. Following this new paradigm Mia Lövheim (2007) investigates cyber communication on religion when she describes what strategies young people in Sweden apply when constructing their religious identities. See also Lövheim and Linderman 2005. Corrywright (2004) highlights the analogy between internet and contemporary spiritualities when he speaks of *network spirituality*. Schofield-Park's examinations points out that visual

effort was made in both cases to explore in detail this virtual medium and to discover the connections to local references appearing in the case studies.

For a decade, I have been paying regular visits to Zita, a healer masseuse who, besides being an outstanding (and trained) expert in various alternative therapies, is a significant spiritual teacher in local contexts. She is the founding member of several esoteric groups and clubs. Despite no longer being directly involved with any of these associations, she still maintains friendly relations with existing members. Our relationship and our encounters follow a similar pattern to that associated with these groups. In our conversations, we usually inform each other as to recently acquired esoteric knowledge, we exchange opinions on our spiritual experiences and recommend books and articles, films and websites to one another. I have known for a long time that Zita claims to have been in close contact with angels: she senses their presence, they assist her in healing, she organizes her everyday life according to their guidance, she turns to them when she wants to know more about her or her loved ones' futures and she asks for their support when making decisions. Moreover, angels play an important role in her keeping in touch with deceased loved ones: the angels deliver messages from them and vice versa; they inform the dead about Zita's worldly life, her emotions and thoughts. A few months ago, Zita related to me two tragic incidents: the death of her brother, the loss of whom she could not get over, and how she had lost her faith in angels because they had disappointed her.

These incidents were in fact the catalyst for the present article: the story detailing the journey from doubt to disappointment. There is another story as well, that of Anikó, who became a seer with an unwavering faith in angels after the death of her son. Anikó's case is relevant here because it has several points of contact with Zita's story, despite, describing an opposite process, that is, the emergence and consolidation of angel belief. In both cases the narratives unfold from the personal accounts of experiences undergone by middle-aged women from the countryside (from a small town or a village), another similarity is that they are constructed around a trauma following the loss of a close relative. This distress is where the parallels – ideas about the dead, angels and life after death, the relationship between the living and the dead – are rooted. The religious worldview of the narrators also overlap: they are characteristic examples of contemporary alternative spirituality that correspond to the post-

---

representations conveyed by role-playing video games, movies, and the internet play a crucial role in shaping the views on the supernatural world (including angels) among American teenagers (Schofield-Park 2005, 183–205). Similarly, role-playing video games had a great impact on contemporary science-fiction discourses by their simulation techniques and visual environment, says Frelik (2014). Possamai (2012, 1–2) defines those (quasi?) belief-systems and mythologies which have been inspired by emblematic sci-fi films (*Star Wars, Matrix*), series (for example *Star* Trek) or popular role games (*World of Warcraft*) hyper-religions. On this topic see Morehead 2012; McCormick 2012. The role of electronic and print media along with on-line communication is crucial in terms of the new angel images, too, see for example Gilhus 2012, 236–41; Uibu 2012; and Kis-Halas 2008; 2009. Similar processes have been described in the case of ET- and UFO religions by Partridge 2004; and Zeller 2012.

modern, esoteric beliefs around angels. Nevertheless, Anikó comes from a Roman Catholic family, while Zita was raised Protestant, a difference which will prove significant later. In both stories, we witness the "rediscovery" of angels; although the angels play roles that are polar opposites in the narratives. In the case of Anikó, the new angel cult replaced the earlier Judeo-Christian ideologies and the angels appear as wholly positive figures for her. Zita, on the other hand, overwrites an already positive postmodern concept of angels with an even newer ideology, namely the galactic conspiracy theory, in which angels most certainly play a negative role.

Angel Cult: Cult of the Dead? Anikó's Story

Before discussing Anikó's story, it is important to explain the relationship between the two narrators, Anikó and Zita. Anikó was Zita's client for years.[5] She turned to the locally well-known healer when suffering from chronic back pain. In conversation during the massages and supplementary treatments,[6] she told Zita about her apparitions of the dead, strange dreams, hallucinations, which she experienced. It soon became clear to Zita that Anikó was "receptive" to messages sent from the world of the dead; moreover, she was predisposed toward spirituality and was interested in esotericism. Zita not only lent a helping hand to Anikó in interpreting her visions about the dead,[7] but after successfully healing her, she also accepted her as her disciple. She gave her material to read and they discussed what Anikó had read. Zita invited her to lectures, courses and events about spiritual topics. Finally, she introduced her to Reiki.[8]

The close relationship between Anikó and the angels began when she became a member of the local Reiki club founded by Zita and her two companions. Soon after the club transformed into an angel club, a change precipitated by the members completing a weekend angel course held by a teacher from nearby Pécs.[9] From this point

---

[5] I met Anikó in Zita's apartment in 2007.

[6] The holistic approach is a common feature of New Age religiosity and alternative medicine, (cf. Hanegraaff 2007, 33–34; Chryssides 2007, 18; Hedges and Beckford 2000, 172–73, 178–82; Tighe and Butler 2007, 415–20; Knoblauch 2008, 146), which can be observed in Zita's practice (2008; 2010). For her, "scanning" the closest social environment (such as family or workplace relationships), the emotional life and thought process of the patient is just as important as the massage mapping the physical characteristics of the body. Among nurses employing alternative massage therapies, Hedges and Beckford observed similar practices (2000, 180–82).

[7] Some of Anikó's stories can be read in a collection of texts including vision narratives, see Kis-Halas 2009.

[8] On healing with subtle energies see Brennan 1988; Albanese 1991; 2000, 31–36; Fuller 2004. A general introduction to reiki is found in the encyclopedia by Parker and Parker (2004), while the Hungarian reception of reiki is described by Kis-Halas (2007). Esala, and Del Rosso examine reiki training (2011).

[9] The angel course introduces participants to the basic principles of esoteric angel belief. Here, one can learn the various techniques of angelic communication, such as angel meditation. I have discussed in detail the books that play a key role in the cult, as well as online "angel discourse" in Hungary, see Kis-Halas 2008.

on, their meetings included the conjuration of angels on a regular basis: they lit candles, they meditated, then remained vigilant to observe the "sign" announcing the arrival of the angel.[10] Anikó, for instance, even received advice from the angels (indirectly, through "angel meditation"[11]) on how to communicate with the revenant dead appearing in her apartment.[12]

Afterwards, the visits of her deceased father were met by her with complete peace of mind:

> You know, when he died, I had to take care of everything because my mother and my sister collapsed completely. And I was standing in the kitchen, you know, and somehow, as I held my head and cried … I saw my dad coming in. But with my eyes closed! And he came to me, and caressed my head and said, "don't cry, my little girl, be smart and be strong!" And, you know, I looked up and I said: "Daddy, are you here?" But, but another very strange thing was, you know, that he had no legs. I saw him, but only the silhouette of him. I saw his figure in its entirety. But it was as if he floated to me. … I also felt as he caressed me. And then he told me to be strong. After that I haven't seen him for some time. Then a few weeks later he came

[10] This sign could be the sudden flare of a candle's flame, a light breeze, a strange shadow, or simply "sensing the presence". The latter is a complex physical-mental state of consciousness that does not mean more than the expression itself: the supernatural being/spirit/entity cannot be seen, heard, touched, or smelled, one just becomes aware of their manifestation. Interestingly, feathers, often interpreted as signs of angelic presence in Estonian, Swedish, or Norwegian discourse on angels (cf. Uibu 2012, 75–76; Utriainen 2015, 164) are somewhat underrepresented in Hungarian angel-narratives.

[11] A common method of communicating with the angels: in a quiet and peaceful setting the participants concentrate on the problem to be solved or the question they seek an answer to or in which they expect the angels to help or intervene. Furthermore, they also focus on the angel from which they expect the help. This can be, for instance, their personal guardian angel, or an angel who is an "expert" or "the responsible" one in the angelic hierarchy surrounding the question. Before commencing meditation one must create an atmosphere that facilitates relaxation, and one should also ask for the "protection" of Archangel Saint Michael. This is important because, according to their belief, human consciousness, soul and body "opening" towards the transcendent sphere are defenceless against the forces that manifest there. Saint Michael, however, provides effective protection, which they imagine in the following, very specific way: he holds his sword and shield in front of the person's body. The archangel's appearance has been described as a colourful light or warm current of air, that is, a form of "energy". Following Saint Michael's appearance, the helping angel arrives: this angel then sends a signal and gives an answer to the question telepathically or by means of a vision/dream. At the end of the meditation, both the helping angel and the archangel leave.

[12] She was advised not to be afraid of them, but to accept their approach with serenity and, more importantly, love. She should "tune in" to them and "have conversations" with them in her mind: ask them to reveal the reason for their apparition, then try to help them by channelling the Reiki energy. Anikó said that one of the "ghosts" not only knocked, but regularly drew on the attic stairs; in the end, at Anikó's request, she introduced herself by writing her name on a childhood photo of her son. It turned out that she was the spirit of a little girl who used to live in the house that had stood on the site of Anikó's apartment (Kis-Halas 2009, 515–16).

again … One morning he appeared and said "Well, my little daughter, my time is up. I have to go. I know that now you are on the right track." … and this was his goodbye. 'Cause he had to go, you know? … I even asked him "where do you have to go?" But he didn't reply. The next day … I was in the shower and I suddenly felt the presence of my father. I turned around and I asked him out loud: "Daddy, are you still here?" You know? 'Cause I thought that he had really left. … And then he said: "Well, yeah, I still got one or two days left here." So, apparently, he didn't mean it literally that he would not come [to see me] anymore.

Later, again with the cooperation of the other club members and the angels, she tried to help a "soul that stuck here"[13] to return to the otherworld. In this ritual, they summoned Saint Michael who protects the summoner with his arms or – in certain narratives – with a "protective energy shield". The next step is to send the deceased person's soul away: the soul is forgiven and told not to bother the living anymore, but to leave for the otherworld. Saint Michael takes the dead souls by their hands and leads them away. This time, Anikó was not successful, because – allegedly – the soul "had been around for too long", but she felt reassured that she, at least, tried to help.

A few years later Anikó's college student son, Zsolti, died in a car accident.[14] The day following her son's death something strange happened to Anikó:

I was lying in front of the TV and it felt as if I had been possessed by him. As if he lay upon me and, there and then, would have somehow possessed me. Then I tried to open my eyes because I felt that this… that this is how it works. I also felt as if he was inside me. And then, as I opened my eyes it felt as if I was looking with his eyes,

---

[13] My fieldwork shows that it is a commonly held belief in Siklós and its surroundings that the soul, for some reason, cannot get to the otherworld after death and therefore appears to the living. In short, they believe that the dead return because they have some sort of unsettled business with the living, because their funeral was not appropriate, or they had a sudden or premature death, or that the deceased had violated the social/ethical norms while alive. Clearly, it is not a feature unique to New Age spirituality, it is rather rooted in the belief system of Christianity and has been present in local beliefs (and in European popular beliefs in general) for a long time. Among the healers practicing in this region and their patients, however, a new interpretation can also be observed. According to this interpretation, the revenant dead are still among the living because they are unable to proceed on the path of development continuing also in the otherworld, because of their low energy levels. If it is so, then their karma cannot be completed. To get more energy, they ask the living and try to attract attention to themselves. They signal by throwing objects, making noise or sending messages through the dreams of the living. Sometimes they try to take away the "life force" of the living with violence: they settle into their aura and "charge" themselves from it. In this latter case, the living person falls ill because they lose their vital force. It is worth noting here that this new connotation is not typically a local development, it is clearly one of the global phenomena of contemporary spirituality, cf. DeNio Stephens 1997. I have discussed examples of reinterpretation of beliefs about the possessive dead (also looking back on great traditions) in an earlier article on the phenomenon of energy vampires, see Kis-Halas 2012.

[14] Retrospectively, in Anikó's recollection, in a vision of hers she was also present at the car crash and saw the death of her son (Kis-Halas 2009, 517, 522).

you know? And then I thought, okay, this is getting weird, now I'm starting to lose my mind. … Something is not right here. And since this incident, since he did this to me, I have so much energy, you wouldn't believe.[15]

Afterwards the spirit of the boy started to visit Anikó on a regular basis. He would not possess his mother's body as he had the first time above but would materialise every day: he would unexpectedly come through the door, or would suddenly appear in the kitchen and sit down on a chair.[16] Anikó welcomed him with love, serenity and without any fear, as she had been instructed in her club, and had later learned at the angel course, and practiced during the previous visitations of the dead she had experienced.[17] Soon her son admitted to her that he was an angel[18] and has been sent to Earth with the mission to continue helping her. Another time, he came not alone but with two other companions, he showed his wings to his mother and flew around the room several times with his companions. Anikó remembered that the two other boys she saw with her son died also in an accident. In a third incident, Zsolti told Anikó that besides supporting her, he was on an important mission: to save souls with his companions.[19] Since the death of Zsolti, Anikó has been in continuous contact with the spirit of her son[20] who assumed the role – a typically Christian one – of a guardian angel who supports, protects and guides people throughout their lives.[21] Clearly, due to her Catholic upbringing, believing in angelic guidance and intervention was not far from Anikó's ideas: "you surely know how it works, that everyone has some kind of a guardian angel"[22] – she explained to me. Besides angels, she considered the Virgin Mary as a primary heavenly patron, she also often mentioned Jesus as one of her heavenly helpers. At the angel course, she learned the ways one could access "angelic assistance" in any life situation, or on any given day of the year:

---

[15] Kis-Halas 2009, 517.

[16] Moreover: during one of our conversations the spirit "was present", to which Anikó drew my attention Field notes, Siklós-Máriagyűd 2007.

[17] Anikó told several stories about the noisy ghosts (*poltergeists*) appearing regularly in her apartment. These experiences played a significant role in Anikó's decision to turn to Zita, which led to her becoming a key member of the Reiki club, then of the angel club. Field notes, Harkány 2007; and Kis-Halas 2009.

[18] The idea of the "spirit soul" may be an analogue to this, see for example Holcombe 1996.

[19] Zita added the explanation that the boy is not simply an angel, but a high ranking one, because he belongs to "the Order of Archangel Michael", he is his "soldier". In between his missions, he mentioned the preparations for an earthly dimension shift (Kis-Halas 2009, 521). Lehel Peti called the very similar soul-saving "practice" of a Moldavian *Csángó* holy woman a contemporary form of *imitatio Christi*, see Peti 2008.

[20] She even confirmed this in a conversation that occurred before this article was written. Harkány (Baranya County, Hungary), 29 August 2016 (J. K-H.).

[21] To this Zita added the explanation that Anikó and her son were "duals", that is, souls who were in a very close relationship in their previous lives. About the concept of "dual" in detail see Kis-Halas 2009, 517–18.

[22] Kis-Halas 2009, 520.

So if I have a problem I go to sleep just as we have learned in Reiki, by asking the angels – because I, I usually ask them – to help me, and I also ask Zsolti, my son, to tell me the solution![23]

However, Anikó's relationship with the angels is not limited to the management of life's minutiae, there is more to it. With the mediation of the angels, Anikó also received a new life goal ("life mission") the accomplishment of which is supervised and assisted by the spirit of her son, who is an angel himself:

… you know how many times [he] praises me? … I consider myself a good person. I don't hurt other people. If someone is not like this, I don't care for them, I avoid them. And then he compliments me. He tells me "mother, you did it very well!" And "good job, Mom, this is how it's done! We are on the right track![24]

What do we learn from Anikó's case? It is immediately apparent that for her the heaven of the angels and of the dead is identical: an otherworld imagined as a galactic scene located somewhere among the stars, in space. Their forms of appearance and roles are also similar; moreover, the two otherworldly figures are almost merged into one. The angels and the dead also share the feature of moving around freely between this world and the other, thus their connection with the living is continuous. In addition, entering into contact and communicating with them is not limited to special places, times and situations: the dead can appear anywhere and angel meditation is a ritual that can be performed by anyone and anywhere, even at home. The relationship of angels and dead souls becoming angels with the living is determined by good will. They assist in any domain of everyday life. With their continuous presence, they also ensure that the person they support accomplishes his or her earthly career in the most efficient way possible. One of their important tasks is to – gently, but firmly – encourage people to respect the fundamentally Christian ethical codex indispensable for a successful life.[25] In the case of Anikó, for instance, this necessitated selfless, altruistic, tolerant, empathic, and patient behaviour:

I keep noticing that … I'm always sought out by people who need help. Sometimes I even feel that I'm too exhausted, but then I get my act together and I go on. I am

---

[23] Ibid., 524.

[24] Field notes, Harkány 2007.

[25] This angelic role is not a new phenomenon. The concept of an angelic guardian who is ordered to the human soul at the very moment of birth (what is more, at the moment of conception), and who is a lifelong companion to each human being, has been present in all Abrahamic religions, cf. Jones 2011, 61–68. Among early Christian theories about angels is that of Evagrius Ponticus that describes very accurately how the angels continuously support and guide humans towards salvation, see Muehlberger 2013, 37–39. In the tenth–eleventh century cult of Archangel Saint Michael in Ireland, his characteristic of judging (weighing) human souls has become a central element during the middle ages, see Callahan 2003, 184–85.

usually engaged to help five-six people at a time. … They pour their souls out to
me. And I just listen. If this relieves them, then it's good. These aren't big things;
you know? Sometimes I feel that I am everyone's emotional garbage can. But I keep
on listening. I try to give advice, best I can, you know?[26]

Their further important role is to convey messages: through her son, Anikó was
involved in an undertaking that affected the entirety of the Earth and the Universe.
In connection with this, she also said that this was the skill of only certain groups of
angels and Anikó's son happened to belong to such an "order of angels": he was a
soldier of Saint Michael.[27] These ideas not only reflect that the world of angels is just
as differentiated as human societies,[28] but also that there is a possibility of a continu-
ous collaboration between people and angels/spirits of the dead (who had become
angels), although the principal role is always taken by the latter, the living "only"
assist. Finally, the angels/spirits of the dead are soul carriers and soul savers who take
care of the souls of those who have died an unexpected death (in an accident or a
catastrophe).[29]

The points of contact between Anikó's ideas (and local or rural Hungarian angel
concepts in general) and the belief system we call postmodern esoteric angel cult
deserve further exploration. In a previous study, I discussed this Hungarian cult in
detail, especially its online forms; therefore, here I only mention its main charac-
teristics. European and American studies place the origins of this belief system in
the American society of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Peter Gardella,
who was the first to describe it, called it a new American religion with no ties to any
specific congregation, the main feature being that it provided a unified framework
for spiritual forces of various nature and origin, i.e., it was transtheistic.[30] The most
important reason behind the rapidly spreading and sustainable popularity of this reli-

---

[26] Field notes, Siklós 2007.

[27] In the Apocalypse of John the troop of angels defeating Lucifer are led by Saint Michael. (Rev-
elation 12:7–12). This momentum plays an important role in the Archangel-cult unfolding in the
high Middle Ages, see for instance Keck 1998, 168; and Callahan 2003, 182–83. The definitely mil-
itant flavour in Saint Michael's character is deeply rooted both in biblical and apocryphal tradi-
tions, as revealed by the Dead Sea Scrolls, cf. Hurtado 2010, 562.

[28] The hierarchically organised Cosmos, and the kinds and orders of angels in it, was a popular idea
in first-century Judaism, see Hurtado 2010, 551. It has already been described by Pseudo-Dionysius
the Areopagite as well as Saint Augustine, cf. Keck 1998, 53–68; Jones 2011, 82–84; Muehlberger
2013, 208–14.

[29] It is taught in the angel course that whenever you hear the sirens of an ambulance or a fire en-
gine, you have to ask Archangel Saint Michael to send his "soldiers", the helping angels, to save
the soul. Similar motifs can be found in the vision accounts of Ilona Jánó, the *Csángó* holy woman,
see Peti 2008, 544–46.

[30] … "transtheistic, involving a provisional acceptance of many spiritual powers with an assumption
of some underlying unity" (Gardella 2007, 5). Scholarly studies on contemporary angel spiritual-
ity include but are not limited to Schindler 1999; Draper and Baker 2011; Moore 2013; Tighe and
Butler 2007; Walter 2011; 2016; Utriainen 2015; 2016; Uibu 2012; Gilhus 2012; Kis-Halas 2008;
2010; 2012.

gion is seen by researchers as being the central characteristic of the angels at its centre: their ability to cross borders (*religious border-crossers*)[31] that had already emerged in Judaism.[32] This is the basis of most of the traditional Judeo-Christian functions of angels: they mediate, intervene, fight and protect, they even become symbolic border-crossers in their revolt against God.[33] The angels move easily between the sacred-profane, divine-human worlds. This mobile, plastic, limitless and complex angel concept perfectly fulfils the need for heavenly mediation and more direct accessibility of the divine sphere that can be observed in strongly secularised, postmodern societies. Researchers have noticed that these needs conspicuously occur especially in the case of societies founded upon Protestant religious traditions, such as the Nordic countries, England or the Unites States. They explain this with the observation that the cult of saints and angels is missing from the official doctrines of Protestant religious currents; therefore, there is no possibility of a crossing between this world and the next.[34] This argument remains just a hypothesis for now, because the comparison lacks comprehensive studies mapping angel cults in societies based upon Catholic religious traditions.[35] This is why today's angels are justly called "agents of the supernatural"[36] who are able to effectively intervene in earthly events, regardless of their complexity. Moreover, they serve their believers without asking anything in return: they are selfless, generous and helpful. What makes them even more attractive is that one can believe in them without having to join new cults or religious communities; it is possible to remain within one's existing religious convictions (if there are any). They transcend religious borders as well. The faith invested in them has no organised frame-

---

[31] Gilhus 2012.

[32] According to Hurtado, apocalypses and exegeses from the Second Temple period (between 530 BC and 70 AD) have revealed a rising interest in the hierarchy and the structure of angelic hordes, which had been imagined as a homogeneous mass before (Hurtado 2010, 550–52).

[33] The Dead Sea Scrolls refer to the Prince of Light(s) (the Angel of Truth), who is identified with Saint Michael (or Melchizedec) by some researchers, and who leads the angelic army against the hordes of the fallen angels under Melchiresha (the "king of evil" or Belial), see Hurtado 2010, 554–55. Dimant mentions that qumranites called themselves "the sons of light", consequently they counted themselves among the members of the angelic troops combating the army of darkness. What is more, by following strict community rules (celibacy, for example) and being convinced that they were the privileged and absolute interpreters of divine truth encoded in the Torah, they made it obvious both for themselves and outsiders that they were similar to angels in this respect (Dimant 2004 [1996], 465–66, 472).

[34] Finland's Lutheran religious traditions are underlined for example by Utriainen (2015, 160), and the same is discussed by Gilhus in relation to Norway (Gilhus 2012, 234–36, and by Walter in relation to the Anglican and Presbyterian religiosity of the British Isles (Walter 2016, 4–5).

[35] Among the few examples is White (a Dominican friar) who thinks that, similarly to the adherents of New Age spiritualities, Roman Catholic believers should rediscover the importance of angel belief (White 2005, 571).

[36] Draper and Baker 2011, 639.

work, despite its mass popularity;[37] it is an individual practice of religion and, as such, can be modified according to need.[38]

Anikó's angel belief, in my opinion, corresponds exactly to these characteristics. Clearly, the foundation of her beliefs are angel concepts of Judeo-Christian origin, as transpired with the personal guardian angel (see fig. 1). It is also part of this heritage that during visions an important role is attributed to music: several of her angelic visions begin with Anikó listening to music. She even claims that the voice of her favourite singers sounds as if it came from Heaven. Anikó's concept of angels having wings and flying also parallels this tradition. However, the traditional angel concept has today been suffused and overwritten by the visual and material culture[39] of commercial-religious, popular-Christian content (see figs. 2–3). Anikó's angels are young and beautiful,[40] they can put on or take off their wings, they emanate joy and happiness, and they are kind and helpful. The impact of popular esoteric angel literature on a global scale[41] and of the angel courses can be sensed in the visual representation of angels and in the concept of the relationships between humans and angels. This system of relationships is fundamentally democratic: angelic help is available and accessible to all. While there are simple, yet ritual means of contact, the simple plea or prayer is the most common means of communication. Another important characteristic is its everyday practice: asking for angelical intervention can be undertaken in any type of life situation; it is a fast and effective way to overcome momentary or persistent difficulties, to ensure success. In this regard, Anikó's angel belief is indistinguishable from the beliefs encountered on Hungarian and international online forums.[42]

Another important aspect of the postmodern angel cult is relevant here, namely the merging of angels and the spirits of the dead, which also plays a role in the other case study included in this paper. This question was primarily examined by European researchers who drew their conclusions based on sociological surveys, principally from

---

[37] New angel belief is interpreted as contemporary folk religion by Knoblauch 2008; and Houk 1996.

[38] See Gardella 2007, 18.

[39] For instance, the angel representations in angel statues, prints, postcards or (outside of the Christian religious context) Christmas gift items, the angel image in Christmas commercials (Engelke 2012). We can also mention here angels portrayed in films, see for instance Gardella 2007; and Utriainen 2015.

[40] In the postmodern angel cult, the angels have changed gender: originally, they were somewhat androgynous, then later we encounter unequivocally female representation despite a definitely male angel image. According to Utriainen, the cult of angels is popular primarily among women, and accordingly angels not only represent typical female roles within Finnish society, but directly reflect on their change: besides the traditional protective/caregiving woman figure we see the woman making responsible decisions, see Utriainen 2015, 169.

[41] According to Utriainen's survey, the most popular apostles of new angel belief in Finland are the Irish Lorna Bryn (http://lornabyrne.com), the English Diane Cooper (http://www.dianacooper.com/), and the American Doreen Virtue (http://www.angeltherapy.com/). In Hungary, it was the works of Doreen Virtue that were first published, and to this day she has been the most successful in this field. Zita and Anikó both read her books and use her angel oracle cards regularly. For more on this see Kis-Halas 2008.
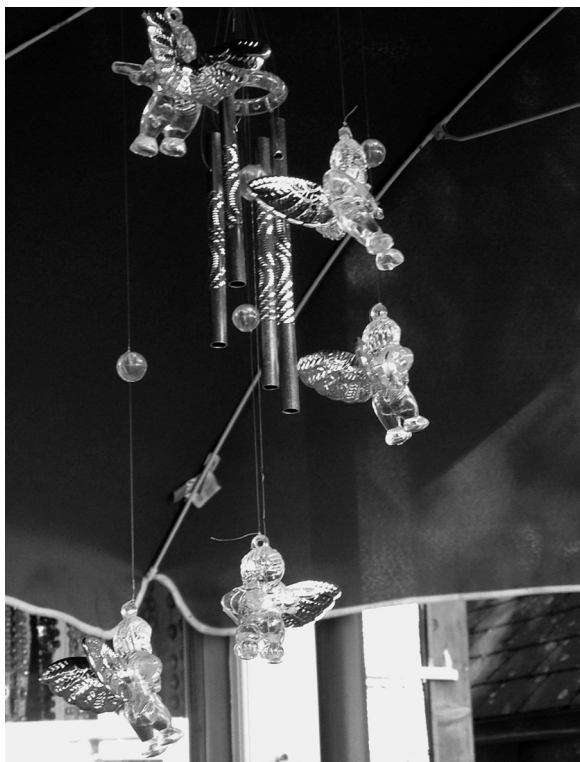
[42] See for instance Kis-Halas 2010; Uibu 2012; Walter 2016.

1 Angel wall calendar in a stall at the Máriagyűd shrine fair
(Máriagyűd, Hungary, Assumption Pilgrimage, 14 August 2016; author's photo)

2 Angels among devotional objects in a stall at the Máriagyűd shrine fair
(Máriagyűd, Hungary, Pentecost Pilgrimage, 4 June 2016; author's photo)

3 Wind chime with angels at the Máriagyűd shrine fair
(Máriagyűd, Hungary, Assumption Pilgrimage, 14 August 2016; author's photo)

their own field research. Connecting the figures of angels and the dead is not a novel phenomenon.[43] Among monotheist concepts of ancient origins there are the angelic troops of apocalyptic visions, the Angel of Death, then the soul carrier angels of medieval Christianity, and the cult of Saint Michael also flourished in the Middle Ages,[44] a movement which proved very popular throughout Europe.[45] Another, much later source of inspiration is the afterlife concept of nineteenth-century Spiritualism based on the vision of Emanuel Swedenborg, in which the souls of the dead and the angels

---

[43] According to David Keck, angels gathering around the deathbed while waiting for the soul to leave the body has been a well-known topos of the medieval angel literature (1998: 203–4). Marshall (2006) points at the survival and the transformations of the same belief both in liturgical and paraliturgical contexts in reformed England.

[44] Saint Michael's day, on 29 September was also a celebration of all the angels, see Keck 1998, 179–84.

[45] Keck 1998, 4–7, 38–39, 62–65, 179; Callahan 2003; Gilhus 2012, 232–33.

become friends in the otherworldly fields.[46] The most characteristic ideologies of nineteenth-century western esotericism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy (which developed subsequently from the former), both attributed an important role to Archangel Michael; not just as a soul carrier, but as the leader of the troops of angels.[47] We cannot ignore the ancient cults of various cultures of the world that obviously influenced the extant popular beliefs related to benevolent dead and the Christian cults of heavenly helpers (saints and guardian angels).[48] Walter mentions here the folk belief popular in the nineteenth century according to which children become angels after death.[49]

We have already discussed Anikó's beliefs regarding angels, and here we must return to them. Clearly, Anikó was unable to accept the loss of her son, despite the continuous angelic support. She required some continuity, but for this she lacked the medium connecting the living with the dead. Although the spirit surgeons she met at the angel club could take her back to the past where she could meet up with her deceased loved ones[50] and they even assisted her in helping the revenant dead and *poltergeists* harassing her to cross over to the otherworld, they did not know how to conjure the dead. And this was exactly what Anikó needed: she wanted to talk to her son, because he had died so suddenly. The angels intervened at the best moment, since for them there were no borders between the living and the dead. With Zsolti becoming an angel, the obstacles to regular meetings were removed.

Behind the contemporary ideas related to the dead becoming angels, common across Europe, it is exactly this way of thinking that can be observed. Its motivation is the general need formulated by Anikó as well: to stay in contact (see figs. 4–5). This permanence is provided by the new angel-beliefs: "death ends a life, but a not a relationship!"[51] This somewhat contradicts the general and much older rule that the dead belong to their own realm: they must leave the living for good. Only those dead return who have unfinished business with the living, whose life was not without fault and who must atone for their sins, or whose death and/or funeral was not regular/ not ordinary;[52] such were the reasons for the spirits turning up in Anikó's apartment, including her son. Anikó "accompanied" the spirits, but she did not want to send Zsolti away. However, by becoming an angel, Zsolti's impurity (sin) stemming from his sudden death lessened, as Anikó alluded to when talking about Zsolti's angelic mission: "we need pure people, truly pure, that is how he explained it to me."

---

[46] Moore 2013, 161.

[47] Steiner writes about Michael *Arkhe,* see Steiner 1914.

[48] According to a 2013 survey, which was carried out among 500 patients suffering from chronic disease in Germany, 38% of those who considered themselves neither religious nor spiritual said that they believed in guardian angels, see Büssing et al. 2015.

[49] Besides popular beliefs, Walter also underlines the important role played by Renaissance and Baroque putto representations in this process (Walter 2016, 7–8). On the same, see Jones 2011, 69.

[50] Kis-Halas 2009.

[51] Walter 2016, 13.

[52] Schmitt 1998; Lecouteux 2009.

4–5 Angels on tombs in a village cemetery
(Márfa, Hungary, 14 April 2016; author's photos)

Interlude: Galactic Conspiracy Theories and Interstellar Demonology

Our Universal Journey by the Australian esoteric author, George Kavassilas, was first published in Australia in 2012. Prior to this the author had already published some chapters in 2011 on his website.[53] There are no Hungarian translations, but the author's name is known to many in Hungary and, as we will see below, many have even read the book. Who is Kavassilas and what are his teachings about? From his biography we discover that he encountered aliens in his childhood, they abducted[54] him several times; they even conducted experiments on him. He claims that the basis of his current knowledge was created by these experiences; especially the last time when his "galactic family" took him close to the Sirius Star System.[55] Following his soul travels he had an enlightening experience: not only did he get an insight into the countless dimensions of the Universe, but he rediscovered the meaning of life, and reinterpreted humanity's role within the Universe.[56] He began to disseminate his knowledge on his own radio station and in the course of his countless lectures. Kavassilas established a UFO "religion" in which he was the medium, and thus had exclusive authority. Witnessing his rapidly growing popularity, another group claiming to be able to communicate with extra-terrestrials, the Galactic Federation of Light, wished to take him on as a member in 2004. Kavassilas, however, refused, after which the group tried to disturb him during "channelling"[57] in order to circumvent the mediation of information from interstellar helpers. As a result of his ambivalent relationship with aliens and the aggression of the Federation, the rival UFO contact establishment, Kavassilas became more and more convinced that the Earth and its inhabitants are part of a galactic conspiracy from which humanity can only emerge victorious through a conscious mental and spiritual evolution. This was his motivation for writing *Our Universal Journey*.

---

[53] See http.www.ourjourneyhome.com.au.

[54] The theme of humans abducted and then used or even abused by extra-terrestrials in certain experiments is not unknown to discourses on esoteric issues and spirituality in Hungary. Abduction, however, is initiation too, as the victim acquires superhuman or supernatural abilities at the same time. A girl from Siklós (South Hungary) has gained seeing abilities after that she had been visited and abducted several times (Field notes, Siklós, May 2016). A healer from Győr (West Hungary) recounts similar experiences (S. Balázs 2004). Abduction spiritualities have been considered a subgenre of UFO-religions by researchers, see for instance Partridge 2003 and 2004, 170–72.

[55] The Sirian connection and origin are the "bywords" of Hungarian ethno-esoteric discourses: the Hungarians are thought to be of Sirian origin, see for instance the Church of the Universe founded by György Kisfaludy (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crzqVhmCshE). For Zita, who had a strong ethnic identity to begin with, it was in fact this expression that vouched for the authenticity of Kavassilas's stories and information.

[56] See http.www.smashwords.com/profile/view/ourjourneyhome. Accessed 30 September 2009.

[57] In fact, channelling is not restricted to ET- and UFO-religions. Based on mediumship in nineteenth century spiritism, the practice has become a characteristic feature of several New Age spiritualities, see for instance Sutcliffe 2004, 470. In terms of UFO-religions, see Smith 2003.

As already mentioned, in the year of the online publication of Kavassilas's book (2011) excerpts and summaries of it appeared on several Hungarian online forums, and in Hungarian. The following brief overview is based on the ten most visited pages in Hungarian according to Google. It can be established that every entry on the pages making reference to Kavassilas is a variation of four main topics: 1. birth of a "new world order" and related apocalyptic predictions; 2. conspiracy theories; 3. extra-terrestrials and UFOs; 4. the timing and role of Hungarians in the present and future order of the Universe.

The published Kavassilas texts can be traced back to two main sources. One being a Hungarian virtual club that attempts to unite the Hungarian followers and sympathisers of Drunvalo Melchizedek. Drunvalo Melchizedek, originally called Bernard Perona, is a spiritual guru of South American descent who is very popular in Hungary. The belief complex he preaches fuses elements of UFO-religiosity and science fiction with Kabbalah, Theosophy and the esoteric interpretation of quantum physics. According to his teaching, the key to becoming aware of one's superior self is to learn the Mer-Ka-Ba meditation technique, a condition to spiritual development. The books of Drunvalo Melchizedek are considered bestsellers on the Hungarian esoteric book market since their first publication in 2004. His two-volume work about (among others) sacred geometry and the hidden logic of the Universe, *The Ancient Secret of the Flower of Life,* is even part of Zita's esoteric spiritual library. Drunvalo Melchizedek claims to be an interstellar intelligence living inside the body of an earthly human, who arrived to Earth through the Orion, the Pleiades, the star "Sirius B" and finally Venus. His mission is to help execute the plan of the Sirians to save humanity.[58] The teachings of Kavassilas refer to almost identical motifs and topics. No wonder that the leader of the virtual club and the administrator of the page posted one of Kavassilas's prophecies as early as 2011, which has subsequently been reposted on four Hungarian esoteric websites over the past five years. The other source is a 144-page summary of Kavassilas's above-mentioned work uploaded to a free, text sharing website. The unknown translator gives the English website of Kavassilas as the source. The translator's emphases are underlined and omissions are marked with square-bracket ellipses, which suggest that the text published is not the integral text, since it is clearly a translation lacking the copyrights of the original.[59]

Zita claims to be inept in cyberspace, and therefore does not read blogs and is not a member of any virtual clubs, fan pages or discussion forums. It is obvious, therefore, that she did not learn of Kavassilas's ideas from online information sources. Nonetheless, she acquainted herself with the Australian guru's teachings thanks to her extended electronic correspondence. (Her e-mails are handled by her husband or by her son; they download the attached files and print the documents for her.) If we com-

---

[58] See http://www.drunvalo.net/ and http://www.drunvalo.org/. Accessed 30 September 2009.
[59] See https://www.docdroid.net/fQoZY3b/george-kavassilas-kozmikus-utazsunk.pdf.html. Accessed 30 September 2009.

pare excerpts from Zita's account with the respective texts of the second translation, it becomes obvious that Zita probably received this or a similar translation from one of the "spirit surgeons" from Siklós in the spring or early summer of 2015. For instance:

> Zita:
> It says that the Moon is an artificial celestial body. It is covered with silicon and who knows what other substance. But this is a vehicle that once broke down, at the beginning of Life and that's why it's standing there. It is where the little greys, and little greens and big things live…
> (February 2015)

> Translation:
> The Moon used to be a spaceship. It was once the crown jewel of the fleet of the Beings of the True Light. It was a scientific laboratory created by one of the Seven Sisters of the Pleiades. … When the fight for this solar system was over, it was seized by Draconian forces. … Next step was to cover it … with silicon dioxide (silica). … currently it is the home of a group of Beings who consist of one of the branches of the Draconian intergalactic conspiracies, which contains various species, such as the Draconians, Greys, crossed Human races and Little Olive green workers who are about three feet tall (cca. 95 cm).[60]

From all of this we can draw two important initial conclusions: firstly, the doctrines diffused by Drunvalo Melchizedek and Kavassilas are prime examples of esoteric UFO religions and extra-terrestrial cults that "operate at a hazy boundary between religion, science, pseudoscience and science fiction".[61] Secondly, Kavassilas's teachings reflected on the apocalyptic expectations, which gained worldwide, and thus Hungarian, popularity around 2011–2012. So, their teachings not only discuss the subject of UFOs, but conspiracy theories and millenarianism[62] also play a role.[63] Thus, it is not an accident that his teachings became especially popular in Hungarian esoteric conspiracy discourses.[64] What was the impact of these doctrines in Zita's case? We examine this in the story that follows.

---

[60] See https://www.docdroid.net/fQoZY3b/george-kavassilas-kozmikus-utazsunk.pdf.html. Accessed 30 September 2009.

[61] Östling 2016, 419.

[62] The most recent overview of the Millenarian current of New Age is written by Lucas (2011). About the Millenarian currents in post-Communist societies see Potrata 2004.

[63] This is not an unusual phenomenon in the case of esoteric UFO religions, see for instance Grünschloß 2004, 424–25; Flaherty 2011.

[64] The "*epistemic guidelines*" for conspiracy discourse are summarized by Barkun (2003, 3–4), and also formulated by Dyrendal (2016, 198).

The Big Scam: From Angels to Demons

Zita's only brother died of an acute, aggressive cancer. Although his ultimate fate was known of in advance, his close and extended family were unprepared for his death. Zita, being a healer, was ready to help her brother immediately after the diagnosis had been established, but her sister-in-law did not let her near him. When a few months later the agony of Zita's brother began the relationship between the two women turned irreversibly sour; to such an extent that the wife did not let any of her sisters-in-law (there were four) come to his deathbed. Thus, Zita could not help her brother, and she could not even say goodbye to him. Another trauma followed at the funeral: Zita was so upset beforehand that she asked for an antidepressant-sedative from one of her sisters. The medication, however, proved to have very unfortunate side-effects: Zita experienced a fit of laughter at the funeral. She felt completely embarrassed. For months, she was tortured by remorse for her unacceptable behaviour, which was only made worse by the tense relationship with her sister-in-law. Finally, Zita went to a nearby esoteric therapist with whom she had been on good terms for a long while. Among others, the therapist dealt with systemic family constellations[65] although she applied the method in a somewhat reinterpreted and bespoke form. Systemic family constellation is basically a psychodrama the aim of which is to unearth the hidden tensions within a family and to launch a dialogue leading to their resolution. This therapist also applied the technique to treat past conflicts, even from a previous life. During therapy, the participants re-enact the situation in which the conflict occurred. They only follow the original scenario until the moment of the outbreak of the conflict. From that point on, they change it so that the outcome is acceptable to all the participants. By rewriting the past, they get a chance to redeem mistakes. In Zita's case, they re-enacted the funeral with actors chosen by the therapist, even the dead brother was impersonated by someone. Zita had to watch the entire performance. When they got to the ominous laughing scene, the actor playing Zita started to sob loudly. The dead brother got up, put his arms around her and started to console her. He told her that he felt no resentment for them not being able to see each other in the hospital or at his deathbed. At this point Zita, herself, started to cry loudly. In her recollections of the event she felt a great relief. But the depressing sense of remorse did not go away. A few months after that something curious happened to her while she was at self-awareness training with an esoteric specialist she knew.

> I felt that I had to go there. This was not a training. I had things to be cleansed of. There must be something I have to face. You know? It was about me. … We sat across each other and Marika [i.e., the trainer, J. K-H.] dictated: "say something about forgiveness!" [i.e., to the person sitting across, J. K-H.]. Looking into the eyes

---

[65] The method called *Systemic Family Constellation* (in German *Familienaufstellung*) has been invented by Catholic missionary and psychotherapist Bert Hellinger. The Hungarian Hellinger Institute was founded in 2010 in Budapest, see http://www.hellingerintezet.hu/.

of the other and talking. When she gave a signal, the other had to say something. Then it was my turn again. Things came up that I wasn't even thinking about. … and then all of a sudden a face swapped in. Instead of her [i.e., the woman sitting across, J. K-H.] face I saw my brother. … You see, you're never alone. Especially not in a place like that. A bunch of aliens surrounded us, I guess when we open up [i.e., when the "crown chakra" on top of the head is opened, J. K-H.]. And without acknowledging the fact that my brother appeared in front of me, my tears started to run down my face. I was embarrassed. I didn't know how [this could have happened]. My feeling was that it was a projected image, yet it did appear for me. Why now? So I couldn't clear that up.[66]

Zita was confused after this renewed manifestation of the dead: if the spirit of her brother had already left, why did it return? Did he want to send a message? She started to doubt, but not her own abilities: the possibility of the previous spirit surgeon ritual not being undertaken properly did not even occur to her. She became suspicious: was it really the spirit of her brother that she saw; was it a vision at all, or just an illusion that she experienced? This is when she received excerpts of Kavassilas's book by email. She was especially drawn by the chapter about the angels being extra-terrestrial creatures who manipulate people with the help of the Church:

Then, on their side [i.e., the side of the evil ones], there are the *archs*. You know who *archs* are? The archangels. And they [do it] through the Church. They appear with wings. They gain energy from the pleas, prayers and gratitude people say to them. They live off this energy, because without energy there is no life. And they keep the cycle going, they push you back. Which is why there is rebirth.[67]

Zita was also interested in the sections about the concrete methods of extra-terrestrial influence; this is where she found the passage that resolved the doubtful vision for her, once and for all:

In the fourth dimension the negative entities have a developed technique and a strong ability to manipulate – they are capable of projecting pseudo-holographic images, creating pseudo-light creatures, paralysing our energy centres, entering our thoughts, influencing our emotions.[68]

---

[66] Field data, February 2015.
[67] Field data, February 2015.
[68] See http://drunvalomelchizedek.network.hu/forumtema/george-kavassilas-jovendolese-avagy- mi-varhato-2011-2013-ig-oszefoglalo. Accessed 30 September 2009.

Zita was sure that she had become the victim of angelic deception:

> When I realised it I was mad for two days. I was mad at the angels for fucking me
> over![69] I'll tell you, as it is! … [The angels] help you. It's all true what they teach!
> They come, you feel the force, the presence. And your situation is resolved. And
> they do help you. But they gain a tremendous amount of energy from it! If you are
> a good … praying person, they push you back. I feel fucked over.[70]

She still had doubts, and she did not get any further in the unfinished affair with her
dead brother. When her spirit surgeon friend called her to call her to account about
an email she failed to reply to for weeks, she found a new proof for the angels' decep-
tion. She found a YouTube link in that email: it was a video of a concert where, alleg-
edly, an angel sang together with the singer.[71] The video was clearly published to cred-
ibly prove the existence of angels.[72] Zita watched the video several times in a row.

> … A foreign singer sang possessed by the Holy Spirit. In a voice that had such
> strength that everyone felt the uplift, the uniqueness, the tremendous force. A four-
> year-old child went to him and told him: "An angel is here!" No one saw it, only
> the four-year-old. He [i.e., the singer] did not see it either. But several people took
> photos. And you know what, the angel is in those pictures! In the photographs. But
> it is an angel-shaped light creature. Its legs could not be seen, because that says a
> lot, … In the video you can hear, as if someone else was singing along. Yet no one
> else was singing beside that one man. No one from the band, no one was singing.
> The angel sang with the boy. You see? … And you know, I was watching it, and I felt
> that it did not throw me off my balance. I was not impressed. I didn't go "wow, the
> angel!" [I am] insensitive. What happened to me? I say to myself. Well, I say, is this a
> projected angel or a real one? Because if we could see its legs then we would know.
> Because that tells us clearly. Angels don't have legs. Real light creatures don't have
> legs. If it's not real, than it has legs! But in the picture you can't see.

Clearly, even after having seen the video Zita remained hesitant as to whether she was
a victim of deception when she saw her brother for a moment instead of the face of
another person. Apparently, this no longer played a role in her earlier feelings for
angels diminishing completely. But the debt to her brother was still outstanding. Soon
this was settled as well because Zita had another dream.

---

[69] See http://drunvalomelchizedek.network.hu/forumtema/george-kavassilas-jovendolese-avagy-mi-varhato-2011-2013-ig-oszefoglalo. Accessed 30 September 2009

[70] Field data, February 2015.

[71] See https://youtu.be/zo6Nu5W256M. The video was recorded at Jason Upton's gig in Alexandria (Louisiana, US) and was also inserted into a Hungarian spiritual blog, see http://ujvilagtudat.blogspot.hu/2014/12/valodi-angyal-eneket-rogzitette-egy.html#.VJ-1FsBYA.

[72] In this regard, it is similar to the revelations known from charismatic movements, to public testi-monies, it can be interpreted as its cinematic representation.

All year I only remember once or twice of a few moments of my dreams, and fifty days, exactly fifty days after the death of my brother, I dreamed with him. He came in the night to say goodbye. Since I wasn't able to say goodbye to him because my sister-in-law wouldn't let me near him. Well, it was horrible what she had done to us! [Sighs deeply.] In my dream, we were at a house, in the courtyard. I didn't see the house; I was only aware of all that. It was many of us. My sisters were standing there. I knew that they were my siblings, but I don't remember who was there. … One of them said Józsi is here [i.e., Zita's brother, J. K-H.] "Well then I'll go find him" – I said. As I wanted to go he came to me from the house. I saw him. He was in his thirties. He was thin. I saw him. And as he got to me we hugged, and I only asked him "how are you?" Then he said, "I still have a few treatments left." And then I woke up. So he came. He hasn't come since, and hadn't come before that either. And really, I am not the dreaming kind, but I know that that was the moment he left. He came to say goodbye.

Like Anikó, Zita also wished to see her dead loved-one once again. But Zita's intention was not to reinstate the broken bond, but to say goodbye to the dead. She wanted to pay her dues, which had kept her brother's soul in the human world for too long. What role did the angels play in this situation? They essentially cheated Zita. First at the ritual of the spirit surgeon when Archangel Saint Michael, summoned for help, failed to bring back the soul of the deceased. Then for the second time, they sent a false vision to her and thus ensured that Zita's guilty conscience endured. Zita's brother did not turn into an angel and did not send messages with the help of angels, as did earlier deceased loved ones of hers. At this point Zita took a new direction: she turned away from angels and found the appropriate justification for her decision in the video about the suspicious angelic apparition and in the conspiracy stories of Kavassilas.

It is worth stopping here for a moment: how could angels become evil and calculating creatures in Zita's eyes? It is not a unique phenomenon. Christopher Partridge wrote more than a decade ago that in UFO religions and in *abduction spiritualities*[73] benevolent, helpful aliens, "technological angels",[74] wanting to benefit humans have recently (around the turn of the millennium) become harmful creatures. He thought that in this process, a significant role has been attributed to the general social discontentment about the quality of life and to the consequently resurging and proliferating conspiracy theories.[75] If we look more closely at Zita's case, it becomes clear that it was exactly this motif in Kavassilas's teaching that she found most appropriate to explain her disappointment.

---

[73] For the term see for example, Partridge 2003; Östling 2016.
[74] Jung 1969, 611–12; Tumminia 2003.
[75] Partridge 2003b; 2004.

Conclusion

In the amorphous, volatile, often completely individualised belief complexes of contemporary religious milieu, and especially those of alternative spirituality, one of the most important life-skills strategy is to find one's life goal (life mission), which can only be discovered through continuous psychological and spiritual development. It is no coincidence that in this contemporary manifestation of religion, the attitude of the "seeker" is the most typical role.[76] The spiritual path, which constitutes an important part of the individual worldview, is continuously shaped; its operation can be compared to the route planners facilitating our orientation and sense of locality: they always must be up-to-date and flexible and to react quickly and efficiently to any change. In this paper through two case studies I presented the strategies individuals employed when faced with an unexpected, difficult situation, an obstacle amidst the process of spiritual development. In both cases, the redesign of the spiritual path resulted in changes in the worldview. In the process of mourning the loss of her son, Anikó found effective help in reinterpreting her visions in the framework of a new, esoteric angel cult, and thus she could also be assured of the otherworldly fate of her son. For Zita, on the other hand, the angel cult did not provide a satisfying explanation for the visions of the dead she experienced after the death of her brother. She found solace in UFO cults and conspiracy theories[77] where angels were demonic creatures who served extra-terrestrial intellects that manipulate humanity and who were parts of an intergalactic conspiracy against humanity. In accordance with her new views, Zita no longer seeks the help of angels; although, as a residue of her earlier respect and trust, once a year, at New Year's Eve, she takes out the angel cards because she is curious about what the following year will bring.

References

Albanese, Catherine L. 1991. *Nature Religion in America. From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age.* Chicago: Chicago UP.

–. 2000. "The Aura of Wellness. Subtle-Energy Healing and New Age Religion." *Religion and American Culture. A Journal of Interpretation* 10 (1): 29–55.

Barkun, Michael. 2003. *A Culture of Conspiracy. Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bowman, Marion. 2009. "Learning from Experience. The Value of Analysing Avalon." *Religion* 39: 161–68.

Bowman, Marion and Steven Sutcliffe, eds. 2000. *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Brennan, Barbara. 1988. *Hands of Light. A Guide to Healing through the Human Energy Field.* New York: Bantham.

---

[76] Sutcliffe 2000; and 2004.
[77] Dyrendal 2016.

Büssing, Arndt et. al. 2015. "Do Patients with Chronic Pain Diseases Believe in Guardian Angels: Even in a Secular Society? A Cross-sectional Study among German Patients with Chronic Diseases." *Journal of Religion and Health* 54: 76–86.

Callahan, Daniel F. 2003. "The Cult of St. Michael the Archangel and the 'Terrors of the Year 1000'." In Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter, eds., *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change 950–1050,* 181–204. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP.

Chryssides, George D. 2007. "Defining the New Age." In Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis, eds., *Handbook of New Age,* 5–24. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Corrywright, Daniel. 2004. "Network Spirituality. The Schumacher – Resurgence – Kumar Nexus." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19 (3): 311–27.

Cowen, Douglas E. and Jeffrey K. Hadden. 2004. "Virtually Religious. New Religious Movements and the World Wide Web." In James R. Lewis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* 119–43. Oxford: Oxford UP.

DeNio Stephens, Holly. 1997. "The Occult in Russia Today." In Bernice G. Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture,* 357–76. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Draper, Scott, and Joseph Baker. 2011. "Angelic Belief as American Folk Religion." *Sociological Forum* 26 (3): 623–43.

Dyrendal, Asbjørn. 2016. "Conspiracy Theories in New Religious Movements." In James R. Lewis and Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* 2:198–211. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Engelke, Matthew. 2012. "Angels in Swindon. Public Religion and Ambient Faith in England." *American Ethnologist* 39 (1): 155–70.

Esala, Jennifer J. and Jared Del Rosso. 2011. "Emergent Objects, Developing Practices: Human-Nonhuman Interactions in a Reiki Training." *Symbolic Interactions* 34 (4): 490–513.

Flaherty, Robert Pearson. 2011. "UFOs, ETs, and the Millennial Imagination." In Catherine Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism,* 587–610. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Frelik, Pawel. 2014. "Video Games." In Robert Latham, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction,* 226–38. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Fuller, R. W. 2004. "Subtle Energies in the American Metaphysical Tradition." In Linda L. Barnes and Susan S. Sered, eds., *Religion and Healing in America,* 375–86. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Gardella, Peter. 2007. *American Angels. Useful Spirits in a Material World.* Culture America. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Gilhus, Ingvild. 2012. "Angels in Norway. Religious Border-crossers and Border-makers." In Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, eds., *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief,* 230–45. Sheffield: Equinox.

Grünschloß, Andreas. 2004. "Waiting for the 'Big Beam'. UFO Religions and 'Ufological' Themes in New Religious Movements." In James R. Lewis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* 419–44. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2007. "The New Age Movement and Western Esotericism." In Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis, eds., *Handbook of New Age,* 25–50. Leiden and Boston, Brill.

Hedges, Ellie and James A. Beckford. 2000. "Holism, Healing and the New Age." In Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe, eds., *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality,* 169–87. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Holcombe, A. D. 1996. "How Spirit-Souls Become Angels." *The Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* 19 (2): 88–92.

Houk, James. 1996. "Anthropological Theory and the Breakdown of Eclectic Folk Religions." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (4): 442–47.

Højsgaard, Morten T. and Margit Warburg, eds. 2005. *Religion and Cyberspace*. London and New York: Routledge.

Højsgaard, Morten T. and Margit Warburg. 2005. "Introduction. Waves of Research." In Højsgaard and Warburg eds. 2005, 1–11.

Hurtado, L. W. 2010. "Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology." In John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls,* 546–64. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP.

Jones, David Albert 2011. *Angels. A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jung, Carl Gustav 1969 [1959]. *Flying Saucers. A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies.* New York: Signet Books.

Keck, David 1998. *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages.* New York and Oxford, Oxford UP.

Kis-Halas, Judit 2007. "'Fejtetőmön arany fénygömb'. Az első lépések reiki ösvényén. Beavatás egy ezoterikus gyógyászati rendszerbe" ["Golden light ball on the top of my head" The first steps on the reiki-path. Initiation into an esoteric healing system]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Maszk, átváltozás, beavatás. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 400–20. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről V. Budapest: Balassi.

–. 2008. "'Ha eljönnek az angyalok…' Angyallátók, esszénusok, beavatottak a mai magyar New Age mozgalmakban" ["When the angels come…" Angel-seers, essenes and initiates in Hungarian New Age spirituality]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Angyalok, démonok, látók, szentek. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 243–78. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VI. Budapest: Balassi.

–. 2009. "'Mihály arkangyal katonái.' Kortárs látók és gyógyítók elbeszélései a természetfeletti megtapasztalásáról" [Archangel Michael's soldiers: Seers' and healers' narratives on experiencing the supernatural]. In Keszeg Vilmos, Peti Lehel és Pócs Éva, szerk., *Álmok és látomások a 20–21. századból,* I: 512–38. Fontes Ethnologiae Hungaricae VI. Budapest és Pécs, L'Harmattan and PTE BTK Néprajz–Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék.

–. 2010. "Jézus katonái a földön és a Mennyei Jeruzsálemben. Szellemsebészet: egy kortárs ezoterikus gyógyászati rendszer" [Soldiers of Jesus on Earth and in the Heavenly Jerusalem: Psychotronics, a contemporary esoteric healing system]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Mágikus és szakrális medicina. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 593–622. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VII. Budapest: Balassi.

–. 2012. "'I make my saints work…': A Hungarian Holy Healer's Identity Reflected in Autobiographical Stories and Folk Narratives." In Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, eds., *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief,* 63–92. Sheffield: Equinox.

Knoblauch, Hubert. 2008. "Spirituality and Popular Religion in Europe." *Social Compass* 55 (2): 140–53.

Lecouteux, Claude. 2009. *The Return of the Dead. Ghosts, Ancestors and the Transparent Veil of the Pagan Mind.* Rochester: Inner Traditions.

Lövheim, Mia. 2007. "Virtually Boundless? Youth Negotiating Tradition in Cyberspace." In Nancy T. Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion. Observing Modern Religious Lives,* 83–100. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP.

Lövheim, Mia and Alf G. Linderman. 2005. "Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet." In Højsgaard and Warburg eds. 2005, 121–37.

Lucas, Phillip Charles. 2011. New Age Millennialism. In Catherine Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism,* 567–86. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Marshall, Peter. 2006. "Angels Around the Deathbed. Variations on a Theme in the English Art of Dying." In Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Angels in the Early Modern World,* 83–103. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

McCormick, Debbie. 2012. "The Sanctification of *Star Wars*: From Fans to Followers." In Adam Possamai, ed., *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions,* 165–84. Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion V. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Morehead, John. 2012. "'A World Without Rules and Controls, Without Borders or Boundaries': Matrixism, New Mythologies, and Symbolic Pilgrimages." In Possamai ed. 2012, 111–128.

Moore, Rebecca. 2013. "Angels Among Us in Four San Diego Spiritualist Churches." In Christopher Moreman, ed., *The Spiritualist Movement. Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World,* 1:161–79. Santa Barbara, Denver, and Oxford: Praeger.

Muehlberger, Ellen. 2013. *Angels in Late Antique Christianity.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Östling, Erik A. W. 2016. "What Does God Need with a Starship? UFOs and Extraterrestrials in the Contemporary Religious Landscape." In James R. Lewis and Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* 2:418–27. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Parker, James N. and Philip M. Parker, eds. 2004. *Reiki: A Medical Dictionary, Bibliography, and Annotated Research Guide to Internet References.* San Diego: ICON Health Publications.

Partridge, Christopher. 2003. *Ufo Religions.* London and New York: Routledge.

–. 2004. "Alien Demonology. The Christian Roots of the Malevolent Extraterrestrial in UFO Religions and Abduction Spiritualities." *Religion* 39: 139–89.

Peti, Lehel. 2008. "A lélekmentő. Katasztrófaélmény és imitatio Christi egy csángó asszony látomásaiban" [Savior of souls: Catastrophic experience and imitatio christi in the visions of a Csángó woman]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Angyalok, démonok, látók, szentek. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 535–52. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VI. Budapest: Balassi.

Possamai, Adam, ed. 2012. *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions.* Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion V. Leiden–Boston: Brill.

Potrata, Barbara. 2004. "New Age, Socialism and Other Milleniarisms. Affirming and Struggling with (Post)socialism." *Religion, State and Society* 32 (4): 365–79.

S. Balázs, Lívia. 2004. "Vallási elemek egy népi gyógyász tevékenységében" [Religious elements in a folk healer's practice]. In Lackovits S. Emőke és Mészáros Veronika, szerk., *Népi vallásosság a Kárpát-medencében* VI. 2: 213–22. Veszprém: Veszprém Megyei Múzeumi Igazgatóság.

Schindler, Amy. 1999. "Angels and AIDS Epidemic. The Resurgent Popularity of Angel Imagery in the United States of America." *Journal of American Culture* 22 (3): 49–61.

Schmitt, Jean-Claude. 1998. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages. The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. [*Les revenants: les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale.* Paris: Gallimard, 1994.]

Schofield-Park, Lynn. 2005. *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Smith, Simon G. 2003. "Opening a Channel to the Stars. The Origins and Development of the Aetherius Society." In Christopher Partridge, ed., *UFO Religions,* 84–102. London: Routledge.

Steiner, Rudolf. 1994. *Die Sendung Michaels. Die Offenbarung der eigentlichen Geheimnisse des Menschen Wesens. Zwölf Vorträge gehalten in Dornach vom 21. November bis 15. Dezember 1919.* Dornach, Schweiz: Rudolf Steiner. http://fvn-archiv.net/PDF/GA/GA194.pdf. Accessed 15 January 2016.

Sutcliffe, Steven. 2000. "'Wandering Stars': Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World." In Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, eds., *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality,* 17–36. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

–. 2004. "The Dynamics of Alternative Spirituality: Seekers, Networks, and New Age." In James R. Lewis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* 466–90. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Tighe, Maria and Jenny Butler. 2007. "Holistic Health and New Age in Britain and in the Republic of Ireland." In Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis, eds., *Handbook of New Age,* 415–34. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Trosper Shorey, Shannon. 2016. "Media, Technology, and New Religious Movements: A Review of the Field." In James R. Lewis and Inga Tøllefsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements,* II: 264–77. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Tumminia, Diana. 2003. "When the Archangel Died." In Christopher Partridge, ed., *UFO Religions,* 62–83. London: Routledge.

Uibu, Marko. 2012. "Creating Meanings and Supportive Network on the Spiritual Internet Forum 'The Nest of Angels'." *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 6 (2): 69–86.

Utriainen, Terhi. 2015. "Combining Christianity and New Age Spirituality. Angel Relations in Finland." In James R. Lewis and Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, eds., *Handbook of Nordic New Religions,* 158–72. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

–. [2013] 2016. "Doing Things with Angels: Agency, Alterity and Practices of Enchantment." In Riku Hämäläinen, Heikki Pesonen, and Terhi Utriainen, eds., *Helsinki Study of Religions. A Reader,* 138–49. Uskontontiete 17. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Walter, Tony. 2011. "Angels not Souls: Popular Religion in the Online Mourning for British Celebrity Jade Goody." *Religion* 41 (1): 29–51.

–. 2016. "The Dead Who Become Angels: Bereavement and Vernacular Religion." *Omega. The Journal of Death and Dying* 73 (1): 3–28.

White, Dominic OP. 2005. "Are Angels Just a Matter of Faith?" *New Blackfriars* 86 (1006): 568–83.

Zeller, Benjamin. 2012. "Heaven's Gate, Science Fiction Religions, and Popular American Culture." In Possamai ed. 2012, 59–84.

László Koppány Csáji

"What Do You Think about It, You, Who are Inside and Outside at the Same Time?"

Responses to the Revelations of "Prophet dénes" by the Participants of his New Religious Movement
A Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Is an active decision all it takes to become a member of a new religious group? Can we delineate participants of such groups into "believers" and "non-believers" depending on their stance towards an NRM's (New Religious Movement) special norms, core narratives and value-preferences? Is there a clear dividing line between faith and doubt? This paper is an attempt to seek answers to these questions, a case study based on six years of fieldwork (2010–2016)[1] conducted among a new Christian fundamentalist religious group made up of participants from Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Austria and Slovakia. The methodology employed included long term participant observation, multi-sited and online ethnography. While the overarching aim was to analyse the dynamism of attitudes, narratives, and the ever-changing heterogeneity of meanings[2] within the group, the contextualization of the actors' behaviour, and the process by which "outsiders" can become members is also examined. Semi-institutionalized stages towards the innermost statuses of the group are elaborated upon, and a framework developed which sets out the steps participants go through to access greater knowledge of the movement.

Do the members of this NRM's core group also have doubts? How do they express minority opinions? How do they engage in and settle disputes? Such questions can be explored through discourse analysis; however, for the purposes of this study it is proposed that this model is most useful in a modified form. Thus, this paper "anthro-

---

[1] After writing my paper I continued my fieldwork till 2018.

[2] I use the word *meaning* similar to cognitive semantics (Tolcsvai Nagy 2011). Meaning is a set of constantly changing contents of knowledge (data, narratives, values and patterns – hereinafter referred to as *narrative*) and emotions called forth by the individuals in actual situations from a cognitive register (not a simple usage of definitions or semiotic codes).

pologises" discourse analysis,[3] and I apply it differently from the well-known textually oriented discourse analysis (TODA) or critical discourse analysis (CDA)[4] methods. My new set of analytical tools combines qualitative and quantitative methods, although it is still primarily the former. This multi-dimensional discourse analysis is grounded in long-term fieldwork. Anthropological observation can unravel the frequency of narratives appearing in various speech-events.[5] This "from-below" aspect – how discourse is constructed in everyday reality – is what Michel Foucault called the genealogical side of discourse analysis.[6] This is also an anthropological approach that tackles epistemological problems and hermeneutics,[7] extending the definition of *discourse* to silence (passive or non-acting behaviours) as a "speech-event". Emotional expressions and all non-verbal communicative facts are also active parts of the discourse; a step back needs to be taken from textual and semiotic aspects.

How do people create cognitive reality through discourse? How does the NRM construct itself through discourse? The personal process towards core membership of the NRM requires constant decision-making with active and/or passive responses from the actor. That participants' dynamic and unsystematic individual knowledge registers,[8] besides obvious endeavours to systematize knowledge, create patterns and common value-preferences is evident. It is possible to analyse how it works, how attitudes shift, emotions change and how cognitive contents are gradually internalised with recent variations of narratives, experiences and information. I found that more disputes and doubts were experienced among the core members (those with the highest status) than among novices.[9] After analysis of the background to this phenomenon, there does seem to be much that is hidden to outsiders and Inquirers,[10] than

---

[3] I use the term discourse a bit differently from Michel Foucault (see Foucault 1972; 1981). Discourse – in my interpretation – includes not only texts, but any behaviour or gesture. Even silence (the avoidance of active commitments) can be part of speech events, therefore I extended this category to include silence – "non-acting" passive behaviours – and all other kind of communicative acts.

[4] See the works of van Dijk 1985; 2008; Fairclough 2001; 2003; or Escobar 1994; 2004.

[5] I use this term as Michel Foucault did: "discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements" (Foucault 1972 [1969], 107).

[6] Foucault 1981 [1970]. One of the very few Hungarian endeavours for such a discourse study is Papp Z. 2001.

[7] See Mészáros 2014.

[8] I use the term *knowledge register* in the same way as some current epistemological, linguistic, psychological and anthropological works: it contains values, attitudes, emotions and narratives – and many ambivalences. It can be considered at the personal and the community level. (Walker 2003; Imbert 2006; Tánczos 2015).

[9] It does not mean that core members have more doubts, but they are more open to expressing their feelings.

[10] Inquirers are those who have expressed their positive emotions towards the Prophet and/or the group, Seekers are those (former Inquirers) who started to join the group's religious activity in communal events, but have not requested the supervision of the Prophet yet.

what is expressed among the Shines[11] and Candidates.[12] I would like to make a contribution to the study of vernacularism:[13] diversity of knowledge, individual emotions and personal discourse horizons can all be important roots of heterogeneity; but what causes similarity and cohesion? There is an obvious dialectic relation between the individual and the social level: actors are not separated and acts are not only accidental. We can recognize the frames and trends through analysing the discourse; but it is also possible to recognise the role of individual behaviours, which affect (and form) the discourse itself.

Site and Setting

This study focuses on a new religious movement present in the Carpathian Basin since 2008; it is small with a few dozen very active members, and about 150 less so. The movement has no name for itself; the members do not consider it a separate church even if the movement has a well-recognisable façade and doctrine. Community members seek a direct and personal connection with the Holy Spirit. All of them agree that this connection is essential for a pure Christian life. They frequently exchange narratives about their visions, concepts and experiences within the group, although they also remain in their former religious congregations. This phenomenon can be considered a kind of multiplied religious identity, and also an expression of pluralism. The central person is undoubtedly "Prophet dénes", a vernacular prophet from Transylvania (Romania). He lives in Homoródkarácsonyfalva (*Crăciunel* in Romanian; see plate 10 in the Gallery). He began his mission as a vernacular prophet on 6 January 2008. The prophet's civil name is Dénes Péter, and he introduces himself as a Prophet. He writes his Christian name's initial in lowercase, expressing the priority of his prophethood, which he begins with a capital letter. He usually signifies that he was declared as the 22nd prophet "in front of their Golden Thrones in Heaven", after a 22-year initiation period during which he was educated by the Holy Spirit. Among other events he had an out-of-body experience, took soul-travels and experienced dreams and visions. He states that he has visited Heaven and Hell, and has spoken directly with Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and several angels.

In the first phase of its existence (2008–2009) the movement grew quickly around the prophet, with distant hubs connected only indirectly, but all linked to him. In the second phase (from 2010), members developed a trans-national religious network in

---

[11] Shines are those members who have already received the Holy Spirit (having had direct communication and some of the charismas).

[12] Candidates are those who have requested the supervision of the Prophet during their path to receive the Holy Spirit.

[13] When I refer to the individual level, I use the term *vernacular* in the way Leonard Norman Primiano does (Primiano 1995), by giving a very individualized aspect of religious identities and concepts. But when I refer to the community level, I use the term *vernacular* similarly to Robert Glenn Howard (Howard 2011).

the Carpathian Basin. Participants built relationships with one another at ritual events and over the internet, and a network of distant individuals was formed.

This new period was marked by the "miracle of Temerin" (emic term *temerini csoda*). A miracle is said to have occurred in Temerin (in Northern Serbia, near Novi Sad), which became a basic legitimisation narrative. On 15 November 2010, a Catholic prayer group witnessed a vision: the gathered group, 9 persons in all, who were praying around the prophet saw what at first what seemed to be a pigeon or some other bird above the prophet but it then took on a cross-like form of many colours. This was immediately and widely accepted as a miracle by the group, and the prophet asked the witnesses to write down their experiences before talking to each other, in order to fend off any future scepticism. This miracle became the prophet's most important legitimisation narrative. A replica of the visionary cross was carved from wood and fixed to the exact place on the roof where the vision had appeared. Once the replica was in place, the colourful vision materialised again, however, this time it was recorded on a mobile phone to be shown to everyone (and was shared on the internet). This photograph has taken on special significance for the group which is borne out by how the image is used and transmitted: on the web, on flags and even on the icing of the fourth anniversary ritual cake in Temerin (2014) (see fig. 1). This image has become the symbol for the "miracle of Temerin".

From 2010 the house in Temerin where these two miracles occurred quickly became a place of pilgrimage (receiving members and even non-members from the locality and also farther afield). Although most of the members till 2010 had not known each other before (the clustering coefficient was low), their local connections have since been built up and strengthened as the religious events in Temerin and other places created a cohesive effect. This has changed the dynamic of the community-building process: nowadays most members are from Serbia and the central part of the Carpathian Basin (see map 1). In the language of Social Network Analysis the increasing transitivity resulted in the group taking on the property of a "small world".

The growing number of participants hailed mostly from Vojvodina (Vajdaság, North-Serbia) in 2011–2013, and local connections have grown. Small groups of members frequently met to pray, to invite the prophet and to experience community among distant arms (hubs) of the movements, and many community events were established: the pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó (*Şumuleu Ciuc)* at Pentecost (the route taken is from Homoródkarácsonyfalva, home of the prophet to the Shrine and to the Saturday mass and back through the Harghita mountains); the anniversary of the "miracle of Temerin" in the house where it happened. Firewalking-rituals were organised by the group during this time, as a legitimation technique for their evangelising missions.

The movement has constructed its "religious movement-like façade"[14] during these years (2010–2013), and the number of devotees continues to grow. It was only after the dispute of 2014 (explained below), that this movement-like attitude weakened as

---

[14] Prior to this, it was rather similar to a New Age group with many individuals seeking answers to their personal questions and self-fulfilment. Urban shamans and esoteric gurus unsuccessfully sought connections with Prophet dénes.

1 Ritual cake for the fourth anniversary of the "miracle of Temerin", 2014
(author's photo)

did the ties between small subgroups. Yet, interpersonal connections have remained strong, and from 2015 a new period of growth has been observed with new meeting formats like the "Fénytalálkozó" ('Shine-meeting'), and interactive lectures for large audiences in cultural houses in Transylvania. The clustering coefficient fell in 2014 (when many members left the group, as well as some joining), and began to grow again in 2015.

Prophet dénes states that for direct (personal) connection with the Holy Spirit the institution of churches and priests cannot be of assistance. A direct connection (to be filled with the Holy Spirit) can be attained only with his (the prophet's) help. The Prophet supervises the Initiates (Candidates), but mentions that the Holy Spirit can also be received alone, as an individual process, without the help of anyone, but "it's a long, hard and very risky project". The doctrine of personal redemption shows that this group is similar to Pentecostal Awakening movements, but there are significant differences: the ecumenical attitude, the absence of glossolalia (the charisma of speaking in tongues) and the absence of ecstatic rituals distinguish this NRM from the Pentecostal movements.
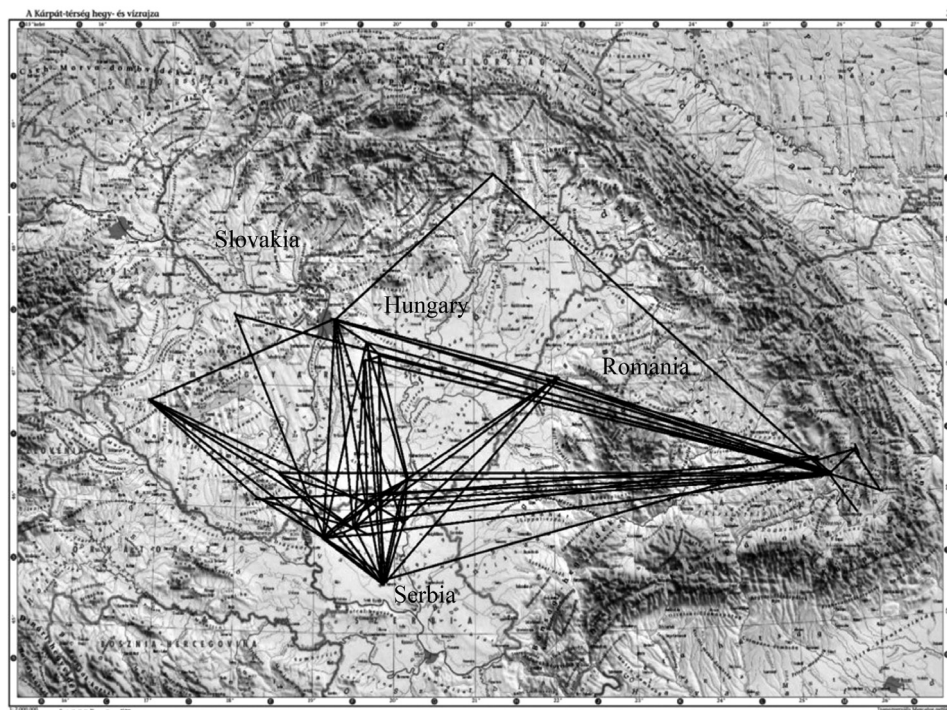
Map 1 Network of the movement (I drew only the active connections)

Most of the participants do not want to be part of a mass movement, as they want to return to Christianity's roots: they are building a small congregation, which is organized locally and is network-like, with a presence on the web being very important. The group is an elitist, fundamentalist[15] one. They all accept that every member of this movement should remain in their own church and congregation; they do not want to establish a new church, as they refuse to establish institutions and priests. Formally those who have reached the Shine state (received the Holy Spirit) are equal. Prophet dénes does not think that Christianity is the sole and only religion which can lead us towards God, but he doesn't consider all churches to be equal. "There is a line" – he says – "some churches are high above, some are under this line". As examples of this hierarchy he usually mentions Pentecostal Christianity as being well above the line, the Catholic and Calvinist churches and Buddhist faith are all just above, but the followers

---

[15] They want to go back to the roots (the Bible itself), without the institutional and theological theories. The patterns of the early Christians can be recognized in this movement. The Acts of the Apostles and Apostolic Letters report small hubs, local centres and network-like communication similar to those within this group.

of Krishna Consciousness are below it, and the Congregation of Faith (*Hit Gyülekezete*) a Hungarian neo-protestant Christian church is far below the line, which suggests that he believes the last group's adherents to be not particularly welcome in Heaven. Even individuals with Buddhist beliefs have been seen participating in ritual events (e.g., firewalking or pilgrimage), but they were neither Shines nor Candidates.

The prophet spends most of his time travelling: on foot and by motor scooter, and attempts to evangelize everybody he meets (see plate 11 in the Gallery). He speaks Hungarian and Romanian, and his missionary activity takes him into Romanian, Hungarian and Gypsy communities. When invited in, he reads small parts of the New Testament, blesses the hosts, prays together with them and sometimes heals people. He displays his elevated status with easily recognizable signs: a headband around his forehead, a white robe, a necklace with a crucifix and his unique beard (shaved in similar fashion to God the Father's – he explains). Due to the high turnover of members, the activity of the prophet can be compared to slash-and-burn agriculture – he needs new disciples and supporters if he wants to survive.

Those who knew Prophet dénes before his prophethood, have not joined his religious movement. The prophet gave up his former job (he was a fitter and carpenter), and he rarely visits his wife and adult daughters (his daughters are book-keepers). Even if he lives without a salary or regular income, Prophet dénes does not ask for money from people, but he certainly needs a supply of food for himself and petrol for his motorcycle. He accepts food or monetary donations, and he often stays for a few days as a guest of suppliants or fellow members when he travels to a region. While on the road, he sleeps in his small tent near the road. Members of the group retain their property, so the movement has no communal property.

Constructing "Faith": The Threshold Narratives

The layers of the NRM's discourse space[16] *according to threshold narratives*

It is quite hard to estimate the number of people involved in this movement. As this NRM is not a declared Church, the participants do not have "membership cards" as such. Notwithstanding this, after the first five years of the group's life steps have been taken in 2013 to establish institutions, gradating the access to knowledge-levels. The

---

[16] The NRM forms a special frame of religious discourses: not only as an interpretive community (Fish 1980), but with a set of communicative interactions. Its "space" is relatively separated from its social environment. Work places, schools, religious groups and many other groups also form common semantic meanings and value-preferences. These discourse spaces overlap each other. The process of meaning-construction stays within these network-like relatively insular communication structures. Personal discourse horizons (discursive access) also have importance, since they reach other discourses as well. Discourse spaces can be imagined similar to Harrison White's notion of *network domains* (see White and Mische 1998), but there are important non-network-like elements as well: status, locality, emotions, personal lifeworlds etc. all have impact on the process.

categories of Seeker (emic term *kereső*), Candidates (emic term *Szent Lelket kérő* – 'the one asking for the Holy Spirit') and Shines the core group of those who have already received the Holy Spirit (emic term *fény* – 'shine') became commonly-used terms for those taking steps towards becoming a part of the core group, a set of followers who have had direct contact with the Holy Spirit. Considering only this core group as the membership is misleading. Much depends on the situation and attitude, because some Shines have already become inactive and others have begun to doubt or are hostile to the prophet. Some expressed their critical attitude (towards the firewalking rituals, for example) without seceding from the movement. Those novices who are already on the journey (waiting for the Holy Spirit) and who are being supervised by the prophet, must be considered among the members, too. There are others, who arrived at a connection with the Holy Spirit independently, but want to cooperate with this movement. We should also add those who support the prophet or the movement from outside (e.g., one of the older brothers of the prophet belongs in this category), and those, who are merely curious, trying to get a better understanding ("Seekers"), and yet others who are hesitating: "to ask or not to ask the prophet to supervise them". Finally, there are some who remain sceptical, but still wonder what it is all about, and are ready to help in minor matters. (Most of the prophet's neighbours from his village attend ritual events which are held in the prophet's garden.) And then there is "the anthropologist" (the author), already more than five years into his research into the group. The anthropologist also plays a special role, even if he/she tries to remain as neutral as possible.[17] Currently, the core members (Shines) number approximately 40–50 persons. The number of Seekers is hard to estimate, but is approximately 60–80 women and men (about two thirds of whom are female). There are another 50–90 people, who have a looser connection, who can be utilised by the movement when required. They act as supporters, friends and donors. It is quite a small movement, consisting of fewer than two hundred active actors. More than 70 percent of them are Roman Catholics, the rest mainly Calvinists, and 8–10 people do not belong to any church. There is a lot of fluctuation in membership levels. Many people leave the movement after a short period, others after one or more active years (see fig. 2).

Over time, the movement has developed an internal network: members have built social and economic connections with each other (they multiplied ties and the clustering coefficient grew). From 2010, the group occasionally organised rituals within small prayer communities and local subgroups even if the prophet was absent (he regularly spent time in his remote Transylvanian village). Access to the internet gave new meaning to "presence" among those in the movement, as it became possible "to be present" in another dimension that redefined the local. Skype and Facebook communication and events began to outnumber those in the offline world. Both domains, the offline

---

[17] Once, during a dispute among core members one Shine asked me: "What is your opinion, you, who are inside and outside at the same time?" The situation confirmed to me my relevant position in the group, even if they felt, that "the anthropologist" is "inside" and "outside" at the same time, but exists also as a participant.
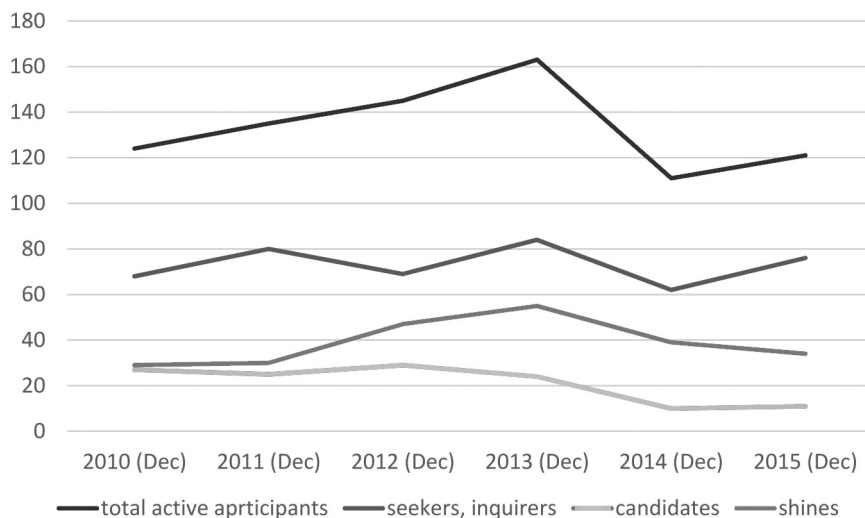
2 The changing number of active participants according to their status (2010–2015)[*]

[*] The figure was based on my field-notes. These are approximate numbers, especially for the Seekers and Inquirers (+/– 20-30%), less approximate for Candidates (+/– 15%), and relatively precise for Shines (+/– 5%).

and online, involve speech events that can be divided into five types: 1. online, personal (e-mail, messenger, skype, not open Facebook messages, etc.), 2. online, open (Youtube, Facebook, blogs, etc.), 3. offline, personal or internal (when some members are physically present), 4. offline, communal, not open to public sphere (groups of members, excluding the outside social environment); 5. offline, public (interaction between the members and the outside world). During 2008–2009 the 4th and 5th category of speech event was the most common, followed by the third, then the first and finally the second (4, 5, 3, 1, 2); over the next few years, up until 2013, the frequency of speech event types changed somewhat with the fourth remaining the predominant class but with online communication becoming more common (4, 1, 5, 3, 2). Today, this has altered dramatically with online events and communication, both personal (1) and open (2), now being predominant with offline communication becoming less common (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Communication between local groups of members nowadays takes place primarily over the Internet (Facebook, skype, e-mails, Youtube, blogs), as the groups are sometimes divided by great distances, but most of this communication is not open to the public. Some members use file-sharing websites for representation purposes, and two of them have started blogs, but these have only been visited by a few people, mainly by members of the movement, and only one remains active.

Over the course of this research, it has become evident that there are varying narratives circulating depending on the particular status individuals have within the group

be they "outsiders", those who are inquiring, the Seekers, who started to join the group's events and meetings, those who have requested the prophet's assistance in receiving the Holy Spirit or those who have already received the Holy Spirit. To analyse these layers or narratives it was recognized that not only instinctual gradation, but a more or less unspoken collusion existed between not just the prophet and the core members, but sometimes even the candidates. To permit somebody into the inner layers of the discourse space of the group, it is necessary to filter and to instruct them in order that they may progress further.
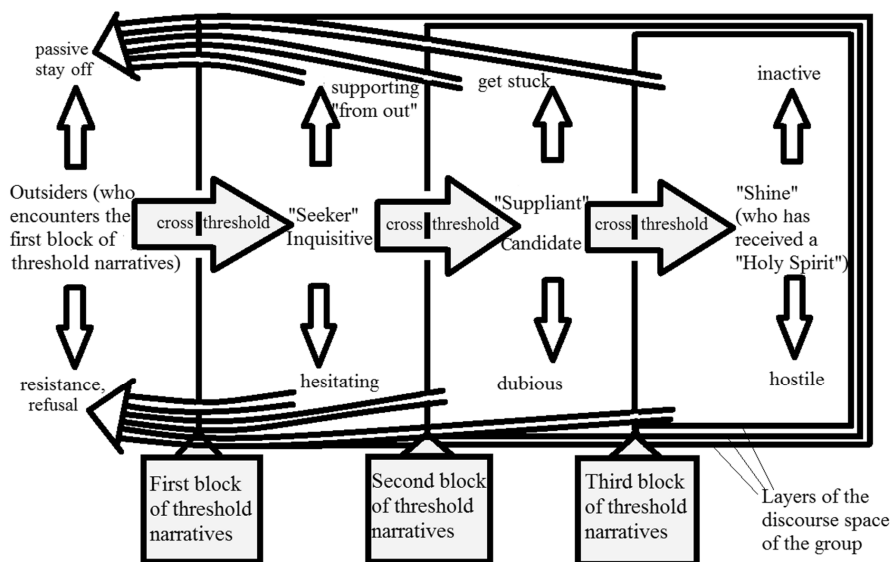
The gradation of threshold narratives

It is necessary to explain the gradation of threshold narratives to understand how this interpretive community is continuously and instinctively constructed. Narratives and rules cannot be offered randomly to anybody, this is especially so in the case of newcomers (outsiders). The Shines and the prophet realised that a selection procedure of sorts is essential before permitting an individual into the inner discourse – a necessary step in order to avoid unwelcome disputes. Without this "policy" unmanageable diversity of opinion would occur which would result in an unacceptable conflict, something the prophet experienced in 2008–2009. Diversity must be moderated. They think that discursive divergence could easily destroy the group. So, the threshold narratives are necessary to both pre-select individuals and instruct them before they are exposed to the inner discourses.

To demonstrate the role of threshold narratives, focus must be placed on how the common registers and value-preferences emerge. These threshold narratives not only result in a "common language", but establish a distinction between stages: Shine, Candidate, Supporter,[18] Seeker, Sceptic etc., helping to select only those for further communication who appear to be ready. The prophet has stated several times:

> I cannot tell everything to everyone. I must consider what is due, and the Holy Spirit also stipulates what can be told in the given circumstances. And there are secrets that we are prohibited to speak of, ever! I was told on one occasion in Heaven "…but you can never tell anyone of this!" So these are serious things.

Thus, it is an emic, conscious categorisation drawing a distinction between these statuses, allowing them into the internal, protected discourse space only through certain threshold narratives. Members of the movement also act according to this gradation, but not as a strict rule or institution, but as an instinctual one. Before analysing the particular narratives, it is necessary to articulate the model of the thresholds (see fig. 3). The layers of the discourse space of the group are categorised according to

---

[18] Supporters are those who organise some ritual events, but declare themselves to be independent hosts. They are not active participants of the movement on the Internet, and do not participate in offline events away from their homes either, but instead invite the Prophet and the members regularly into their homes, and sometimes even donate food and money to the Prophet.

3 The model of threshold narratives

the main statuses of the participants: as individuals gain access to a greater amount of discourse they progress from left to right, thus all who play an active role in the movement are included in the initial discourse but as individuals are gradually filtered out the circle of discourse access shrinks until all that remain are the Shines, who have exposure to the most internal of the discourse.

Threshold narratives are an attempt to avoid curious individuals who would reject the movement's message on first exposure, and to filter the audience. These narratives divide the audience, and those who wish to progress are likely to be prepared for further knowledge; to face the second, and then the third block of threshold narratives.

The first block of threshold narratives

The first block of threshold narratives is what outsiders first encounter when being exposed to the movement or some of its members. This block contains quite general messages, for example "acceptance of Jesus Christ's doctrine in its entirety", and "faith is dead without acting according to it", but some messages are of a less general nature, e.g., "the only authentic translation of the Bible is by Gáspár Károli, others are false".[19]

---

[19] The translation was made in the late sixteenth century and was the first translation of the entire Bible into Hungarian.

What follows is a list of some of the main threshold narratives of the first block. Of course, these are only examples of the narratives and rules someone may hear when he or she first meets the prophet:

1. The supremacy of the Bible. The prophet, the Shines and the Candidates stress many times that what is necessary is an "entire acceptance of Jesus Christ's doctrine written in the New Testament".
2. It is not enough to "believe", but we should behave according to the Bible's instructions. ("Faith is dead without really acting according to the Bible")
3. The only authentic variant of the Bible – the creation of which was inspired by the Holy Spirit – in the Hungarian language is the translation by Gáspár Károli. All other translations are false and should be ignored.
4. Prophet dénes states that he has but one mission: when Jesus Christ comes to Earth again (only God knows when this will happen), he should find more faith among the people. "To strengthen the Christian faith – that is my duty."
5. The role of Prophet dénes – he is not a divine person. He is only human. As he states "… It's not the prophet who should be followed. It's not me who should be followed, but Jesus. I also follow Jesus." Participants are not his followers but *more like acolytes* (emic term *tanítvány*).
6. The need for self-reflexivity. One of the most frequently mentioned narratives is "if God has sent a prophet to us, we should start thinking: what are we doing wrong?"
7. Prophet dénes does not want to establish a new religion, the movement is ecumenical. He stresses that every member of his movement should remain in their own church and congregation, he does not want anybody to leave the ecclesia.[20]
8. Dénes Péter (as Prophet dénes) was chosen as the 22nd prophet by the Holy Trinity.
9. Prophet dénes received this status in Heaven, in front of the Golden Thrones, after a 22-year period, during which he was instructed by the Holy Spirit. Even before his birth and during his childhood he was selected and trained by the Holy Spirit to be a prophet.
10. A miracle occurred in Temerin (in North Serbia) on 15 November 2010. It was a communal vision of a colourful cross above the praying Prophet dénes, denoting him as a true prophet selected by God.
11. There are proofs of real faith: firewalking, magnetizing coins[21] by the body, healing etc. which can testify to the participants' faith.
12. The Holy Spirit confers divine powers on those who have received it: e.g., healing, prophecies, evangelisation skills, dreams and visions as communication with the

---

[20] E.g., he declares himself a Unitarian, and, when he is in his village, he attends church every Sunday.
[21] The practice of firewalking and coin-magnetizing by the prophet were emblematic techniques between 2010 and 2012. Recently healing and blessing have become the most important proofs of the Holy Spirit's activity.

divine, the magnetising of metal objects, the ability to walk through fire[22] and the gift of reading the future. It is the will of the Holy Spirit that confers these powers on particular members of the movement.

13. People of modernity should re-learn the ability to be self-sufficient, people should plant vegetables and fruits in their garden (reclaiming the knowledge of "traditional agriculture and making our own food"), as there could be a crisis at any time.

14. We should consciously protect our natural environment (nature-conscious behaviour).

15. People should learn how to deal with modern technology consciously: the world can even be destroyed by it. This does not mean that it should be rejected; it can be utilised for good purposes. People should not let the world become too industrialised, nor spend their lives hurrying from one thing to another: "we should keep time for God and for ourselves".

16. Promotion of the conservative family-model: "the men's head is Jesus, and the women's head is the man." Children should respect the will of their parents – so the family is of a hierarchical structure, just like the world itself.

17. We must respect all lives; abortion is strictly forbidden!

18. It is forbidden to smoke and drink too much alcohol, as all of these destroy the temple of the Holy Spirit (the body and health as a whole).

19. True and deep faith is based on a personal (direct) connection with the Holy Spirit.

20. The wearing of white clothes: the requirement to wear white garments is – according to the prophet and most of the candidates and Shines – of Biblical origin.

Of course, not all of these narratives are necessarily relayed to interested outsiders, but it is quite probable, that at an individual's first exposure to the movement most of them are proffered. This block of narratives serves as the first selection: if someone consciously refuses any of the statements, he or she remains an outsider (doesn't cross the threshold). Most of the narratives of the first threshold block are quite abstract, vague statements, with which the prophet and the members do not want to shock their audience. Only those will continue the conversation and look for a personal connection with the prophet, who can accept the following two possibilities. The first being that the individual concerned can imagine the possibility that there could be a direct dialogue with the spiritual world, primarily the Holy Spirit. The second possibility is that there is a chance that Prophet dénes has a genuine, divinely endowed prophet status bestowed by the Holy Trinity. Beside these cognitive assumptions, there is a third, unspoken condition that is required in order to take the next step, namely a feeling on the part of the individual that something is lacking, a spiritual emptiness that has not been satisfied by previous exposures to churches. As is evident from the

---

[22] The magnetizing of metal objects and the ability to walk through fire were only common occurrences between 2010–2012.

first block of narratives, the very special narratives that come later are not divulged to "outsiders". They are exposed to only the foundational ones, those that do not require large leaps of faith.

Narratives of the first threshold polarise the audience into those who entertain the idea that the prophet is true and real, and those who do not. In my experience the latter express their doubts passively; voiced dissent is very rare, however, after this first narrative disclosure there are few who remain "neutral outsiders". Some become sceptical, others hostile and yet others adopt attitudes of passive resistance. Only a few outsiders aggressively dispute what they have heard, most quietly keep their distance. Another – usually a minority – group remains curious for more: asking questions, asking for help, joining in prayer at evangelisation events, participating in firewalking, or simply asking for a telephone number, e-mail address or a business card. Such actions mark these participants out as having crossed the threshold. These threshold narratives polarize the audience in a non-confrontational way, although the majority of individuals are deterred by the narratives from deeper involvement in the movement. This is an important pre-selection process before permitting people into the anteroom of the inner discourse spaces. Generally, those outsiders who decide to go no further, do so quickly, usually at the first or second meeting. Those who have a health issue will focus on the healing, others on the charismas or the ecological and spiritual crisis of modernity etc., but those who progress further, and cross the first narrative threshold all find something in the narratives that posit a possible solution for their current problems or spiritual emptiness.

To cross the threshold is not a question of belief or non-belief, it is far from a line between faith and doubt. To cross the threshold means to take a decision to continue the communication or stop it: to continue listening to the Shines and the prophet or not to, "let them recognise my inquiry or not?" – whether to permit what was one-way communication to become interactive. Even this first decision acknowledges that doubt remains on both sides: those who resist and those who step further. They may have different levels of doubt, or they might have different habits, feelings or experiences. Those who step further do not necessarily "believe" the narratives offered by the Shines and the prophet, but inevitably there is something in what they have heard that attracts them to go further.

The second block of threshold narratives

What happens to those who pass the first threshold? They certainly do not change their position from outsider to member immediately, they are still Seekers, but no longer are they outsiders. The emic term "Seeker" (*kereső*) encapsulates the status of the participant when approaching the second block of threshold narratives, when she or he is already inquisitive, but has not yet asked for the assistance of the prophet in receiving the Holy Spirit. At this stage, it is enough for individuals to continue the conversation, participate in a religious event or ritual, write e-mails or engage in video calls with the prophet or another member of the movement. With these actions, interactive communication begins, and Inquirers face the "second threshold narrative

block", which includes a wide variety of statements, rules and values. These statements are recounted not only by the prophet, but also by members of the movement. Inquirers soon realize that there are different statuses within the movement: the Seeker, the Candidates and the Shines, this status terminology is commonplace among this wider level of the discourse space of the group.

Among the second threshold narratives are not only religious, but ecological and environmental measures also. They include instructions on how to behave with people (especially within the family), how to read the Bible (the prophet stresses that only the New Testament should be read, as the Old Testament has been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus), and also some advice regarding ethnicity.

More details and specific regulations appear in the inner speech events that are hidden to recent newcomers, and only a consolidated (assorted) part of narratives, values or regulations can be heard. Individuals at this stage are not expected to believe everything that they hear, but the role of the second threshold narratives is rather to claim the attention of the listeners, and give them the information necessary for deciding whether to ask for the prophet's supervision toward receiving the Holy Spirit. The heterogeneity of the participants is evident, and the narratives are not an attempt to indoctrinate the individuals, rather to make an impression on them.

Inquirers become Seekers, who are exposed to the second block of threshold narratives over a longer time span. The time in which individuals can make their decision can vary from a few days to a year or more. During this decision period, the Seeker becomes gradually more familiar with the discourse at the group's ritual events and other meetings. Some examples of the second block of threshold narratives:

21. The Holy Trinity helps us to be good Christians, by performing miracles, giving advice and providing visions. There is continuous interaction between the "Heavenly Powers" (emic term *mennyei erők*) and the human world: signs and visions – some can realise them, some are blind to them. Small miracles can happen to anyone, but Shines and Prophet dénes can more easily recognise them as such – due to the assistance they receive from the Holy Spirit.

22. People have free will (self-determination), although we need to learn how to recognize the signs given by angels and the Holy Spirit (the mediator of God's power).

23. For genuine faith, it is necessary to have a direct connection with the Holy Spirit, but the institutions of churches and, in particular, priests cannot help in this process.

24. A direct connection (to be filled with the Holy Spirit) can be attained with the help of Prophet dénes, who supervises the candidates, so it is an obvious choice to become a suppliant.

25. A more adequate (detailed) gradation between the stages of Shine, Candidate, Supporter, Seeker, Sceptic, Wonderer, etc.[23]

---

[23] The term "Shine" (*fény*), those who have already received the Holy Spirit, and the word Suppliant (*kérő*), for the Candidates, are commonly used terms for the inner statuses, and the newcomers would have heard them before, but the internal terminology of Inquirers, Seekers and Supporters is introduced at this stage.

26. Prophet dénes's doctrine has characteristics of elitist fundamentalism and Pente-costal Awakening (without the charisma of *glossolalia*).

27. Meditation (like pure praying) is an important part of the Christian faith. It can be learnt from the prophet.

28. During his 22-year initiation, the Holy Spirit removed the soul from Prophet dénes's corporeal body taking it on several journeys around Earth, Heaven, and he had out-of-body experiences.

29. During his initiation, Prophet dénes spoke directly with Jesus, Mary and angels in Heaven. Seekers may hear some basic narratives about angel-visions, and the trav-els to Heaven and into the universe (a distant planet) by Prophet dénes, but if so, these are limited versions[24] or fragments from the particular narratives.

30. According to the Holy Spirit's wishes, Prophet dénes is not allowed to work or ask for money, but he accepts food or monetary assistance. He can be welcomed as a guest. All forms of assistance, be they monetary or in some other form, can only be voluntarily given, and must not be an obligation.

31. It is forbidden to work on Saturday (Sabbath). (If necessary it is possible to switch Saturday for another day, but the working taboo should be kept once a week on the same day.) If we break this taboo, the transgressor could be penalised by the Holy Spirit.

32. It is good to be successful in this life, but it should be shared with others. Members keep all their property, so the movement has no communal property.

33. The Secrets ("there are secrets I have seen and heard that can never ever be told!") and mysteries of the movement are only revealed to those who have received the Holy Spirit. The prophet shares a few details of his spiritual journeys and visions, but he says "more secrets can be told only for those who have already asked the help of the prophet for getting the personal Holy Spirit".

34. Only the New Testament should be read by the current Christian believers, those reading the Old Testament can become blind to the real truth of the Bible.

35. An anti-ethnocentric attitude. ("God created human beings, not nations")

36. Stereotypical narratives about "teachers" and "doctors" are reinforced: it is diffi-cult for them to escape their disciplines and see the truth. The Prophet often says that "teachers" and "doctors" cover their eyes to Jesus's messages, and they form a barrier between Jesus and the people.[25]

37. Prophet dénes often states that Christian priests have no direct connection to the Holy Spirit. He gives an example: those priests who wear glasses demonstrate that they have no connection with the Holy Spirit. If they did, they could be healed by the Holy Spirit, as the Bible says "Ask, and it will be given to you!",[26] which means – as the prophet sees it – that any health problem can be healed with the help of

---

[24] Only fragments can be heard at this stage about Hell, or soul-travel to a distant planet (galactic journeys led by the Holy Spirit).

[25] This narrative is not widely accepted among the group, it can only be heard from the prophet.

[26] Matthew 7:7.

the Holy Spirit, but we can only ask for assistance if we have a direct connection, and allow the Holy Spirit to enter us (fulfilment).

38. Those who criticise the work or the emergence (intention) of the Holy Spirit, can be penalised (as occurred to the wife of Prophet dénes on two occasions).

39. Prophecy[27] and foretelling:[28] interpretations of prophetic visions about an actual person,[29] shown by the Holy Spirit to the prophet and to the Shines; it is to help the candidate remain or turn to a Christian life.

40. Seekers and Candidates experience how the powers of the Holy Spirit operate in real life: they witness healing with prayer, blessing, proselytising, prophesizing etc.

41. It is up to the Holy Spirit which particular charisma(s) should be given to which particular Shine. Nobody gets all the powers in the group. E.g., the prophet had a gift for healing, but in recent years he has not practiced it. Some Shines, in particular have the power of healing, this being one of the most important ones. There is no charisma for *glossolalia* among the Shines.

42. The basic symbols of the NRM. The symbol of God the Father (circle with eight rays), the Son (cross) and the Holy Spirit (oval form with many shining rays). It is often said that these are not human creations: these symbols were shown to the prophet in Heaven.

43. It is permitted to draw or paint pictures of Mary, Jesus, God, the angels and so on (icons and pictures are allowed, as they are illustrations for those who cannot read), but it is strictly prohibited to create sculptures, as they can be interpreted as idols.

Of course, the roles of the above written narratives are not the same. Some of them are very rarely mentioned (e.g., 34, 43), or it is only the prophet that mentions them (like 36, 37, 38), others are also relatively uncommon. Contrary to the first block of threshold narratives, these narratives receive a wide range of responses. Not all of these narratives are accepted equally, as some of them attract passive resistance from most of the Shines and Candidates (e.g., 36, 37), a fact borne out by the silence that surrounds them. The threshold narratives are not exams or questions in a quiz – it is possible to go further even if somebody does not accept them all or has differing opinions.

It should be explained that an actual threshold narrative is flexible, and that a wide range of attitudes can be called forth in various situations. Let's analyse narrative 35 in the above list. Theoretically, there is an expectation of an anti-ethnocentric

---

[27] As an emic word, it refers to a vision and interpretation of an actual person.

[28] There is a possibility to have this charisma bestowed by the Holy Spirit, but it is rare. Prophet dénes reports that he receives signs from the future very rarely.

[29] These happen when someone asks for this prophecy. The prophet or the Shine puts his or her hands on the receiver's head, and waits for an image, a film-like message or other vision or sign. Usually it comes and then the Shine or the prophet interprets it for the audience, giving advice and pointing out possible problems.

attitude in the group. Between 2009–2013, the elder brother[30] of the prophet often said that "God created human beings, not nations". A member of the movement said something similar: "nations were not created by God, but by the people". Another participant once added "… they were made by the sin of [the Tower of] Babylon", but this narrative then stopped being repeated. Participants rather stayed silent, and the conversation continued on different topics. We must consider that in some situations ethnicity can be an important aspect of the movement, e.g., when they are talking about the flag of the Szeklers,[31] the role of Hungarian languages, or when ethnic groups appear in jokes. Depending on the particular situation, the attitude to a narrative changes, and ethnicity can be activated in a person who before had stated the non-ethnocentric narrative. But in general the value of participants' ethnicity appears without the connotation of ethnocentrism: Hungarian ethnicity is a preferable value, but most of them try to avoid usage of the qualifying words "worse" and "better" in comparisons. More than a half of the actors are proud of their ethnic identity, referring to the popular narrative from the religious media that "if God created me as a Hungarian, it is obvious that it was the will of God that I should act as a Hungarian, and we must respect this [God's will]!" It must be added that this particular topic does not arise often in the group, and serious disputes have never stemmed from it. Despite the transnational (anti-ethnocentric) nature of the movement, and despite the fact that the evangelisation routes encompass Romanians, Gypsies, Croatians and Serbians as well, the Shines and candidates are all Hungarian-speakers – because the common language of communication is Hungarian. There have been some who have not gone further in the movement for this very reason.

One of the most important messages to the Seekers is that the Holy Spirit bestows charismas or divine powers on those who display absolute subservience and who have let the Holy Spirit enter them, these charismas include: the power of healing, prophesy-telling, blessing and others.

This threshold narrative block polarises the participants again. Many people do not go further, do not ask for help from the prophet, remain passive or leave the community after a few visits; others remain but only as supporters not wishing to connect with the Holy Spirit. Those who express their intention to seek assistance from the prophet, become Candidates (*Szent Lelket kérő* or *kérő*), and they enter the inner circle of the discourse space of the group. The news about such an expressed decision spreads quickly among the group. The Shines and other Candidates change their attitude toward the new candidate, and the decision is usually warmly welcomed with much positive feedback, embraces and/or messages of goodwill. The Candidates are then ready to face the third block of threshold narratives.

---

[30] He is not considered a member of the movement. He participated in many of the movement's events from 2009 till 2012. The prophet often repeats this statement, so it has become a part of the semi-frequent narratives of the second threshold block. Since 2014 the brother has been passive, he doesn't take part in the speech events of the group.

[31] A Hungarian-speaking ethnic group in East Transylvania, Romania.

The third block of threshold narratives

The candidates are now anticipating their fulfilment – sometimes for weeks, others for years. The emic term that signifies this stage is *delivery,* of the – personal – Holy Spirit (*megkapja a Szent Lelket*). It is always the prophet who declares that a candidate is "ready" to receive the Holy Spirit, and profess the oath. To secure this declaration, the candidates are expected to show active participation in the ritual events and face-to-face internal discourse of the group. During this intensive communication they encounter the third block of threshold narratives. Frequent "phatic" communication[32] now commences. This includes for example, positive-feedback when somebody speaks of his or her visions, dreams (waiting for explanation), feelings, irrelevant gossip (usually personal news without scandal), the usage of special terminology about the transcendent, mentioning the glory of the heavenly power, recognising the heavenly presence, glimpses of angels, special salutations between members including the embrace (through which they can read emotions) and relaxed and informal short conversations. The main role of these seemingly less informative speech events is to strengthen phatic communion, and to instruct the Candidates. This is all positive feedback and integrates the style and attitude of the inner core into the cognitive register of the Candidates.

The Candidates participate in many more speech events now. Some are about the type of *small miracles* that happened to one or another Shine or the prophet. They face many new narratives: secrets and quasi-instructions, but also gossip and reports about failed Candidates, and Shines as well. Candidates, as might be expected, connect more with the prophet at this stage. The third block of threshold narratives is a set of instructions, narratives and virtues. The frequency of communication is increasing inside the group, not only with the prophet, but with those who live closer, or have similar jobs or experiences to the Shines and Candidates. This is a very active period. The style and contents of the inner discourse become more and more familiar to the Candidate. Even the statement that every Shine has another Holy Spirit (narrative 45) does not seem so exotic any more. These spirits are all appearances of God the Father's power, but some of them are reincarnated saints, who follow the orders and will of God. The prophet states that even an individual's patron spirit can be lost or changed: the prophet is on his second one now. If this narrative would have been shared before, probably far fewer people would have crossed the previous thresholds.

Candidates are exposed to many narratives about the angels, spiritual beings (demons) and the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Below are some examples of the most important threshold narratives of the third block:

---

[32] According to Malinowski 1923, these frequent expressions do not communicate information but strengthen social cohesion in a community.

44. There are secrets that can be only shared among the Shines and Candidates (and, of course, with the prophet).

45. There are many Holy Spirits, not only one "person" of the Holy Trinity. E.g., every Shine has a different Holy Spirit. Some of them are reincarnated "saints", others are heavenly beings (angels). These are spiritual beings, referred to as Holy Spirit, who guide humans and appear as individual manifestations or incarnations of "the" Holy Spirit (mediating the will of God).

46. Prophet dénes states that an individual's Holy Spirit may change over time.[33]

47. "Phatic" communication, phatic communion (these speech events contain recognitions of the heavenly presence, glimpsing of angels, referring to the glory of heavenly power, special salutations etc.).

48. Spiritual beings (demons) exist: they should not be permitted into followers' lives or thoughts (this is why channelling and soul travels should be avoided.)

49. The "positive" should be encouraged above all else: this can be achieved with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

50. Using the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit in praxis: when and how to touch clients while healing, how to deliver blessings, requesting fertility and so on. Followers are not only verbally instructed, but also in the praxis.

51. Concrete narratives and rules concerning dress. The wearing of white garments, the covering of women's hair, the crucifix around the neck, wearing of the headband etc.

52. It is imperative to obey the orders of the Holy Spirit without hesitation. Otherwise, the Shine (or even the prophet) may face serious consequences.

53. There is a concept of a limited form of reincarnation: those souls that are cleansed of their sins and wish to return to Earth have a chance to be reincarnated in a baby. Prophet dénes reports that he is in his third incarnation, and that he recalls fragments of his former lives.

54. Prophet dénes has travelled to a distant planet in the universe under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He observed houses, animals, plants and cars there.

55. Everyday miracles: how to recognise the presence of "helping spirits" or angels, how to experience the heavenly presence (*mennyei jelenlét*) and identify its presence in, for example, photographs

56. Prophet dénes can declare at any time that a candidate is ready to take the oath – to receive the Holy Spirit.

57. It is possible to lose the Holy Spirit even if it has already been received.

58. Shines can – theoretically – live and work alone, and have the ability to use their divinely conferred powers even when separate from the group or the prophet. It needs to be stated that Prophet dénes can declare at any time that a Shine has lost the Holy Spirit. (Implicitly it suggests that the Holy Spirit of Prophet dénes has dominion over the others, but this was never stated.)

---

[33] He says he has already received the second Holy Spirit in his life, as after a while the first disappeared.

59. According to the reports of Prophet dénes, Hell is within Heaven, and the sinful are there with their sins (not unlike a prison or zoo), where all can see them and their true selves. Those whose sins are deemed the greatest, are destroyed (the perished), while others can be forgiven after some time and then join the "cleansing fog" of souls (see below).
60. Prophet dénes is but a human being, he is merely a conduit for what the Holy Spirit tells him. As a human being he can also make mistakes, he is not infallible. It is possible to dispute with him, and he also commits sins.
61. Every Shine should follow the direct orders and suggestions of her or his own Holy Spirit. After receiving his or her personal holy spirit, the supervision of the prophet theoretically ends, but in practice he remains attentive to all the Shines giving them advice and rejoinders.
62. Prophet dénes is able to read the Bible without looking at it: he "reads" the pages with his hand, his palm 1–3 centimetres above the page.

While the third block of threshold narratives are being disclosed, the candidate's own cognitive register is beginning to fill with narratives already well-known to the rest of the group. These are not abstract (as were the first block of narratives), but include very concrete and particular narratives and rules. The frequency of their disclosure and their constant repetition engrave them into the mind of the Candidate. Constant feedback on the Candidates' behaviour can have one of two effects: the Candidate conforms to the explicit and implicit ideas in the narratives, or the Candidate responds by rejecting the ideas and thus turns away from the group.

These narratives form the last polarising threshold: those who wish to step further can gain the status of a Shine. After entering the core group (taking the oath and receiving the Holy Spirit), the Shines can theoretically act alone and use their acquired divine powers, but in practice they form the most active core group. In the past, a relatively large fluctuation in Shines was witnessed by the prophet, and he attempted to analyse this in terms of gender. He produced a statistic for the 5th anniversary of the "miracle of Temerin". This suggested that over the previous seven years, most men who had received the Holy Spirit remained in the group, while most of the women had lost the Holy Spirit (see fig. 4). The conclusion he drew was that men were more steadfast in their beliefs than women, in response to this the Holy Spirit told him to concentrate on men's initiation in the future. It needs to be pointed out here, that according to my field notes, many more women who received the Holy Spirit stayed in the group, and that in the year prior to the writing of this paper, two thirds of the group were female, and that currently women make up more than half of Shines.

The role of threshold narratives

Threshold narratives are a practical (flexible) framework rather than a collection of regulations or an elaborated institution. There are certain occasions when Seekers can catch some fragments of the narratives although they have not "officially" passed
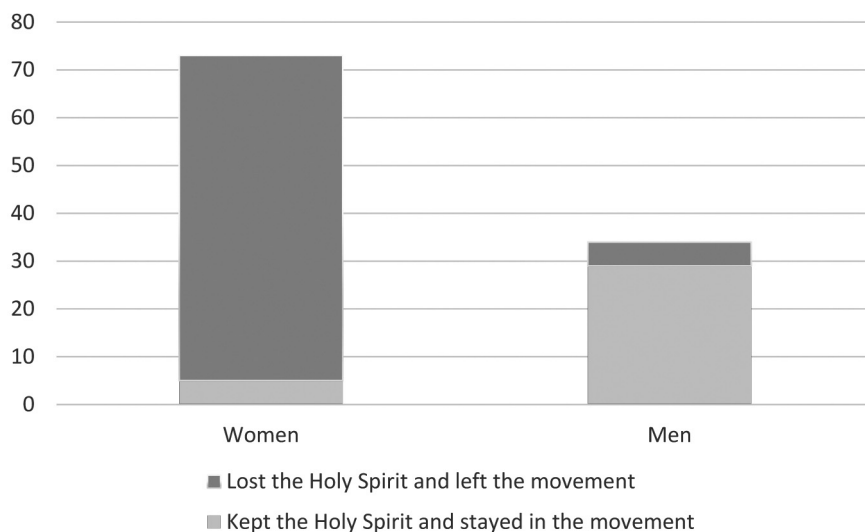
4 Statistic put out by Prophet dénes on 15 November 2015 illustrating the gender of those leaving the group (The difference is much less in my approximation: I estimate that male and female are nearly equal in the rate of leaving.)

the relevant threshold. There are also possibilities to gain access to the inner narratives on the internet (on blogs, youtube videos or interviews with the prophet), and also in offline reality (conversing during pilgrimages or on the anniversary of the miracle of Temerin), so the threshold model only partially prevails. Nevertheless, to have momentary (accidental) access to the inner narratives does not expose an individual in the same way as official exposure does (i.e., when a candidate has crossed one of the thresholds). The difference between unofficial and official access is significant, and the latter exposes an individual to a more detailed narrative, disclosed more frequently and in greater detail. What follows is a brief analysis of the role these threshold narratives play and their importance:

Step by step selection. A NRM cannot let "just anyone" in, outsiders must be filtered, but the selection procedure should not be too rigorous or nobody will join. Threshold narratives make a selection not in one, but three steps, filtering the Seekers step by step. The different statuses of followers: Outsiders, Inquirers, Seekers and Candidates are not initially exposed to the more unusual (seemingly extreme) narratives. This gradation is necessary for them to get used to the internal discourse of the group. Without this gradation, many of the current members would probably not have gone so far in the process. The gradual filtering of potential participants by the core group and the prophet is a strategy to avoid early exits.

The learning process. To learn (cognitively engrave) the narrative register and to be familiar with the values, regulations and attitudes of the group, it is necessary to

construct a quasi-educational process. Narratives are built on each other like bricks.[34] The learning process contains not only the internalising of narrative knowledge but also the learning of behaviour models, getting used to them, creating a similar value-system, and drawing together the attitudes of the members. This process requires both patience and an effective method.

Constructing susceptibility. Those who successfully cross the thresholds are more likely to be ready for initiation than if they had not. A susceptibility to the content of the hidden narratives is necessary before they are disclosed. To enter the inner discourse space, the group must have trained the participants. It is to affect their sensibility, not to shock them with the narratives to come.

Keeping secrets. In the innermost discourse space, Shines have a register of narratives, which contains both public narratives and more restricted ones. To protect this knowledge, the gradation of threshold narratives seems to be a useful tool, and the group's innermost knowledge is revealed to only those who have demonstrated their preparedness.

Concealing the more "difficult" narratives. There are some narratives, which most members of the movement would like to hide, ignore or cognitively isolate (and maybe even the prophet would like to forget). These narratives are for example nos. 54, 59, 62, which cannot be denied expressively as they are sometimes referred to, also some fragments reached a wider audience through the media.[35]

Overlapping knowledge and constructing common value-preferences. It is essential for a NRM to create a more or less overlapping register of narrative knowledge, and to create a common value system among members. It is also necessary to create shared feelings and experiences. Pierre Bourdieu calls this frame of interpretation and behaviour "habitus".[36] The members' habitus cannot be too diverse. A way to bring them together can begin with the thresholds (followed by internalisation techniques, common experiences, positive feedback etc.). The lack of a common habitus and value system could quite easily result in the dissolution of the group.

The limited validity of thresholds

The model of the threshold narratives is just that, a model, not an institution. It needs to be stressed that the threshold-model does not prevail without limits. The following factors explain the most important parameters of this limited validity.

---

[34] E.g., the particular dress code is justified with a biblical citation, a citation which conveys the basic expectation that the Bible is to be followed word by word. It would not be ideal for candidates to learn all the details first, because it would result in unexpected quarrels and rejections – as occurred in the first few years.

[35] Duna Television interviewed the prophet twice, and at the time of the first – in Summer 2008 – the gradation of threshold narratives was not yet set, so the prophet described his galactic journey and his visit to Hell. This could not happen now, but it is impossible to erase these interviews from the memory of those who have known the prophet for some time.

[36] Bourdieu 2009.

Time limit. Those participants who have been involved with the movement for several years did not cross the threshold gradation, as the thresholds emerged only in the last 3–5 years. Those members, who were "socialised" during these years, regard this gradation to be more natural than do some of the "older" participants. The gradation of thresholds is not a process that is set in stone.

The role of interpretive subgroups. The movement has many vernacular subgroups (hubs and cliques) in the network: small charismatic praying-communities and neighbours as local subgroups, friendships, family and economic links etc. It provides a foundation for the emergence of several smaller interpretive communities,[37] as parts of the movement's discourse space. Within some subgroups, their own patterns can arise.[38]

The flexibility of the order. The order of access to the narratives is based on the situation and the personality (mentality) of the individual, and sometimes a personalisation of access can be observed dependent on the actual participant (when and what to tell him or her). It can be influenced by the particular situation, conversation, friendship and other emotional aspects.

The role of the internet and the media. Some previously uploaded files (blogs, videos, articles, ppts) available on the internet may – theoretically – interfere with the now established gradation system of threshold narratives,[39] but these particular files are rarely viewed and/or read (maybe by a few dozen over the last few years), so they do not really affect the process so much. The more recent bloggers and file-sharing members try to respect the group's discourse traditions. Recently uploaded videos and blog-contents have only contained elements from the first threshold narratives, and only some fragments of the second, probably in the belief that in the first few minutes any potential audience would either decide to watch/read on or switch off (i.e. close the file).

The lack of a theological system. The narratives and values do not build a theological system in this NRM. They are certainly centred on the Bible, but the interpretation is quite loose, personal interpretations are tolerated for the less relevant narratives. The lack of defined interpretations gives license for a wide variety of vernacular meanings, especially in the case of the less frequently cited or less relevant narratives.

Fragmented discourse. Anyone, even Prophet dénes, can perceive only elements of the discourse (e.g. some particular speech events), as the discourse itself is the sequence of all the connecting contents as a whole. All the conversations, uploaded

---

[37] See Fish 1980.

[38] E.g., in Temerin's charismatic prayer group, where there was a slightly different gradation of information access. The local Catholic priest's endeavour (and control) is also present, and he is very hostile towards Prophet dénes. This subgroup left the movement in 2014 under a new leader (a woman) who was the head of the prayer group even before they got to know of Prophet dénes in 2009.

[39] One of the blogs written by a very active core member had already been deleted by the time she left the movement, so the data from that are not available any more. But there are some files available even now, which were uploaded onto the web before the realisation of the role of thresholds.

files etc. add new content to the discourse. Fragments of content cannot represent the whole discourse, so meanings are also individual patterns of ever-changing perceptions. Actors participate in different speech events, and they do not share with each the contents of all of them, so control of the group is relative.[40]

The "common" narrative register is only one level of the participants' knowledge. All the participants have their own life-world, and within it they belong to several discourse spaces, form several interpretive communities and belong to different social networks. Some topics are activated in these, others are activated in those situations and discourse spaces. These registers of knowledge are not separate, but form a very complex cognitive reality.[41] The meanings within an actually perceived threshold narrative are always filtered and contaminated by other registers and emotions. This is how individual meaning-clouds emerge.[42] The meanings are not coherent and not definitive, that is why the overlapping process is necessary.

Unintentional disclosure. Within a great, complex conversation at a ritual event, it is impossible to pay attention to everyone's status. In the heat of the moment people want to give and receive positive feedback and they unintentionally disclose information, maybe as a fragment or a brief insight into inner threshold narratives to somebody who is not "officially" ready to hear them. Many of the narratives link to each other, and when one is brought up (e.g. dressing customs), it is hard to consciously limit the information flow. These particular disclosures are not regarded as sins, but rather as mistakes.

The issue of compatibility. The narratives listed above are not equally relevant, and they are not comparable as some involve values, some are narratives, some are a whole collection of narratives and some are merely declarations. There are narratives that are purposefully restricted to the inner discourse space, but some others' positions are relative: they may be disclosed earlier, but it can be risky – it depends on the particular situation and the individual.

Agreement on the relevant themes, ideas and regulations is necessary for the construction of a more or less "common faith" among the members. Faith is more like knowledge and emotion than trust without doubt. The purpose of the gradation between threshold narratives is to promote this construction of a common register of knowledge and shared value system in order to avoid the disintegration of the group with arguments and disputes.

Doubt is always present in the decision-making process. People ask questions and seek answers, this movement is no exception The next section is an analysis of some particular narratives from the point of view of doubt, and shows that doubt remains even among members who have attained the status of Shine.

[40] Cf. Foucault 1981 [1970].
[41] Tánczos 2015.
[42] Tolcsvai Nagy 2011.

Deconstructing the Notion of "Common": Doubt and Disputes

Doubt and disputes

There are contentious narratives that invite conflict, and then there are those that are generally accepted. Even anthropologists tend to pay attention to exotic narratives, and neglect "ordinary" ones, even if they are more relevant. Outsiders, Inquirers and Seekers also perceive the unusual and exotic narratives first. Spending time in the discourse space of the group, less extreme but more relevant narratives also stand out. Long term participant observation lays the foundation for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of these important nuances (the rate of acceptance and doubt). In this NRM, it was clear that the actors expressed their direct disapproval very rarely. It was much more common for doubters to respond with silence to a particular narrative than voice their reservations, displaying a decrease in speech frequency. The most resolute response is the decision to leave the group.

Others, who do not feel such a resistance, grow used to the meanings, values and discourses inside the group and frequent exposure to them leads to their internalization. There are regularly disclosed narratives, like the interpretations of visions, dreams, or the action of the Holy Spirit, or the miracles of Temerin, everyday miracles, glimpses of angels etc., which receive wide positive feedback. This positive feedback prevails in the discourse rather than the disputes.

Threshold narratives don't play equally important roles in the movement. The narratives that are widely accepted are usually those that are frequently reproduced and reinforced, those that are referred to less often are usually the narratives approved of by fewer members of the movement. The narratives related to the firewalking ritual constitute an exception. The practice was very common between 2011–2012, but it was divisive: some members refused to participate, and gave voice to their disapproval (culminating in the secession of the so-called "Temerin-group"); others simply stayed passive – but a majority of the groups (particularly those in Northern Serbia) were active participants. Map 2 illustrates the smaller interpretive subgroups' attitude towards firewalking in 2013. The Temerin subgroup is one of them, but there is another discourse subspace in Temerin, which stayed within the group, since the persons in it were not part of the Temerin charismatic prayer-group, they did not participate in its interpretation process to construct radically new meaning (and refusal) in case of the firewalk.[43]

In Map 2 each small dot represents a sub-group or individual who responded to the firewalks with active/passive and positive/negative attitude.

Although in the case of the firewalking, discourse frequency can demonstrate a conflict over an idea or belief, it seems that the more common narratives circulating in the movement are usually less "exotic" than some of those that are passively opposed through silence; the prevailing, in terms of repetition, narratives are more

---

[43] Csáji 2016.
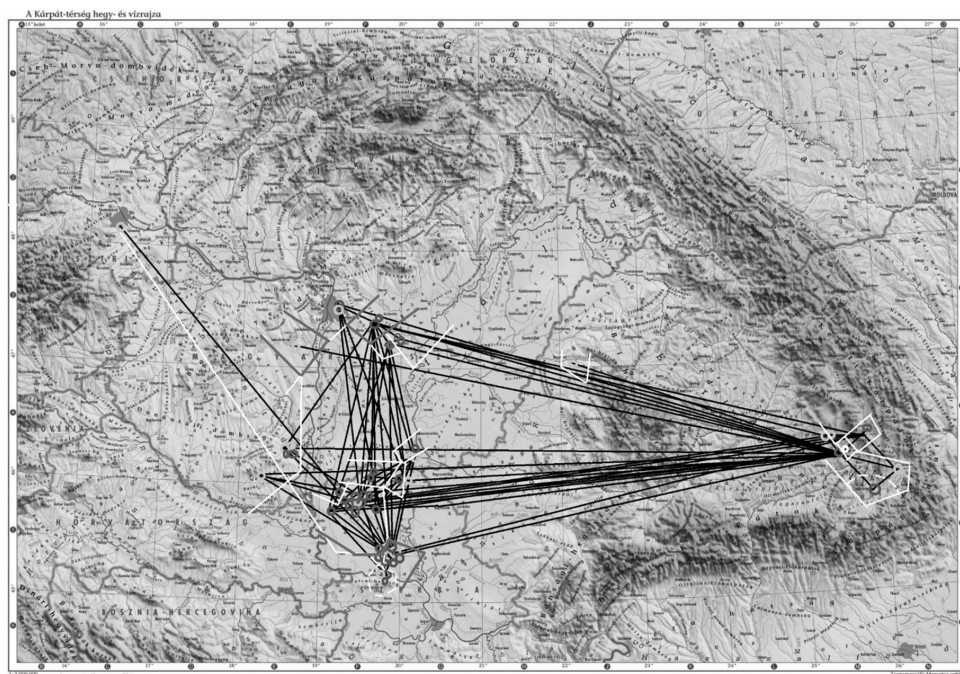
Map 2 Subgroups (inner interpretive communities) of the movement in 2013,
according to their attitude towards the firewalking rituals

widely accepted than those scarcely mentioned. Initially, everyone – even the detached researcher – is as grabbed by the special, exotic narratives, as are the Seekers. As the Candidates become more familiar with the group, their attention shifts from the more unusual to the frequent narratives. They begin to recognize what is "*normal*" inside, and what is on the periphery (like the report of the prophet's UFO-travel and the reincarnation concept). Some candidates can recognise that the rebirth-narrative is not directly rejected by the members, but that most neglect it. This can be considered a type of "*vernacular authority*",[44] when the participants feel that they are active members in the construction of the discourse.

With some narratives, it is possible to observe a wide variety of reactions from refusal to acceptance (e.g., 53, 54, 62), but reactions to the main narratives concerning messages and regulations (47–50) usually converge. Some narratives' positions have changed between the threshold blocks. For example, narrative 62 (the prophet's ability to read the Bible without looking at it, with his hands moving over the text), was a legitimation technique in the past, but in the last three to four years the group surrounded this narrative with silence, and nowadays only the inner members mention it

---

[44] A term coined by Robert Glenn Howard; see Howard 2011, 6.

– if at all. The attitudes of the group towards this narrative vary widely, some simply do not believe it at all, others think that the prophet can do it but only occasionally, but that it is not a charisma, and a small minority accepts that this ability is real. Gradually, the movement has isolated this narrative – realising its divisive nature – and the members consider it too extreme to share with outsiders. This was not a conscious decision, rather a process of the narrative vanishing from the speech events. This example demonstrates that the narratives of the threshold blocks are in a constant state of flux and that attitudes towards them can change. Another perceptible change was the role of the firewalking ritual as a legitimation and evangelisation technique. It dominated the group's ritual events (meetings) in 2011, but by 2013 it had vanished from the group's praxis. It is possible to analyse this heterogeneity of attitudes in the movement and their change over time.[45]

Doubts that Candidates have are not dispelled once they enter the core group of the Shines. These can, however, be moderated by the prophet, if necessary. There was an occasion, when members (a Candidate and a Seeker) quarrelled on a very divisive topic: astrology.

> Is it true or false?" – they asked the prophet. He answered: "I can express that I have never heard such a thing from the Holy Spirit. But it does not mean that it [the astrology] cannot be based on the will of the Heavenly Powers. If God would want it, there could be something like this. … But I have never come across any examples.

This shows the necessity of a wise mediator for leader, one that does not give divisive answers and who allows for different interpretations. In this particular case, both parties involved in the dispute seemed satisfied with the prophet's intervention.

Based on the prophet's interpretation of the scriptures in relation to the group's dress code, the Shines and Candidates are required to wear white clothes and the women to cover their hair with a white head scarf or wear a headband when attending ritual events (narrative 51). Some members do not wish to abide by this dress code. One member, a man, refused to wear white believing that it might lead to gossip about his sexuality. Prophet dénes compromised allowing the man to dress in light colours with just one article of clothing needing to be white. Another narrative that causes conflict is the prohibition of work on the Sabbath (narrative 31). Some who must work on Saturdays ask for an exception. The prophet responded "flexibly" to this request: "in spite of the Sabbath, another day can be chosen for God, but work must not be undertaken on it." This is another example of the prophet employing wise and measured solutions to conflicts, and it also demonstrates the relative flexibility of the regulations.

---

[45] Csáji 2016; 2018.

Another narrative that creates resistance is that of the use of spectacles: the prophet states that "those Christian priests who use spectacles are disbelieving, and have no connection with the Holy Spirit, because otherwise they could ask for healing, and would not wear spectacles" (narrative 37). Similarly, contentious narratives are repeated about teachers and doctors (narrative 36). More than half of the members refuse these narratives passively by remaining silent, and changing the topic of the conversation. The most rarely reproduced (ineffective) narrative is that of the prophet's spiritual travel to a distant planet where aliens dwell in a quite different world to ours (narrative 54).

There seem to be two reasons for the higher frequency of disputes among Shines: 1. The Shines' status is not as fragile as that of the other members of the movement, therefore they may feel that they are more justified in expressing their opinion rather than remaining silent. 2. Only Shines have access to the entire knowledge register and, in particular, its more extreme and divisive elements. Some of them acknowledge their ambivalence towards aspects of the narratives, and try to assist in building a more coherent register.

Particular narratives and their reception

Below is a general overview of some of the more commonly accepted narratives and some of the more divisive ones. From an analysis of these, it is possible to discern four types of narratives grouped according to their presence in discourse and the attitudes displayed towards them by group members.

These narratives are:

a) narratives about angels (narratives 21, 22, 28–29, 47 and 49),
b) narratives about Heaven (narratives 9, 29 and 42),
c) narratives about Hell (29 and 59),
d) narratives detailing the prophet's journey to a distant planet in the universe (narratives 29 and 54).

These narratives are all are based on Prophet dénes's visions, but those concerning angels also include personal experiences relayed by both Shines and Candidates.

Narratives about angels include details like their shape, their appearance, their activity and the interactions members have had with them. Prophet dénes categorises spiritual and transcendent beings in a complex way, and those involving angels represent by far the most detailed visions. He reports that souls in Heaven have a rectangular shape with small ruffles around the four corners, which are waving while they move. They are white, but those who have already had a life on earth are of a light grey tone. Angels who are Heavenly beings (so not human souls), can change their shape and appear in different forms to people: always the most suitable form is chosen depending on their mission, so for men they usually take on the form of women. There are guardian angels that are very large and fly above the vast fields of Heaven. Angels usually appear as circles of light or small shining lines at important events, so as to reinforce positive emotions and powers.

Prophet dénes describes Heaven at length and in great detail. He explains that in Heaven there are no shadows, as the only light is emitted from inside angels and objects. He explains that he visited Heaven several times, met with Jesus Christ, God the Father, the Virgin Mary and of course, the Holy Spirit. He describes vast fields and sacral spaces, and an altar, which could change its shape and colours, revealing the inner secrets of the Heavenly Power (*mennyei erők*) as he calls the multi-shaped energy of God.[46] Participants occasionally ask him to tell them about Heaven. The importance of these narratives is far smaller than that of those concerning angels' (see figs. 4–5).

Prophet dénes sometimes speaks of his visit to Hell. According to these narratives, Hell is in Heaven, and there are two levels to it. The first is somewhat like a zoo or a prison, where sinful men and women are placed, and they are not allowed to move: they must reveal all their sins and sinful thoughts thus becoming transparent. The other level is altogether more punitive, where those sinners who cannot be granted mercy are destroyed. They perish and no opportunity to reform is offered to them. On the other hand, those at the first level are, after some time, permitted into the cleansing fog of heaven where they forget their earthly lives and the sins they committed, ultimately becoming heavenly angels.[47]

Prophet dénes rarely speaks of his journey to a distant planet in the universe. In the early years of the movement, it was much more common to hear him speak of this episode, sometimes even bringing it up in interviews. According to the prophet, he was lying on his bed throughout the entire experience. The Holy Spirit accompanied the prophet's soul on this journey into the universe. When there, they landed on a planet where humanoid creatures lived; the prophet recounted in great detail the fauna and flora of the planet, as well as the houses, he observed vehicles much like cars but without wheels.
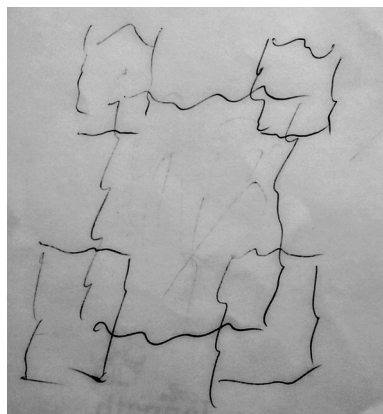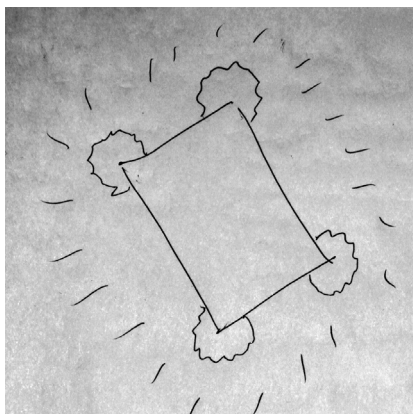
Narrative Frequency

The division of the discourse space is also affected by other factors such as local connections, work relationships, friendships, distance and interests as well as time constraints. These aspects all have an impact on the group's narratives. One of the most important aspects in measuring the importance of an actual threshold narrative is its frequency: how often it appears in conversations (speech events), or is activated (called forth) in the particular circumstance (according to the situation).

Measuring narrative frequency (see below) is difficult to do, thus the statistical data in figures 7–13 are approximate. The data are based on my field-notes and the files collected during my online ethnographical research.

---

[46] Csáji 2017.

[47] This we can imagine as a heavenly fog, which is in Heaven, and contains souls as light-balls. They start at the bottom, and – as they lose their load of sins – they rise higher and higher. It can take years to reach the white colour and become a part of the heavenly beings.

5–6 The "real shape" of angels in Heaven according to the prophet's vision
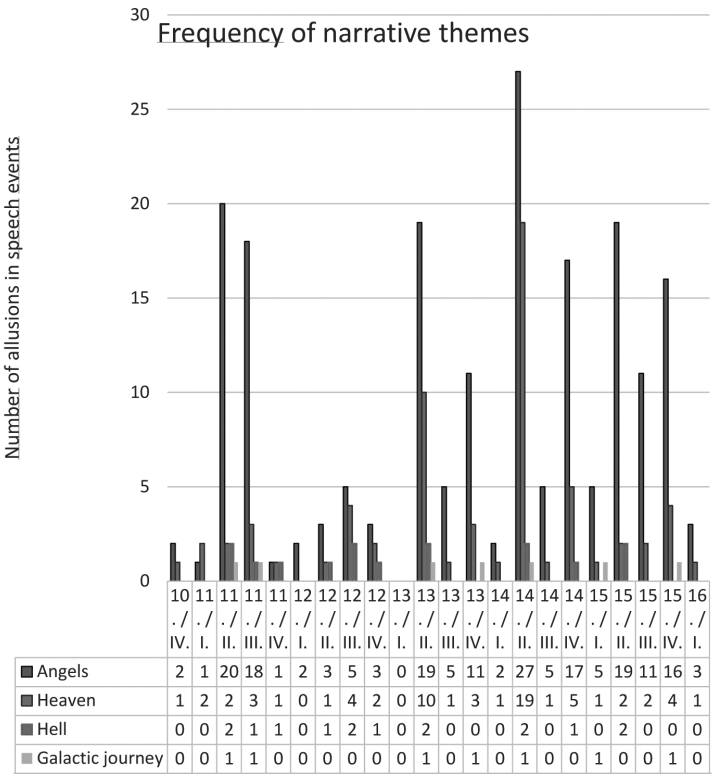Drawings of the prophet and of a Shine

One problem in collecting data on narrative frequency stemmed from the fact that sometimes a narrative might only be alluded to in a private speech event between two people, whereas at other times it might be discussed and debated in great detail by many; the difficulty arose in deciding whether to accord equal importance to both. References to the angel vision narratives received far more active responses and remarks than those narratives concerned with Hell or the prophet's galactic journey.

Another issue associated with this particular method of data collection is that the researcher's observations cannot possibly include all the speech events occurring within the group as there are many "hidden" interactions taking place out of sight and earshot of the anthropologist. For example, besides the open ritual events and public religious life of the group, when somebody becomes a Candidate, he or she begins to actively communicate through closed channels not open, by accident or design, to the observer be they video calls, mobile conversations or personal meetings with the prophet.

Considering the limitations on validity outlined above, figures 7–13 demonstrate the frequency of the narratives. Figure 5 shows the frequency of allusions to the particular narratives during the author's online and offline anthropological fieldwork.

It is clear from figure 7 that the narratives concerning angels are referred to more than the other three narrative themes together. It also seems that during the study's time period there was a change in the frequency of narratives concerned with Hell and the prophet's galactic journey, to the extent that they slowly disappear from the discourse altogether. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the frequency of allusions to narratives seems to follow a seasonal pattern, which can be explained by the fact that the activities of the group are also seasonal in nature. From May to early September, there is a more frenetic period with meetings, pilgrimages and prayer

Frequency of narrative themes

|	10 ./ IV.	11 ./ I.	11 ./ II.	11 ./ III.	11 ./ IV.	12 ./ I.	12 ./ II.	12 ./ III.	12 ./ IV.	13 ./ I.	13 ./ II.	13 ./ III.	13 ./ IV.	14 ./ I.	14 ./ II.	14 ./ III.	14 ./ IV.	15 ./ I.	15 ./ II.	15 ./ III.	15 ./ IV.	16 ./ I.
Angels	2	1	20	18	1	2	3	5	3	0	19	5	11	2	27	5	17	5	19	11	16	3
Heaven	1	2	2	3	1	0	1	4	2	0	10	1	3	1	19	1	5	1	2	2	4	1
Hell	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Galactic journey	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

7 Frequency of narrative themes alluded to in online and offline communication, observed during the fieldwork (the horizontal line represents duration time, the frequency of allusions are measured in 3 month intervals)

meetings over a wide area (regular prayer events occur in local subgroups much more often) – only in November is there a comparable period of activity when the anniversary of the "miracle of Temerin" is celebrated; from December through May communication between members is largely confined to the internet or within small personal interactions. Another explanation for these variations could be changes in the intensity of the fieldwork. Over the last five and a half years it has been impossible to attend every meeting or keep track of all online communication between the group's members.

From figure 8 it is evident that the narratives that are received most enthusiastically are those that are also the most frequently alluded to and, conversely, that the divisive narratives about Hell and the prophet's galactic journey the least. This demonstrates that the basic narratives – from among the threshold narratives – are those concerning angels and Heaven. Although the visions of Hell and the alien planet seem more
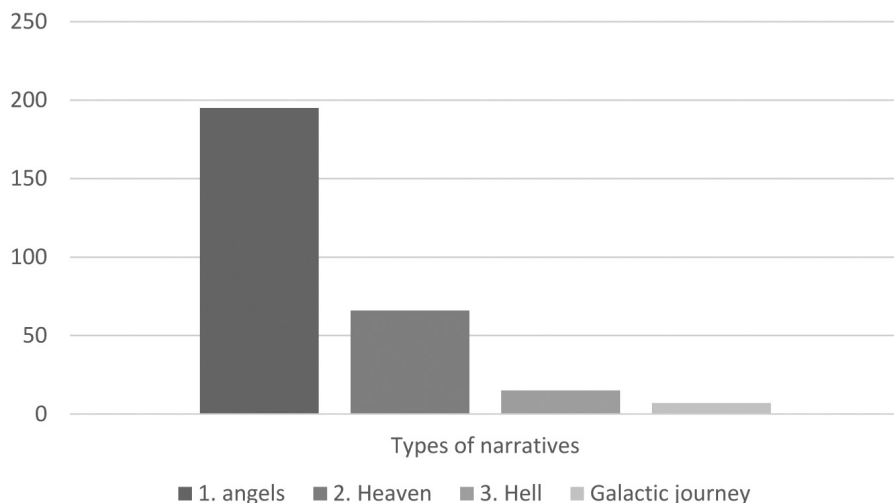
8 Frequency of narrative themes alluded to in online and offline communication, observed during fieldwork (frequency of allusions is measured between 2010–2016)

exotic, so to speak, their alienating nature influences their relevance and, ultimately, the frequency with which they are alluded to.

The following figures (9–13) show members' reactions to the various narratives. As in figures 7–8, references that occurred in interview situations were not included. All other responses are taken into account regardless of the individual(s) alluding to the narrative theme (of angels, Heaven, Hell or the prophet's galactic journey). Of course, the reactions were very diverse, but if the conversation quickly ended as a result of passive, or very rarely active rejection (most frequently with silence), this speech event was recorded as being of the passive negative set. In the opposite case, when the audience became active and seemed receptive, it was recorded as being in the active, positive set. If it was too difficult to discern the reaction, or the audience was so divided that it was impossible to even estimate how the allusion was received, it was recorded as a neutral reaction.

Figure 9 shows responses to the narrative about angels. As is evident, most reactions are positive, and the negative attitudes form a very small minority. It must be noted that these negative attitudes all have a particular cause. All of them can be explained by the given situation in which they occurred. One, for example was a reaction to a Seeker's very extreme expression of her angel vision, which the audience found very difficult to believe. The number of occasions in themselves are next to meaningless. This example of quantitative results in figure 7 demonstrates that the qualitative analysis is the main component of an anthropological discourse analysis.

Figure 10 displays responses to the narratives about Heaven. As will be seen in figure 13, these are more often than not alluded to by the prophet unlike the previ-
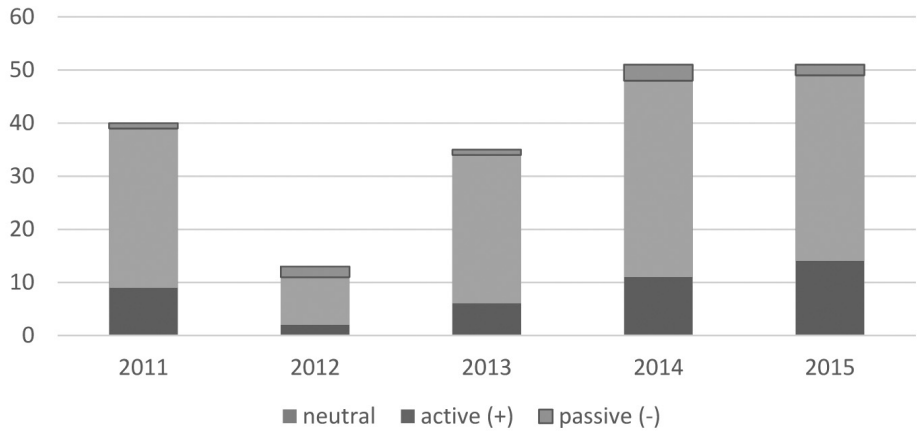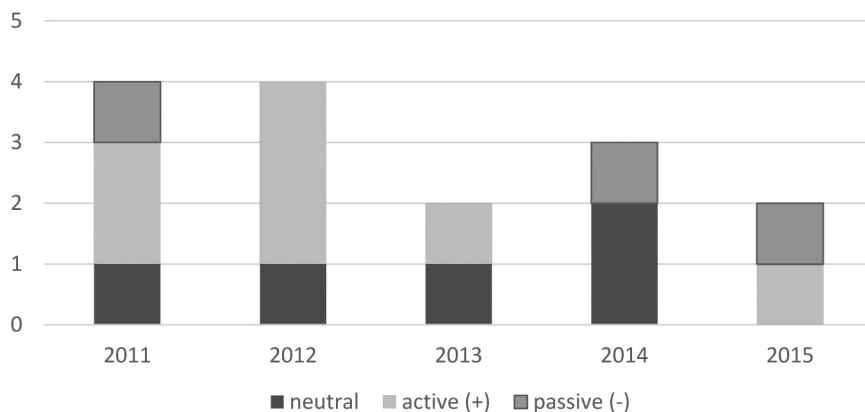
9 Neutral, active (positive) and passive (negative) responses to narratives about angels (observed during the fieldwork, recorded on a yearly basis)
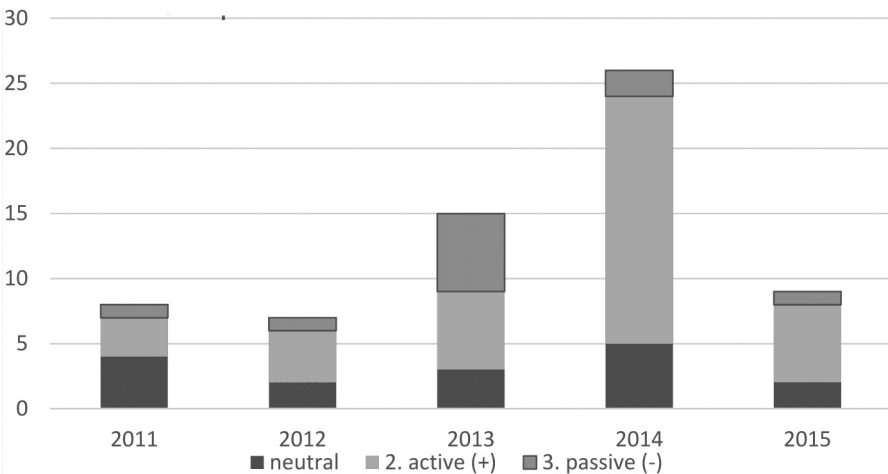
10 Neutral, active (positive) and passive (negative) responses to narratives about Heaven (observed during the fieldwork, recorded on a yearly basis)

ous angel-narratives. It must be added here that – unlike the case of the angel-visions – negative feedback was observed even to the narratives recounted by the prophet.

With regard to figure 11, it is important to stress why figures 9–12 do not contain a category of active-negative responses. As observed, the active-negative attitude primarily manifests itself in face-to-face communication, beyond the public sphere of the group and is thus elusive and difficult to measure. We cannot compare hidden/ private conversations with public ones, as the anthropologist – even if he or she con-
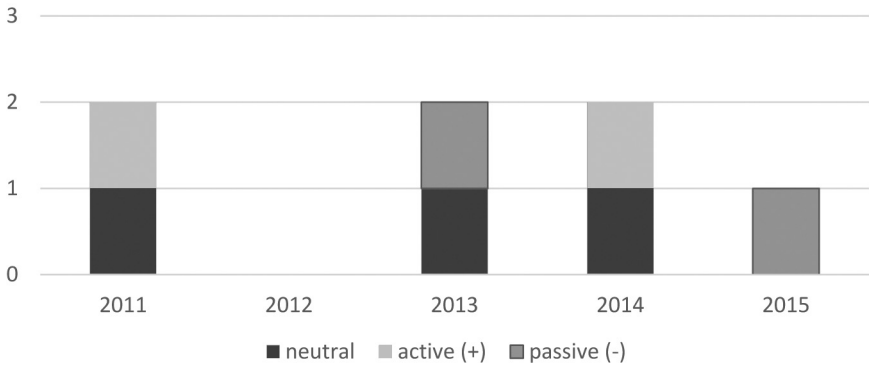
11 Neutral, active (positive) and passive (negative) online and offline responses to narratives about Hell (observed during fieldwork, recorded on a yearly basis)
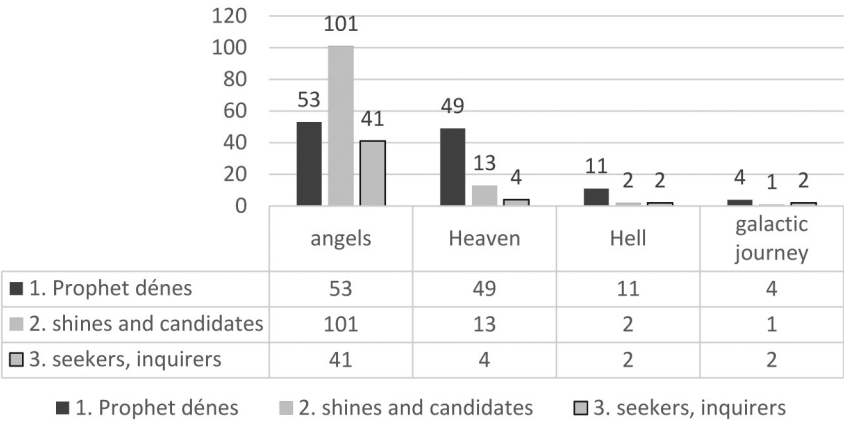
ducts long-term participant observation – cannot be present at all of these occasions. The title of this paper is taken from just such an occasion. The anthropologist has an ethical duty to respect participants' privacy, and can only use this data when expressly allowed to by the individual(s) concerned. As a result, there were only fragments of active and hidden refusals available for analysis, however, I decided not to present it here. Responses may be marked as neutral simply because the attitude of the audience in question could not be discerned; it was particularly difficult when there was a larger audience with multiple emotional responses. For the purposes of this brief analysis, these mixed emotional responses were classed according to which reaction was dominant or seemed more pertinent, nevertheless, in a more detailed analysis the responses should be explained in greater detail and perhaps even at the level of the individual.

Figure 12 shows that the reactions towards the narratives about Prophet dénes's galactic journey are manifold, but the overall trend is that allusions to the journey emerge very rarely, and their divisive nature is plain to see. This particular narrative seems to be gradually disappearing and due to its rarity it can be surmised that it is not widely accepted by the group anyway.

Figure 13 demonstrates that even Seekers and Inquirers allude to the narratives about Hell and the galactic journey (narratives 54, 59). The main reason for this seeming anomaly is, as pointed out above, that the thresholds delineating the narratives evolved over time; during the first years of the research, these thresholds were not in place so access to the knowledge register was open to all in the group. Although, the group had not recognised consciously the importance of the threshold narratives, the frequency of these narratives was still very low. That is why the first years saw a greater variety among the inner discourses, and why, during 2010–2011, outsid-

12 Neutral, active (positive) and passive (negative) responses to narratives about galactic
journey (observed during the fieldwork, recorded on a yearly basis)

	angels	Heaven	Hell	galactic journey
■ 1. Prophet dénes	53	49	11	4
■ 2. shines and candidates	101	13	2	1
▢ 3. seekers, inquirers	41	4	2	2

13 Frequency of narratives based on the narrator
(1 Prophet dénes, 2 Shines and 3 Candidates or Seekers, Inquirers, Supporters)

ers were exposed to more narratives before their initiation than later, by which time
(from 2013) the role of threshold narratives had been defined. Nowadays the grada-
tion of narratives results in a more or less uniform knowledge register and value sys-
tem for the inner circle, but – as already explained – even among this group doubt
and negative responses are not unusual to some of the special narratives.

Angels – the most frequently alluded to theme in the narratives – are referenced
mostly by the Shines and Candidates. They have already internalised the style and
contents, and are able to more freely express themselves. Narratives about Heaven
and Hell are mainly alluded to by the prophet. This clearly shows that these visionary

reports are not part of the group's most pertinent narrative registers, even if all the Shines and Candidates have been exposed to most of them. The galactic journey is very rarely remarked upon by the Shines and Candidates, as this particular narrative is not valued by the group. Some Seekers and Inquirers mentioned it in the previous years, when they still had access to the narrative (until 2013), but the responses to it were not uniform.

This section of the study has attempted to demonstrate that when an individual succeeds in obtaining inner core membership, their doubts and reservations about particular narratives do not cease.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed a new religious movement (NRM), established in 2008 by a vernacular prophet from Romania (Transylvania). Most members of the group are from Serbia, Hungary and Romania. This NRM is similar to the Pentecostal Awakening movements, but there are differences. The leader, Prophet dénes, does not ask members to leave their existing church or congregation (to some extent this results in a dual religious identity for the members) and glossolalia is absent from the charismas bestowed by the Holy Spirit (or holy spirits, as the prophet interprets the Holy Spirit as plural).

After the first years of the movement's life, Prophet dénes and his closest followers recognized that it was unhelpful and counter-productive to allude to any unique visions and special (exotic) narratives to those curious to learn more about their group. Such revelations at an early stage could be shocking, could lead to misunderstandings and ultimately to the rejection of the movement. This led the core group and the prophet to begin to filter interested outsiders and select what could be shared with whom and when. The group semi-consciously, semi-instinctually began to develop a gradation of access to information (the knowledge register). This gradation I call the *threshold narratives*, the purpose of which is to filter participants, and to initiate them by helping them integrate the commonly-accepted narratives and value-preferences of the group into the individual knowledge registers. This also helps in constructing a feeling of community. The transfer of generally accepted interpretations to the members is essential: what is disputed should be decreased, and what is not, shall be increased by group members. Even the revelations of the group's central figure (Prophet dénes) can be rejected and disagreed with. It is evident from figures 7–13 that the narratives relayed by the prophet can result in disputes and may be very divisive (e.g., the narratives about Hell and the galactic journey). The group can reflect their doubts about these particular narratives by expressing negative reactions (passive resistance, gossip, concealed quarrels, public disputes etc.); another reaction is to surround these narratives with silence. The fact that a narrative is rarely alluded to – even if a cursory glance by the anthropologist could identify them as exotic and seemingly representative ones

– can indicate the passive refusal of the group, as demonstrated above in the case of the prophet's galactic journey.

Threshold narratives do not "unify" or alter radically the actors' minds and emotions. There are certain narratives which remain disputed or which are even rejected by some. Expressed public disputes are not common, but doubts exist within the group, even among the core members. *Doubt* is not the opposite of *faith*, both include cognitive dimensions and emotions. Doubt can penetrate, affect or determine our decisions, be they secular or faith based. Faith without doubt is a rare phenomenon. One individual's interpretations of, and emotions towards a narrative or a value-system is never the same as another individual's. The interest of the movement is to draw individuals' interpretations, attitudes and value systems closer together, and to gain agreement on at least the foundational narratives and values.

The frequency of allusion to a narrative, or lack of it, not only reflects its reception within the group, but also its relevance to time and place. Sometimes a narrative – like the firewalking practice the group engaged in between 2010–2012 – was frequently alluded to in the discourse, but this did not mean by far that the members' attitudes to it were uniform and homogeneous. I endeavoured to highlight this diversity of responses above. When a dispute arose over the narrative surrounding this practice, two sub-groups formed, one supporting the dominant narrative and the other not. These subgroups, as interpretive communities created very different meanings for the firewalking ritual. Ultimately, this led to a split in the movement and the secession of a large subgroup of Temerin.

Excessive heterogeneity can increase uncertainty and doubt, which in turn can lead to overt disputes and quarrels and eventually irreparable schisms as illustrated in this NRM with the secession of 2014. To avoid this destructive heterogeneity, an endeavour to create a common register of knowledge is an obvious foil to disunity. To internalise common knowledge, create common registers, and construct a common value-system, the discourse should be organised somehow. Doubt, uncertainty and conflict can never be eradicated from the group's life, but it can be limited by developing methods of dissemination of knowledge and information. A useful tool can be a model of threshold narratives. Outsiders only have access to limited information, but if they show an inquiring attitude they can access more. Then those who express a wish to ask for Prophet dénes's help in receiving the Holy Spirit gain open access to the group's knowledge register. To orientate the attention from "special" ("exotic") to "usual" (relevant and valuable) depends to a great extent on this initiation process. The commonplace narratives seem less extreme, less exotic than those that are unusual and rarely mentioned: the filters of the threshold narratives condition the participants to be sensitive to the frequently repeated narratives. This stresses the importance of the quantitative measures of the speech-events, but does not mean that the research loses its qualitative nature. At the beginning of a long-term ethnographic study, anthropologists are usually more sensitive to the exotic narratives, those that seem to distinguish the group from others, but during long-term participant observa-

tion the researcher can observe the role of frequency and the group's response. This process is similar to what an Inquirer, Seeker and a Candidate goes through.

There is no strict delineation between the "insider" and "outsider" positions within the group. An outsider does not become a "member" immediately on participating in the movement's religious events. The "border" between these two statuses is more like a process of decisions, and graded access to knowledge. Even those participants who attain the innermost status (the Shines), entertain doubts. They have their individual opinions, despite the overlap of meanings and values among them.

The knowledge registers and emotions of the group's members can never be homogenous. Each member retains his or her personal discourse horizons, and there are topics that are not discussed or even mentioned in the religious groups e.g., all members continue as before in their work and family lives, their religious identity makes up just one dimension of their entire identity. To be a member of the group hinges on mutual understanding and positive feedback. Participation in the movement's religious discourse requires common understanding, and the ability to give and receive positive feedback and messages. Disputes cannot be eliminated, but should be reduced.

The model of threshold narratives does not mean that the gradation of discourses is strictly adhered to. There are occasions when people glance into the second or third threshold narratives before they are ready, and there are occasions when the prophet declares that someone has already received the Holy Spirit independently and is thus able to join the core group without a long initiation; the threshold blocks form only a semi-institutional categorization. Sometimes narratives (or their fragments) of the second or third block can be grasped earlier, according to the situation and the individual concerned. To decrease the access to narratives, which the particular participant is not-ready-to-hear, the frequency of mentioned narratives can be regulated. Positive feedback can be built on the less exotic, less extreme ones. Later, when the interpretation of the participant is more likely to be close to the group's mainstream attitude, the participant can make a decision to go further, by strengthening ties with the group. Threshold narratives and the frequency of the narratives mentioned in speech events is also a tool for the group to moderate the inner disputes and to express the passive refusal of the core members. The faith is rather based on common knowledge and personal emotions than the absence of doubt.

This model of threshold narratives I have introduced in this study, is not universal. During my research of other NRMs and New Age groups it sometimes prevails, and at other times it does not. In a group among which I have also conducted fieldwork in recent years (*Bolyafészek*), there is no similar system of gradation, but another I have studied – a neo-pagan movement (*Aranykopjások*) – had a similar gradation of information access during initiation (see Csáji 2012). This model could be a suitable tool for the studies of movements, which have started to move towards institutionalisation. Traditional or new religious movements, and even political societies can show similar features to this threshold narrative system, by regulating access to knowledge, fil-

tering newcomers and conditioning the participants. The aim is in all cases to create common values, commonly interpreted narratives through the ordering of discourse, regulated speech events and the creation of conditioned feedback. This can also be called in anthropological studies the creation of the "language of the group".

References

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2009 [1972]. *A gyakorlat elméletének vázlata* [Outline of a Theory of Practice]. Budapest: Napvilág.

Csáji, László Koppány. 2012. "Az egyéni és közösségi sokszínűség megragadásának vallásantropológiai nehézségei" [Problem of describing personal and communal heterogeneity in the analysis of anthropology of religions]. In Hubbes László, szerk., *Etno-pogányok. Retorikai fogások a hálón innen és túl,* 17–66. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület.

–. 2013. "'Dénes Próféta' (Péter Dénes) – a székely próféta. ["Prophet Dénes" – The Székely Prophet] In Gazda József és Szabó Etelka, szerk., *Lelki élet, vallásosság,* 388–481. Kovászna: Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Közművelődési Egyesület.

–. 2014. "'Belakjuk környezetünket és az internetet!' Lokalitás és/vagy hálózatiság – vallásantropológiai elemzés a közösségkonstrukció lokális és hálózati tereinek, szerveződésének összefüggéseiről" ["We inhabit our environment and the Internet". Locality and/or Network-like organization – anthropological analysis of the coexistence of locality and network-like organization methods of contemporary ecclesia]. In Povedák István és Szilárdi Réka, szerk., *Sámán Sámán hátán. A kortárs pogányság multidiszciplináris elemzése,* 78–96. Szeged: MTA-SZTE Vallási Kultúrakutató Csoport–SZTE BTK Néprajzi és Kulturális Antropológiai Tanszék.

–. 2015a. "Csoda, pokoljárás és a digitalis szakadék Egy új vallási mozgalom legitimaciós technikái a webes és weben kívüli diskurzusaiban" [Miracle, Journey to Hell and the Digital Divide. Online and Offline discourses of a New Religious Movement's Legitimation Techniques]. *Replika* 90–91 (1–2): 57–77.

–. 2015b. "A Szentlélektől az Ufókig" [From the Holy Spirit to UFOs]. *Antroport* online journal (13.08.2015).

–. 2017. "A gyógyító érintés olvasatai: energia, rezgés szentlélek" [Interpretation of the healing touch: energy, resonance, Holy Spirit]. In Lajos Veronika, Povedák István és Régi Tamás, szerk., *The anthropology of Encounters – a találkozások antropológiája.* Budapest: Magyar Kulturális Antropológiai Társaság.

–. 2018. "How to become fundamentalist." *Sociology International Journal* 2 (3): 160–69.

–. 2020. "Posztmodern tűzpróba. Egy Kárpát-medencei új vallási mozgalom parázsonjárás-rítusának kialakulása, hazai és nemzetközi párhuzamai" [Postmodern fire ordeal. The emergence and Hungarian and international parallels of the firewalking ritual of a New Religious Movement in the Carpathian Basin]. In Peti Lehel és Tamás Ildikó, szerk., *Vallási kultúra a Kárpát-medencében,* 195–222. Studia Ethnologica Hungarica XVIII. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

van DIJK, Teun A. 1985. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* I–IV. London: Academic Press.

–. 2008. *Discourse and Context. A sociocognitive approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Escobar, Arturo. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia. Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberculture. *Current Anthropology* 35 (3): 211–231.

– 2004: Beyond the Third World. Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-globalization Social Movements. *Third World Quarterly* 25 (1): 207–230.

Fairclough, Norman. 2001 [1989]. *Language and Power.* London: Longman.

– 2003. *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research.* London: Routledge.

Fish, Stanley Eugene. 1980. *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities.* Cambridge: Harvard UP.

Foucault, Michel. 1972 [1969]. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* New York: Pantheon Books.

–. 1981 [1970]. "The Order of Discourse." In *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader,* 48–78. Ed. and intr. Robert Young. Boston, London, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1984 [1981]. *The Theory of Communicative Action I.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987 [1981]. *The Theory of Communicative Action II.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Howard, Robert Glenn. 2011. *Digital Jesus. The Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community on the Internet.* New York: New York UP.

Imbert, Claude. 2006. "The Register of Knowledge: Figures of Knowledge and Grasping the Real." *Scientiae Studia* 4 (4): 533–61.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1923. "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages." In Charles K. Ogden and Ian A. Richards, eds., *The Meaning of Meaning,* 146–52. London: Routledge.

Mészáros Csaba. 2014. "Pekarik és szellemek: Gondolatok az antropológiai hermeneutikáról" [Peccary or spirit? Notes on the hermeneutics of Anthropology]. *Ethnographia* 125 (2): 250–65.

Papp Z., Attila. 2001. "Az eltűnt hokimeccs nyomában. Diskurzuselemzés egy sportesemény ürügyén" [Following the traces of a disappeared ice-hockey match. Discourse analysis concerning a sport event]. *Médiakutató* 1 (2): 18–29.

Peti, Lehel. 2010. "'Nekünk is van Medjugorjénk!' Vallási és etnikai interferenciák Erdélyben. A szőkefalvi Mária-jelenések" ["We also have a Medjugorje!" Religious and ethnic interferences in Transylvania. Marian visions in Szőkefalva]. In Feischmidt Margit, szerk., *Etnicitás. Különbségtevő társadalom,* 283–99. Budapest: Gondolat and MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet.

Pócs, Éva. 2008. "Szőkefalva/Seuca. Egy új kegyhely új üzenetei" [Szőkefalva/Seuca. Messages of a new shrine]. In Ead., szerk., *Démonok, látók, szentek. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* 484–504. Tanulmányok a transzcendensről VI. Budapest: Balassi.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 1995. "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife." *Western Folklore* 54 (1): 37–56.

Robbins, Thomas. 1996. "Az új vallási mozgalmak és a társadalom [New religious movements and society]." *Replika* 21–22: 173–209.

Sávai, János and Tamás Grynaeus. 1994. *Tüdő Vince betegei. Egy szeged-alsótanyai gyógyító ember feljegyzései* [Patients of Vince Tüdő. Records of a healer from Szeged-Alsóváros]. Devotio Hungarorum 1. Szeged: Néprajzi Tanszék.

Sz. Kristóf, Ildikó. 1998. "Jákob rózsafája vagy frusztrált antropológusok? Az értelmezés hatalmáról és korlátairól" [Rose-tree of Jacob or frustrated anthropologists. Power and the limits of interpretation]. *Tabula* 1 (1–2): 60–84.

Tánczos, Vilmos. 2015. "Egy moldvai csángó férfi vallásos világképének öt regisztere és a szakrális kommunikáció lehetőségei" [Five registers of a Csángó man's religious worldview, and the possibilities of sacral communication]. In Pócs Éva, szerk., *Test, lélek, szellemek és a természetfeletti kommunikáció,* 580–611. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben. Budapest: Balassi.

Tolcsvai Nagy, Gábor. 2011. *Kognitív szemantika. (Egyetemi jegyzet)* [Cognitive semantics. University lecture notes]. Nyitra: KFE Közép-európai Tanulmányok Kara.

Walker, Julia A. 2003. "Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (1): 149–60.

White, Harison and Ann Mische. 1998. "Between Conversation and Situation: Public Switching Dynamics across Network Domains." *Social Research* 65 (3): 695–724.

Judit Farkas

"I believe in it because I know"
Faith and Knowledge in the Lives
of Hungarian Krishna Devotees[1]

The Antecedents of My Study

I began my research among Hungarian Krishna devotees in 1997 while still a cultural anthropology student. My investigations spanned a long period; in 2006, after defending my dissertation on the topic, my scholarly attention turned towards eco-villages. Eventually, in 2009, this interest took me back to the Krishna community, in the Krishna Valley, which as well as being the centre of Krishna Consciousness in Hungary is also an eco-village. Due to my interest in the ecological lifestyle many new avenues of research opened up in relation to my previous area of study; yet, several conversations with believers were picked up where – figuratively speaking – they had been left off. And there were certain topics, which proved to be of particular importance to both sets of research. The present study will return to one question in particular, which I have also discussed earlier: the issue of the relation of faith, doubt and knowledge in Krishna consciousness.

Introduction

For those who adhere to new religious movements the creed and practice of their religion are not *a priori* given and natural; they acquire it as a result of a shorter or longer construction process. Personal choice creates a form of connection with the supernatural, a form of experiencing faith in which it is the individual's task to construct and maintain the self-evident nature of religion (faith and practice).[2] Misgivings, scepticism, and questions that aim to extinguish doubt, or even pondering alternatives play a crucial role in this process. This is especially the case with religious movements that offer a different cultural pattern to believers, such as the community of Krishna devotees. In their case, besides accepting religious doctrines, the

---

[1] I would like to thank my Krishna-conscious interlocutors for helping me carry out this study.
[2] For more on this see Farkas 2009; Pelkmans 2013, 24–25.

integration of the Krishna-conscious lifestyle can be an equally important question or dilemma for initiates.

In terms of faith and lifestyle, the Hare Krishna movement[3] is related to the fifteenth-century reform movement[4] of Hinduism called *Gaudiya Vaishnavism*. The common denominator is one of the basic elements of Hinduism: the succession of masters and disciples (*sampradaya*). The essence of this succession, in short, is that the masters (*guru*) transmit religious doctrines to worthy disciples who will then become *guru*s and take their turn in transmitting the knowledge to their disciples, and so forth. This line of disciples preserves the (allegedly) original and authentic teachings, theology and practice.[5] The founder of the Hare Krishna movement, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (originally named Abhay Charan De, 1896–1977) was also part of such a succession of disciples founded by Caitanya (1486–1534) who was believed to be an incarnation of Krishna.[6] Prabhupada moved to the United States in 1965 in order to spread the teachings and while there, he founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1966. Within a few years the movement became international; Krishna believers opened churches and centres all over the world; and Prabhupada gradually "indianised" the believers by teaching them the *vaishnava* lifestyle and introducing the strict religious practices it entailed into the movement. After the death of the founder (1977) the leadership was filled by the Governing Body Commission consisting of spiritual masters (*guru*) initiated by Prabhupada. The communities of certain countries function as autonomous units, but the general principles of the movement are defined by the leading Commission. Because of the historical context in Central and Eastern Europe – i.e., the Communist-Socialist regime (1948-1989) and its intolerance to religion – the Hare Krishna movement only arrived to Hungary in the 1970s (albeit illegally). The Hungarian movement was first organised by an émigré living in Sweden at the time. His work was later taken over by another, also Hungarian émigré guru (from Canada) who was as a matter of course assigned a principal role in the establishment of the Hungarian movement after the regime change in 1989. This spiritual master, who became the preeminent leader of the community of Hungarian Krishna devotees – Sivarama swami, by his Krishna conscious name – had

---

[3] In this essay "Krishna consciousness", "Hare Krishna movement" and the "Hare Krishnas" refer to the same religious community and religious movement. The first term is mostly used by them, the second is used in the academic literature and the third is the common term outsiders use to describe them (but not in a pejorative sense, the term is rather neutral).

[4] The essence of the reform – in a nutshell – was that everyone had the chance to return to God if they followed the religious reform methodology of Caitanya (1485–1534) who was considered to be the reincarnation of Krishna. In other words: if they dedicated their life entirely to God, served God with devotion, and recited the Hare Krishna *mahamantra*. According to Caitanya's vision, the time will come when the whole world will recite this mantra – the worldwide Hare Krishna movement considers itself the realiser of this vision.

[5] Concerning the legitimation method, see Broo 2003; Farkas 2009; 2016.

[6] On the topics of Vaishnavism, succession of vaishnava disciples and Caitanya see among others: Bhattayharya 1995; Clooney and Stewardt 2004; Dandekar 1987; Farquhar 1998; Purusatraya 1993. On the relationship of Hinduism, Vaishnavism and ISKCON see Flood 1995.

been a part of Prabhupada's movement from the very beginning; as such he had witnessed the challenges and processes of the religion's establishment in the West, therefore he arrived to Hungary equipped with an already-tested adaptation toolkit.[7]

The correct practice and lifestyle was determined by a system of regulations covering every little detail of life, which was considered as the means of returning to God, the ultimate goal of a Krishna believer's life. Yet, the Hare Krishna community is aware that certain believers in certain life situations can evidently not keep perfectly in line with this medieval Indian system considering that their circumstances are so far removed in both time and space (outside India and in the present age). The resolution of this essential contradiction, the practice of adaptation to the given conditions (and its legitimisation) was indispensable for them. Despite its medieval origins and promotion of a lifestyle that seeks a return to the basics, contemporary western believers manage to live and practice their religion in the twenty-first century. Sociologists Ágnes and Gábor Kapitány sum up how this disconnect between the two worlds impacts devotees: the importance of personal choice in the case of contemporary monks is much greater, as is being aware of individual needs; their relationship with God is much more individualised, personal and involves more doubt.[8]

In my study, I will examine the interpretation of faith and doubt by the Hare Krishna movement, and the instruments it offers to create the former and dissolve the latter. I will also discuss how the Hungarian devotees who joined the movement construct their faith; who are the key players in this and how does the individual create his or her faith through questions and answers, through the constructive dialogue of doubt and conviction.

Faith and Knowledge

In the past few years I studied the sacred places of Krishna Valley on several occasions.[9] Over the course of these investigations I have had conversations with the inhabitants of Krishna Valley about how it feels to live in a place that is interpreted as the residence of Krishna, as the duplicate of the spiritual world; how can they conceive, accept and believe that Krishna himself might walk among them. One young woman's answer was so striking that the concept it contained ultimately led to the writing of this paper:

> If people believe in it, it is because they know. I believe it because I know what happens here [at the sacred place]. Faith is actually a conviction, and this type of [conviction] is based on knowledge. Knowing what goes on here; and this strengthens

[7] On the Hungarian history of the movement and the religious doctrines see: Kamarás 1997; 1998; 2000; Farkas 2004; 2009.
[8] Kapitány és Kapitány 2014, 69.
[9] The following studies are a result of this research: Farkas 2012; 2014; 2018.

faith if there is knowledge behind it. The more we read about it and the stronger our conviction is, the more we can improve our faith (V. d.d. 2011).[10]

During our conversation about Krishna believers' perception of nature, another of my interlocutors also emphasised knowledge and the importance of acquiring new knowledge:

> Just because [plants and animals] cannot speak, they do feel, and we have to be able to see that. If not otherwise, with the help of Vedic knowledge; by reading it, and then you will accept that they are souls, too (K. d.d. 2011).

Krishna believers are often faced with the following questions in relation to their religion and customs: why do you believe in this? How can you believe all this? How can you be so sure that this is the truth? These questions are not unfamiliar to them as they too had asked them during their first encounters with the religion – they had asked other believers and themselves as well. Vedic philosophy says that certainty can be achieved through *pramana* (Sanskrit for evidence, proof). Pramana is the means of knowledge considered authentic. In the doctrine observed by the western Krishna movement (ISKCON), the Brahma−Madhva−Gaudiya sampradaya, includes three pramanas: perception (*pratyaksa*), logical argument (*anumana*) and authoritative evidence (*sabda*). Krishna believers, when someone questions their faith, usually answer citing the "authorities" considered authentic and unquestionable within the movement. These authorities are the following: the spiritual master (*guru*), the Vedic scriptures (*sastra*) and the "evolved" believers who have achieved a high level of development in the religion (*sadhu*).[11] The believers can confirm the authenticity of a claim by comparing these three sources: "If I read this statement in *sastra*, I consult guru and *sadhu* for verification. If I hear it from the guru, it is verified by the *sastra* and the *sadhu*; and if I hear it from the *sadhu*, it is verified by the *sastra* and the guru."[12] The Holy Scripture, being God's word, has unquestionable authority and truth. In reality, however, in order to accept this statement, the person interested in this religion first has to acquire some certainty about Krishna consciousness.

The first thing one might notice when talking with Krishna believers about faith is that they interpret it in a distinctive way: they don't consider mere faith in the ineffable that is based on emotions and impressions to be sufficient; there are even those among them, who frown upon such belief. One of my interlocutors, with reference to the sacred scriptures, defined what he called "sentimental" faith as an undeveloped

---

[10] At the end of each interview excerpt I indicate the initials of the interviewee's Krishna name and the year when the interview was conducted. The single d. in the names is the abbreviation of *das* and refers to a man; d.d. means *devi dasi* and refers to a woman.

[11] Suhotra 1995.

[12] Ibid.

form of faith, because he thought that emotions change easily, and faith has to be placed upon more stable foundations: knowledge.

> Faith must have a foundation in order not to be a blind faith, because that would be similar to being afloat, it would not have any basis. Sentimental faith can change easily, because emotions change easily, too. People who are sentimental, who "took a liking to something", change their minds easily. True faith is based on knowledge (C. d. 2015).

This idea, as indicated above, is founded upon sacred scriptures that distinguish between several levels and forms of faith. The Vedic worldview categorises every material existence under three binding forces (*guna*): goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and ignorance (*tamas*). As a result of these binding forces there are three types of faiths. The faith derived from the binding force of *rajas* and *tamas* has only transitory results; while the deeds carried out with goodness (*sattva*) purge the heart and lead to pure faith in God and devotion (see Bhagavad-gita chapter 17: the three divisions of faith).[13] The most perfect type of faith is when the believer sees the eternal servant of Krishna in every living creature, and relates to them accordingly; and arrives from faith to the spontaneous, unconditional love of God. "When faith matures, it becomes love" (C. d. 2015).

Another interlocutor who has been a Krishna believer for twenty years, did not interpret his relationship to the religion as faith:

> Today, Krishna consciousness is not a faith to me. It is knowledge. Today, the reason for which I believe in Krishna consciousness, the reason I take part in this process is not emotional or sentimental, it is motivated by rationality (M. d. 2015).

As we can see, there are levels of faith; and devotees have very practical views on how to evolve in terms of faith; this is not a coincidence, since the community itself represents a very practice-oriented attitude.

Krishna believers usually explain why they joined the movement with reference to its rational, practical nature.[14] Beyond the logical explanations of the founder Prabhupada, the logical and satisfying answers given by the scriptures to every aspect of life even the smallest and most trivial, as well as the authenticity and persuasive argumentation of the believers, they usually mention experience as the main motivation for joining: "I have tried it and it works". Some devotees had tried the suggested religious practice out of simple curiosity; others were convinced at the first encounter and con-

---

[13] Bhagavad-gita.

[14] This is confirmed by studies of the conversion process carried out among Krishna believers, such as the Hungarian study by the sociologist of religion, István Kamarás (1998). He concluded that believers chose Krishna consciousness for (also) being comprehensible and practical. When asked what Krishna consciousness meant to them, most believers mentioned lifestyle, faith and knowledge in their answer (Kamarás 1998, 174).

tinued practicing the religion driven by this conviction; and there were also those who had started the practice only to prove that it was silly and would not work but through practice became convinced.[15]

It seems to me that personal experience and the fact that they feel that everything depends on them, that is, they can control their own fate, has a particular importance for those accepting Krishna consciousness:

> I trust the scriptures, Prabhupada and the people who follow them. And I also trust my own experience. The personal experience is the most empowering because you might think that the other was perhaps wrong, it did not happen like that. It is not based on emotions, but on your own self.
> …
> If you don't do your *sadana* [regular religious practice], the same way you can develop your faith, you can also lose it. You have to do something for it.
> *And is it only a matter of the* sadana*?*
> Yes. Everything comes from it.
> *Can't it be that I'm lazy, but Krishna will eventually save me? That never happens?*
> (laughs) Everyone has a destiny, we prepare our subsequent life with the current one. If you start living a spiritual life, the Krishna consciousness, you will change your fate. From that on it depends on you. Krishna won't help you on this level. There are no exceptions. You also can't go and confess your sins. It doesn't work like that. Everyone gets his or her karma. You can take out as much from your spiritual bank account as you have put in (Sz. d.d. 2015).

Later the same person said the following:

> Christianity tells you to be good. Okay, but how? For us the point is also to elevate to the level of goodness, but how should I be good? How should I be good to the person who is hurting me? Krishna consciousness is a practical path. You are not only told to be good. You are told instead: Do you want to be good? Then try to do this and that (Sz. d.d. 2015).

Consequently, besides personal experience the other great appeal for Krishna believers are the specific "guidelines" and the detailed and easy to follow practice.

As mentioned in the introduction: while those who are born into a religion take for granted the doctrines and practices that they acquire over the course of their socialisation, the freshly converted individual who is taking on a new religion has to construct this taken-for-grantedness. Krishna consciousness is a bookish religion (founded upon literacy and lexical knowledge); the individual who comes into contact with the movement undergoes serious training from the very beginning: the daily

---

[15] I am not discussing here those for whom it did not work and are, thus, no longer in the movement.

religious practice (*sadana*) includes the reading of sacred scriptures,[16] learning the main sections, listening to teachings, and so forth.

The primary Krishna-conscious method in order to acquire the taken-for-granted aspects of Krishna consciousness is hearing (*sravanam*) and singing about Krishna (*kirtanam*), and continuously remembering Krishna (*smaranam*). The first stage of learning is hearing, which, contrary to its western interpretations, is not exclusively the hearing of sounds, listening to the masters, the gurus, but also the reading of sacred texts; hearing its words assists the individual in acquiring knowledge. The subsequent step of learning is contemplation, during which the individual processes the knowledge acquired through hearing. This is followed by "realisation", which is the integration of the knowledge into the everyday practices of the Krishna believer, which will shift the system of values and the entire life of the devotee. The "material" that is to be learnt (a complete culture) requires the detailed elaboration of a learning methodology, as well as the verification and close monitoring of the outcome of the learning process. This is also necessary because, beyond the considerable amount of literature, the movement counts upon orality to aid the construction of a Krishna worldview and practice, and especially its adaptation to Hungarian culture. The methods thus established serve to ensure that the orally transmitted knowledge arrives at its desired destination; therefore, the Hare Krishna movement also functions as an institution that secures the effective practice of the above.[17] ISKCON is thus the institution that

---

[16] The works of the fifteenth-century *Caitanya* are important elements of the written sources of the Krishna faith, although only hymns are extant. His logically developed theological system was written down by his disciples, and are also considered to be fundamental works of the Krishna-conscious canon. Among the texts of central importance in Hinduism, and the two most important texts of the Krishna religion are *Bhagavad-Gita,* which is in the *Mahabharata* epic (fourth century BC – fourth century AD), and the later *Bhagavata-Purana* (950 AD). It is the *Bhagavad-Gita* which claims that Krishna is above everything, the Supreme God; and according to the *vaishnava* interpretation, this text introduced the practice of *bhakti yoga* as being the best way to salvation, which surpasses the significance of any previous yoga methods. The *Bhagavata-Purana* is one of the most important, most cited works among the sources used by the *Caitanya* school, as also shown by the references to these writings within the movement (Brooks 1992, 35).

The writings of the masters urging the revival of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the nineteenth century (Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati) also constitute an important part of the movement's literature. The most important texts of the Krishna-conscious canon for the believers are the works of Prabhupada. The Krishna believer takes a vow at his or her first initiation to read the works of the founder for at least one hour a day: his translations, commentaries and other texts; they become acquainted with the scriptures in his translation, his interpretation. The works of leading spiritual masters are gradually included in the canon.

[17] For Krishna believers the ISKCON functions as an educational institution for learning the *vaishnava* culture; my interlocutors explicitly explained this from time to time: " … you learn from those who are already learning it. This is basically the essence of ISKCON. This is why Prabhupada founded the ISKCON, to have an organisation, a systematically constructed organisation, a 'Church'. Many attacked Prabhupada for it, asking why it was necessary to have an organized Church. You will not achieve the love of God by being a member of a church. You achieve it with practice. But this Church, this community is necessary in order to have a place for a community that keeps to certain standards. So, if you want to become a doctor, it is best if you go to university. You can also achieve

oversees the learning of the worldview and the dogma, as well as the acquiring of the lifestyle; making Vaishnavism a self-evident, "natural" part of the individual devotee's life. In traditional societies, and to some degree in modern societies as well, acquiring these and integrating them into everyday life is accomplished through passing them on from generation to generation. The Krishna movement, however, is lacking a part of the transmitting methodology; therefore they had to invent new methods of learning besides the traditional methods of passing on culture. These methods primarily target the internalizing of the philosophy of Krishna faith and consist of regular study (and exams) where the disciples train themselves with the help of their peers and they are also helped in learning the material through lecture series and trainings organized for the members by the local community. Krishna devotees take a vow at their first initiation to read the works of Prabhupada for at least one hour a day. But the vow only reinforces a practice they are encouraged to follow from the outset: the novice members are constantly reminded of the importance of daily reading from the very beginning by the leaders of the community and long-term adherents. On several occasions after the evening ceremony, I have heard those present being encouraged to go and read a little.

While at the dawn of the Hungarian movement's establishment relatively little was known of the faith's tenets, by the early 2000s there was a definite tendency to require devotees to learn and to understand their religion. Beyond independent studying, lexical learning also takes place in an organised manner; for instance, the urban community I researched for the longest period of time (1998–2005) orchestrated group activities where certain members of the community lectured on given topics. These included the history of their religion; the biography of the most important figures of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and their significance within the movement; the introduction to the holy places of their faith; basic theological insights about God, the soul, reincarnation, karma, time, creation, etc.; the foundational principles of the faith, the theoretical foundations for *murti* worship; the significance of preaching, and so on. The goal according to the then leader was: "to provide a complete education of philosophy, culture, dedicated practice, and spiritual life". One of the methods was to go through and meticulously study the scriptures. The knowledge imparted during the lectures and from the scriptures was later tested in a written and graded exam. Those who achieved under a certain level had to retake the exam. Besides the local educational methods there are also exams at a national level based around a centrally-determined curriculum. The "*bhakti-sastri*" exam, as it is called, is related to initiation in the sense that anyone can take it, yet initiation is not a prerequisite; however, the individual cannot obtain a second level initiation without having passed the exam first. Over the past few years, the expectations have been increasing for new devotees to go to the Hungarian Krishna College (Bhaktivedanta Hittudományi Főiskola).

---

the love of God anywhere in the world, but if you join ISKCON, you come here on a regular basis and adopt what they tell you there… it is practically a school where they teach you how you can carry out a dedicated service. This is why Prabhupada founded this place" (M. d. 2005).

Besides the importance of lexical knowledge, the Krishna movement is also an expressly practice-centred religion: the important elements of the spiritual practice are: regular daily prayer; performing the rituals; "association" (spending time in the company of other believers, learning from the more experienced, assisting initiates); maintaining contact with the guru, etc. Moreover, the church hierarchy also supports this learning process: every believer knows who to turn to with their questions.[18]

This is a thoroughly developed system, a learning process that not only facilitates devotees' proficiency in the scriptures and religious practices, but is also an instrument for deepening one's faith. The believers learn what they should see and how to interpret it. "By learning the appropriate behaviour the believer starts to adopt the appropriate ways of perception/cognition."[19] That is to say: they learn to believe.

The story of Sz. d.d. is a perfect example of this process: Sz. d.d. considers herself a determined, self-aware woman who had no intention of joining a cult. She never had a particularly good opinion of religions, let alone organised church communities. She did have a certain concept of the world, one also considered basic to Krishna consciousness (such as the belief in the existence or the reincarnation of the soul), but when she started to attend the local Krishna community with a more enthusiastic friend she was annoyed by many things: she considered the images too kitschy, the statues depicting God (*murti*) ugly, the Indian clothes annoying, and the collective dances too creepy. What captivated her, however, was that she received an answer, and a seemingly logical one to everything. Moreover, she was especially convinced by the knowledge and the serenity of the believers, that they obviously knew something and had achieved something, which she found attractive. Her rational nature was seduced by the practical attitude: she was given a "map" (as the Krishna believers call it) and a promise that if she followed the map she would get to where she wanted. Her initial positive experiences confirmed that it was true: "everything worked as it was described in the scriptures". This last sentence is a recurring element in Krishna believers' accounts, they usually draw the conclusion that if the things they have experienced proved to be true then probably all that they do not yet understand or have not yet learned are also true and achievable. Only knowledge is lacking and therefore must be developed.

M.d.'s first encounter with Krishna faith was not accompanied by any doubt: on reading the Bhagavad-gita, the words and deeds of Prabhupada and the lives of the believers, he was instantly convinced by its authenticity. He cannot articulate the reason: "It's like when two people are talking, and you decide, you can't explain why, but you decide that you believe what one of them is saying, and not the other" (M.d. 2015). For him the *murti*-issue, which was a difficult question for many believers, was also self-evident:

---

[18] I discuss all this in detail in my book, see Farkas 2009.
[19] Mitchell 1997, 84.

How can you accept the fact that the murti *is God himself?*
Well, you just accept it. It is written. If you accept it as a whole, you accept the book, you cannot rip out pages from it saying that I don't like this, I'll leave it out. So you either accept the book as a whole because it is an integral system and that is how it works. Or you don't accept it (M.d. 2015).

For Sz. d.d. this was a much longer and more challenging process: she told me that she thought the *murtis* were manifestly ugly, which made her doubt whether Krishna consciousness was for her at all. At the beginning of a one-week stay at Krishna Valley she had a psychologically testing day when she almost left and went home, but eventually she pulled herself together and stayed. After that she closely observed the religious practices (in which the other believers helped her tremendously), then, when she returned to the altar she was shocked to see that the *murti*, which she had previously seen as ugly, became beautiful. "It was so beautiful that after that I was afraid to look at it, I was afraid that if I do something wrong it will turn back to being ugly!" (Sz. d.d. 2015). Through religious practices she not only learned the elements of the practice (which she carried out with increasing precision), but, without being aware of it, she discovered new ways of perception as well. Sz. d.d. came to understand later that seeing the *murti* as beautiful was also part of a developmental process that could be accomplished through practice.

This example is a good illustration of the general Krishna-conscious view and practice, namely that learning more about the religion and exercising regular religious practices increases devotees' expertise in religion, strengthens their conviction and eliminates any doubts.

The most challenging thing about examining doubt is that it disappears in the process of articulation; from the dynamic dialogue between questions/doubts and answers/convictions only faith and certainty remain; doubt is often difficult to recall retrospectively.[20] This recollection is also difficult because doubt is usually interpreted in religions as a deficit of faith, as a result after doubt is overcome convinced believers tend to neglect their former doubts. Krishna believers explain the emergence of doubt with the improper exercise of religious practices ("he is not doing his *Sadhana*"). While in the early stages of understanding, doubt and searching for the truth motivate believers to obtain information (which they consider to be also important: "Ask! Ask! Ask!" – is their suggestion to initiates); in later stages, however, it seemed to me that having doubts was thought to be (at minimum) controversial.

When examining beliefs, researchers often encounter the phenomenon of their interlocutors showing doubt when describing their own beliefs[21] interestingly, in the

---

[20] For more on this see Pelkmans 2013, 16. If in this process the doubts emerge victorious, then the individual usually leaves the religious group.

[21] Because the researcher questioning them is an educated person, and they are aware of their beliefs not conforming to rational, scientific thinking, they try to keep a certain distance from the things they describe. See Hesz 2012, 74.

narratives of Krishna believers this is a rare phenomenon. This is not just because doubt is interpreted as the imperfection of faith and, therefore, they speak little of it, but also because in an interview situation they wish to justify their conviction and the doctrine of their religion. In the life-histories they tell, naturally, the matter of doubt does arise (although often only if asked about it), but mostly in the context of how they have tackled it.[22] While living with the community, over the course of my research I had the opportunity to observe the same process: how emerging dilemmas and doubts are eliminated with the help of methodology provided by the religion.

Ágnes Hesz described how her interlocutors in her fieldsite displayed uncertainty and had difficulty when asked to articulate their beliefs about the dead, beliefs that they had never before thought about or had never been required to verbalise.[23] This type of hesitation is relatively rare in the case of Krishna believers, they usually talk about things they have articulated many times before; they work with a pre-formed, elaborated set of narratives. Evidently, there is a difference between a speaker who is used to talking in public and the more timid believers; but the basic narratives can be found in both cases. They are not unaware of this: "you will hear the exact same cardinal points from everyone" – said one of them. Getting to know this common, elaborated set not only takes us closer to the narratives, but also to the process of building faith; both stem from the same root: the learning process of Krishna consciousness (faith and practice), the elaborated system (the "map") that leads the believer to his or her final destination.[24]

Over the course of the process of integration into the movement, novices acquire the most important cultural competencies of Krishna consciousness that allow them to have a Krishna interpretation of the world and to be integrated into Krishna society. During this process, evidently, a great number of individual feelings arise and experiences occur, but their interpretation is influenced by the Krishna society's environment[25] – the narratives developed to this end and the well-outlined ways of perception all serve this purpose. Religious faith not only explains the special experi-

---

[22] This is also a narrative trick: it shows the power of faith that the believer was able to overcome his or her doubts.

[23] Discussing Correll's findings (2005) Ágnes Hesz remarks that "expressing doubt happened in similarly strict forms and along similar narrative schemes as the justification of beliefs" (Hesz 2012, 71) (Timothy Corrigan Correll, "Believers, Sceptics, and Charlatans: Evidential Rhetoric. The Fairies, and Fairy Healers in Irish Oral Narratives and Belief", *Folklore* 116, no. 1 [2005]: 1–18). See also Ágnes Hesz's paper in this volume.

[24] László Koppány Csáji, on the contrary, studied a contemporary Christian religious group that was formed only a few years earlier, thus, not founded on a system as elaborate as that of Krishna consciousness. In his study Csáji demonstrates the interaction of individual knowledge and collective narratives in such a new community, how the group can shape its knowledge set, how the individuals identify (or do not) with certain narratives and how that shapes the faith of the group members (See Csáji, this volume).

[25] "I argue that the interpretation of personal experience is mediated by feelings, and that the interpretation of feelings involves social memory. Although feelings seem entirely personal, they are always experienced in, and hence framed by, social conditions" (Mitchell 1997, 80).

ence, but creates the experience itself, as we have seen in the example of the *murti* that "became beautiful". Jon P. Mitchell, referring to his research in a Maltese Christian community, talks about ready-made memories, about experiences that serve as reference points for the believers' later experiences.[26] A woman was asked by a fellow believer at the beginning of her Krishna consciousness to bring a full glass of water to the *murti* instead of just a half-filled glass. This was when the woman understood that for this devotee, who admonished her, the *murti* truly represented the living God; and she started to understand what it was like if someone had a self-evident faith in the *murti*/God. This experience became an absolute standard example for her and she inserted this story into her narrative about her own process of accepting the *murti*.

> In the beginning there is faith. Let's try it, and see what happens. Then comes *sadhu sanga*: I come into contact with people who have faith. And this is a big thing, if someone gets to this point, because faith is born from association (C.d. 2015).

– synthesised another, long-time Krishna acquaintance of mine. He also underlined several times (as others did as well): "Faith comes from association." In other words, the knowledge, company and example of believers who are more evolved in the religious practice contributes to the development of the individual's faith; the forms, narratives, experiences that serve as a framework for the devotee's experiences and guide them in establishing appropriate experiences.

In Krishna consciousness faith is developed in a very conscious and practical way on a cognitive (semiotic/narrative, practical and emotional) level; and, as we have seen, knowledge and the deepening of knowledge play an accentuated role in it.[27] This ritual-centred approach in the Krishna movement is conspicuous even for an observer from outside the community. Observing the clearly defined rituals and following the regulated practices are basic instruments of developing faith. The question may arise that if the fundamentally unconscious rituals play such an important role in the life of Krishna believers, how can the previous statements about the importance of consciousness and of knowledge be justified? The answer is that adherents are aware of the effect of rituals and they build on this effect. Every element of the *Sadhana*, the daily practice of religion, serves this purpose, as do the rituals of collective celebrations, the use of objects, the use of holy places, or even the particular Krishna use of language as well.[28] Experience and knowledge are connected through an interactive process, as in any other religion; the acquiring of knowledge and the system of rules,

---

[26] Mitchell 1997, 81.

[27] "Belief in turn, is dependent on the types of knowledge, and modes of cognition, involved in the process of believing. I argue that belief is based upon three different, but related, modes of cognition: the semiotic, which relates to language, or to language-like phenomena; the practical, which relates to forms of embodied knowledge; and the emotional, which relates to people's feelings" (Mitchell 1997, 79–80).

[28] See Farkas 2009; 2014. My book about Krishna believers (Farkas 2009) is entirely about this process, therefore I do not go into detail here.

as well as the physical and spiritual experience obtained through the practice of religion play an equally important role in religions that people are born into. There is only a difference in focus, namely, that in terms of understanding and experiencing they attribute a particularly great significance to knowledge (besides practice), which is able to strengthen and ground faith: "I believe in it because I know." I have heard countless times the experienced believers encouraging the initiates by stating that it does not matter if they do not understand something, they should keep on reading about it, listen to the masters and the other believers and practice. And eventually "the taste (*rasa*) would come."[29]

Let me conclude my essay with a story that is a good illustration of this process; an example of the perfect internalisation of religious experience.

In an earlier work I pointed out (among others with this same story) that the narratives related to objects in Krishna faith (and evidently in other religions, too) not only point to the functional role of objects, but they also show the extent of the integration of religious teachings and the means of integration.[30] Over the years I have talked about the *murti*-issue with Krishna believers and many among them confessed that accepting that the statue is God himself was one of the greatest challenges of their religion. In the summer of 2013, after lunch following pilgrimage to Krishna Valley, I was sitting in front of the temple with a couple of women. They started to talk about a boy who had been very cranky that day, and since his wishes were not fulfilled fast enough and he did not get ice cream in time, he took vengeance and destroyed the ice cream machine; moreover, he made it rain! At this last part I became suspicious that they were perhaps talking about a non-human boy. It soon turned out that the story was about Govardhan Lal, a "stone *murti*" from the sacred Mount Govardhan in India. This *murti* has a very complex meaning and role; one of its meanings is that it is Krishna's child version ("stone child", as one of the believers said). Accordingly, they treat him as a child, bring him sweets and seek to fulfil his wishes. Another devotee also told us that the first servant of the temple (main *pujari*) had been offering sweets to Govardhan Lal since morning, in order to ensure his good mood so that he would not make rain and the pilgrimage would not be postponed. Over the following days I continued to hear this and many other stories about the mischievous Govardhan Lal; the same women told the story over and over, and relayed it to others who then passed it on. They even laughed at Govardhan Lal destroying the ice cream machine, because by doing so he also deprived himself of ice cream for a while. Repeating the Govardhan narratives is a tool aiding the comprehension of the *murti* being God, a means to developing faith; the same way the Krishna narratives that everyone knows by heart are repeated over and over again during the pilgrimages.

---

[29] Taste*, rasa*: typically Krishna term. According to the glossary of László Tóth-Soma *rasa* is: "a certain mood or attitude that can be tasted in the loving relationship with the Supreme Lord" (Tóth-Soma 1996, 404). The taste is a "spiritual feeling", a feeling of higher order that one can get and lose: "It is true, if you do *japa* even learning is different. I felt much more like it. Then you get the 'taste' of it that they described" (I. d.d. 2005).

[30] Farkas 2014.

The mischiefs of Govardhan Lal took place here and now; these stories can be told with the omniscience of an insider; meanwhile the perception and interpretation of an object as being God is continuously taking place. The lexical knowledge completed and charged with "empirical" and emotional content engenders self-evidence, and together they create faith.

References

Broo, Mans. 2003. *As Good as God. The Guru in Gaudíya Vaisnavismus.* Abo: Abo Akademi University Press.

Bhattacharya, S. C. 1995. *Vaishnavism in Eastern India.* Calcutta: University of Calcutta.

Brooks, Charles R. 1992. *The Hare Krishnas in India.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Clooney, Francis X. and Tony K. Stewardt. 2004. "Vaisnavism." In Sushil Mittal and Gene Thrusby, eds., *The Hindu World,* 162–85. New York: Routledge.

Dandekar, R. N. 1987. "Vaisnavism." In Mircea Eliade, ed-in-chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion.* 4:171. New York: Macmillian Publishing Company.

Farkas, Judit. 2004. "The role of the offered food in the life of the Hungarian Krishna-believers." *Food and History* 2 (1): 283–301.

–. 2009. "*Ardzsuna dilemmája." Reszocializáció és legitimáció egy magyar Krisna-hitű közösségben* ["Arjuna's Dilemma." Resocialization and Legitimation in a Hungarian Krishna-Community]. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

–. 2012. "'Végállomás, nem megy tovább.' Krisna-völgy jelentései, értelmezési alternatívái" ["Terminal point! You can't go further." Meanings of Krishna Valley and its alternatives of interpretation]. In Landgraf ILdikó és Nagy Zoltán, szerk., *Az elkerülhetetlen. Tanulmánykötet a 60 éves Vargyas Gábor tiszteletére,* 555–77. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

–. 2014. "'Isten mellett ülni a padon.' Tárgykultúra, lokalizáció és az autentikusság kérdései a somogyvámosi Krisna-völgy szenthely-koncepciójában" ["Sitting on a bench beside God." Questions of material culture, localization and autenticity in the "holy site"-concept of Krishna Valley]. In Árendás Zsuzsa és Szeljak György, szerk., *Vándorló tárgyak. Bevándorlók tárgykultúrája Magyarországon,* 195–228. Tabula könyvek 12. Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum.

–. 2019. "'From Krishna Valley to New Vraja-dhama': An Example of Tradition and Innovation in Gaudiya Vaishnavism." In Ágnes Hesz and Éva Pócs, eds., *Present and Past in the Study of Religion and Magic,* 213–28. Budapest: Balassi.

Farquhar, J. N. 1998. *Modern Religious Movements in India.* Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Flood, Gavin. 1995. "Hinduism, Vaisnavism, and ISKCON: Authentic Traditions or Scholarly Constructions?" *ISKCON Communication Journal* 3 (2): 5–15.

Kamarás, István. 1997. "Devotees of Krishna in Hungary. In Irena Borowik and Grzegorz Babiski, eds., *New Religions Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe,* 325–40. Kraków: Zaklad Wydawiczny Nomos.

–. 1998. *Krisnások Magyarországon* [Krishna believers in Hungary]. Budapest: Iskolakultúra.

–. 2000. "Conscience de Krishna: interpretation hongroise." *Social Compass* 47 (2): 221–40.

Kapitány, Ágnes és Kapitány, Gábor. 2014. "Alternatív stratégiák kulcselemei" [Key elements of alternative strategies]. *Magyar Lettre* 95 (Winter 2014/15): 65–71.

Mitchell, Jon P. 1997. "A Moment with Christ: The Importance of Feelings in the Analysis of Belief." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3 (1): 79–94.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. 2013. "Outline for an Ethnography of Doubt." In Mathijs Pelkmans, ed., *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies,* 1–42. London: I.B. Tauris.

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 1970. *Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.* N. p.: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

–. 1975. *The Nectar of Instruction.* N. p.: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Purusatraya, S. 1993. *The Four Vaisnava Sampradayas.* Vrindavana: VIHE.

Satsvarúpa, dása Goswami. 1999. *Prabhupada Nectar. Anecdotes from the life of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.* N. p.: Gouranga.

Suhotra, Swami. 1995. "Doubt and Certainty. In Krishna Consciousness." *ISKCON Communication Journal* 3 (2). http://content.iskcon.org/icj/3_2/3_2suhotraswami.html. Accessed 5 January 2016.

Tóth-Soma, László. 1996. *A Gaudíya-Vaisnava Vedanta Filozófia* [The philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnava Vedanta]. N. p: Torchlight Publishing Company.

GALLERY

Plate 1
Hugging the Tree of Wish
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 2
Family with a sacrificial goat at a Yezidi shrine feast
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 3
Circumambulating the "tent" of Shahsê Batê
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 4
Tying a rag around a wishing tree
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 5
Throwing the wishing cloth inside the Main Sanctuary in Lalish
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2012

Plate 6
Throwing the wishing cloth inside the Main Sanctuary in Lalish
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 7
Shrine guardian with wishing stones
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2011

Plate 8
Balancing stones in the cave of Abdul Qadir Gilani
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2013

Plate 9
Pilgrims at the Central Sanctuary of Sheikh Adi in Lalish
Photo by Eszter Spät, 2012

Plate 10
"Prophet dénes" in his home
Photo by László Koppány Csáji, 2014

Plate 11
Prophet dénes with his motor scooter
Photo by Prophet dénes, 2014

This volume grows out of an international conference, entitled "Faith and Doubt" that was held in 2015 at the Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Pécs, under the aegis of a European Research Council grant. The main goal of the conference was to approach the connections and disconnections of the relationship of doubt and faith from a variety of disciplinary, historical, and geographical perspectives. The authors belong to a wide range of disciplines from historians of antiquity and the early and high Middle Ages to scholars dealing with the early modern era and anthropologists and folklorists studying the contemporary period through field-based research.

The participants of the conference put the emphasis on the relationship of faith and doubt and on doubt's role in enhancing or undermining faith. We asked what kinds of forms did doubt take, how the believer gained or lost conviction, what happened when attitudes of belief and non-belief/unbelief clashed in different historical periods and finally to what degree could doubt be regarded an intrinsic part of faith or to be a modern phenomenon. The theme of the relationship of faith and doubt runs through the chapters uniting and dividing the papers in exciting ways. The third term of the title of the volume – knowledge – grows out of the papers as many of the authors discuss faith and doubt in relation to knowledge. Both faith and doubt can derive from knowledge or can be bolstered by it, lack of knowledge can lead to doubt, while acquiring it can reinforce faith. In several of the papers different knowledge systems are seen to coexist or clash and their resolution does not necessarily lead to the abandonment of belief altogether, rather it can lead to the rise of new beliefs (and new doubts).

The volume is divided into three sections. Part I contains a single paper discussing how ancient Greeks conceptualized faith and doubt, which at the time did not constitute the inevitable pair that it became under Christianity. Part II brings together cases from different time periods and geographical areas from cultures that belong to the circle of Abrahamic religions, more precisely, with a few exceptions, to Christianity, while the papers of Part III examine cases in which people employ explanatory frameworks that present alternatives to Christianity ranging from *táltos* beliefs as they can be traced in early modern witchcraft trials to "post-modern" angel beliefs.

FAITH, DOUBT AND KNOWLEDGE
IN RELIGIOUS THINKING