

# Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication



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Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-2231-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2231-2

Style edited by Andrew Rouse

Index prepared by Ágnes Maléth

Editorial assistant: Andrea Zombory

The publication of this volume has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement № 324214.

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## PREFACE

ÉVA PÓCS

The studies in the present volume are the proceedings of a highly successful international conference organised by the “East-West” Research Group on Religious Ethnology operating at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Pécs and held in December 2014.<sup>1</sup> The event was co-organised by the *Belief Narrative Committee* of the *International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR)*. The goal of the conference, and thus of the present volume, is to provide a more nuanced picture of the notions of body and soul held by the peoples of Europe; the soul concepts associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition and other religions and denominations; the alternative traditions preserved alongside Christianity in folklore collections, linguistic and literary records, and, through a handful of examples, of the notions of soul found among Asiatic peoples, including the Finno-Ugrian linguistic relations of the Hungarians. We also placed great stress on the connections between these notions and the beliefs related to death and the dead. The latter were addressed by speakers as the other central question of the conference. The third major focus was on questions of communication between the human world and the spirit world. Throughout, we strove to highlight the mutual connections of these three subject areas.

We were convinced that the time had come to offer a more nuanced picture than had existed before regarding the notions of the soul carried by the different peoples of Europe. The supposed “original” pre-Christian notions of the soul had to some extent fused with the Christian notions in every case, to varying extents and in different ways. On the other hand it must be borne in mind that the Christian notions themselves are far from homogeneous—indeed, partly rooted in Greek philosophy and partly in Jewish Old Testament ideas, they underwent continuous change from the church fathers until the most recent times, morphing through the varied ideal

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<sup>1</sup> In the frame of the ERC project № 324214: „East-West”. Vernacular religion on the boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: continuity, changes and interactions.

formations of monism/dualism/trialism, and depending on the changing notions concerning the destiny of the dead and of the body in the other world and before resurrection. Clerical notions helped sustain popular and non-Christian traditions in all places, but the way in which they influenced “popular” folklore beliefs varied from place to place.

This means that certain European notions of the soul represent the pre-Christian legacy of the European peoples, while others are based on universal human characteristics or were shaped by Christianity. This is one reason why we cannot think of unified, clearly outlined and definite notions of the soul, or of the existence of several types of soul clearly demarcated and serving different functions. It seems more accurate to reconcile ourselves to a vision of a motley, constantly fusing and changing collection of folklore and literary representations of different mentalities, ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. These certainly deserve to be mapped out in detail for each people and each culture, drafting a map of Europe which reveals the shared European characteristics and the unique local cultural traits alike.

This volume comprises a wide array of papers without methodological, temporal or geographic limitations from the fields of folklore studies, anthropology and cultural history, comparative, historical and textual philological analyses, works presenting the findings of archive studies or field work in or outside of Europe, as well as analyses of religious phenomena in a broader context of religious ethnology or the history of religion. Besides representatives of religious anthropology, ethnography and folklore studies, the volume also features experts from religious studies and psychiatry. Our explorations focused on the roles which notions of the soul and the spirit world played in the everyday life, religion and mentality of various communities; we also focused on their folklore and literary representations, as well as the narrative metaphors, motifs, topoi and genres of notions of the soul and of supernatural communication, along with questions of the relationship between narratives and religious notions. The researchers published in this volume have managed to eradicate certain “white spots” on the map of scholarship.

The papers published in *Part 1* of the volume discuss the problematics of the connections of body and soul. It is well known that under the influence of the Christian dualism of body and soul, anthropological and folklore research had put about a crudely simplistic notion which swept away considerations of a rich ancient Greek heritage of literature, philosophy and linguistics; that studies into the records of the mythological contribution of various European nations have been few and far between; that research has paid insufficient attention to the extremely nuanced and

varied notions of the soul held by non-Christian peoples outside of Europe (for instance, in the Hungarian context this refers to our Ob-Ugrian linguistic relations), or that scholarship has largely overlooked the fact that there are peripheral regions of Europe where this kind of material is available to this very day for collection as living folklore. As regards notions of *free souls*, *shadow souls*, *alter egos* or *second bodies* which separate themselves from the physical body, European anthropologists, particularly the researchers of German mythology or of the pre-Christian Hungarian religion, considered these the pagan legacy of their own people, which survived alongside or in opposition to Christian notions of the body and the soul. Our volume adds nuance to this overly simplistic vision.

The studies in *Part 1* include *Vilmos Voigt's* work on the soul notions of the Finno-Ugrian peoples, and *Virág Dyekiss's* article on the ideas of the Nghanasan. *Daiva Vaitkevičienė* speaks about contemporary Lithuanian rites surrounding the *shadow soul*, while *Judit Farkas* reports on her research among Hungarian Krishna believers. *Kata Zsófia Vincze's* article offers us a glimpse into those aspects of the relationship of body and soul which concern sexual mores in the framework of Judaist laws, regulations and customs of marriage, reaching as far as twenty-first-century interpretations. A paper by *Willem de Blécourt* reveals how deeply rooted were the notions of the second body in Western European textual folklore, even if today they no longer represent living notions of the soul and exist merely as narrative stereotypes. Several Eurasian peoples associate ideas of the free soul with certain traditions of helping or guarding spirits. *Francesca Matteoni* contributes new parallels to previously known Eastern European and Hungarian data from the sphere of “witch animals” that were once popular throughout Europe.

The objective of *Part 2* of the volume is to shed light on the connections between notions of the soul and faith in life after death. In the traditional communities of Europe, notions concerning the process and phases of dying, the journey of the soul to the other world with its various stations, as well as the other world and life in that world abound in great variety, even in the modern period, along with the related rituals. Shared traits are the ideas and prescribed rites of life after death common in the Jewish and Christian faiths, but communities of all denominations also entertain extremely anti-Christian notions and frequently practise alternative rituals, too. Also prevalent are various non-Christian representations of souls that live on after death—benevolent and malevolent spirit creatures, or occasionally even demons who assault humans. Examples quoted from Siberia by *Tatjana Minniyahmetova* for instance shed light on the fact that traditions of a number of different religions may peacefully live on

alongside each other and “pagan” traditions. *Suzana Marjanić* cites examples from the folklore of the modern period to show that the spirit creatures that emerge from the souls of the dead must be considered not only as archaic “pagan” relics but as elements of a pan-European Christian culture.

Contemporary beliefs held by Christian believers simultaneously accommodate Christian and lay, non-Christian notions of the soul and the other world, as well as of the spiritual and bodily aspects of life after death. More closely: the body continues to live on alongside the soul; the death of the body and the soul are not a one-time event but a step-by-step process of transition from physical reality into a spiritual existence. All of these are varied forms of communication with the dead, substantiated by accounts about the “returning” dead who come to assist or who take care of their family which are known from the folklore data collections of all the peoples of Europe and which are cited by a number of papers in this volume. Almost as numerous are data of the “evil dead” of folklore collections—of souls who never made it to the other world but instead linger in a state of limbo, or even of demons who assault their own family. These malevolent creatures were mostly the unburied dead turned demons—people who had drowned in water, died on the battlefield, died unbaptised or who had committed suicide. These individuals had died outside of their own community and thus could not expect to be buried in the village cemetery. The same kind of destiny awaited individuals whom the church itself had denied the ritual of a proper burial, or people whose funeral had been disturbed by something (as in the case of vampires). In each of these cases the underlying idea is that rituals which help the dead make the transition to a new, spiritual status are also rituals for re-interpreting the manner in which they belong to the family community. This is exemplified by a study by *Éva Pócs* which discusses how dead individuals excluded from the community can turn into assaulting demons. Such malevolent demons were known even by the ancient Greeks, as is shown by *Anna Tóth’s* article—a text which focuses on the unburied dead who reappear as demons of vendetta. *Kaarina Koski* writes about another aspect of life after death: the dead who live on in the shape of specific “cemetery spirits”. She cites examples of this phenomenon, apparently also a universal trait, from the folklore of Finnish Lutherans, offering a fine analysis of the specific local functions of these figures. *Vilmos Keszeg’s* paper approaches the subject of life after death from a more profane angle—he looks into the stereotypes of the dead and their “eternal life” as they are recalled on bereavement notices.

*Part 3* of the book comprises writings about beliefs and rites related to so-called *double beings*. These beliefs represent a special, archaic pre-

Christian variant of soul notions, once all-pervasive in Europe even until the not very distant past. Werewolves, vampires, witches, night-time pressing demons with names such as *Mahr/mara/mora/nightmare*, and fairies all belong to this category. These creatures were believed to be humans who also had a spiritual alter ego which they could turn into. This subject matter has a clear place in our volume: in the beliefs of European peoples these figures, partly human, partly spiritual, were also spirits of the dead; they often appeared as the dead variants, “ancestors”, spiritual guardians or helping spirits of living humans. Their living variants were attributed special spiritual qualities—through their free soul or alter ego they were able to change shape as they liked, or even access the other world. This was not so much the Christian other world as a kind of alternative earthly existence, the other world of fairies or witches. In other words, we are talking about mythical beings who can also act as spirits of the dead and whose notions are closely tied in with European beliefs of souls, death and the dead. The papers of this chapter offer us insights into the colourful world of these spirits, a world which is mostly extinct and exists primarily in folklore narratives. *Julian Goodare* and *Lizanne Henderson* write about the folklore and literary traditions of the Scottish world of fairies, while *Sandis Laime* offers us an account of the possible origins of the Livonian werewolves. Vampires are double beings which are at one and the same time dead individuals who had been excluded from the community and therefore assault it, or demonic alter egos of living persons. Examples of vampires and their representations in oral narratives, films and works of literature can be found in the contributions by *Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković* and *María Tausiet*.

*Part 4* is dedicated to communication with the spirit world. The writings in this section enumerate a number of typical examples for creating contact with spirit creatures, even if they cannot possibly cover every method that has occurred in the present and past of Europe. The otherworldly journeys of the souls that depart from the body, and the subject of the dead who appear to humans, are both perennial topics, but the character of these spirit figures has been transformed considerably over time and New Age spiritualism has rendered their ranks even more varied.

A generally known technique for seeking contact with the spirit world that has been practised widely in the past and present of Europe is that of falling into a trance, i.e. attaining an altered state of mind through some trance inducing technique or object. Some of these techniques are related to circular movements. *Mirjam Mencej*'s comprehensive study inventories the variants of this behaviour across a number of different cultures. *Christa Agnes Tuczay* enlists medieval German examples of the “soul journey” in

her paper. Consciously and deliberately seeking contact of this kind with dead people who have made it to the other world is a universal human phenomenon which stretches across the past history of Europe. This is the subject matter of the vast visionary literature of medieval Europe, and one noted example, the *journey of Ramón de Perellós*, is analysed here by *Gordana Galić-Kakkonen*. This pilgrim had made his way to the purgatory of Saint Patrick of Ireland.

A different set of aspects of communication with the dead is explored in a study written by *Alejandra Guzmán Almagro* on the practice of exorcism, a ritual which aims to expel ghosts and evil spirits. Possession also appears as a form of communication in two other studies concerning two non-European peoples: *Ilaria Micheli* offers us insights into the lives of certain African tribes, while *Sarolta Tatár* talks about the Buryat. In the closing essay in the volume, *Vilmos Tánzos* introduces us to the religious world view of a Moldavian *Csángó* man. He explores the various registers of the world view, wondering which of them includes the possibility and manifestations of sacred communication.

*Julia Gyimesi*, as an expert on psychiatry, wrote about the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis. The aim of her paper is to outline the basic features of spiritualism, psychical research and psychology in Hungary at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some key figures of the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis—Sándor Ferenczi and István Hollós—were interested in the question of spiritualistic phenomena and telepathy, and tried to understand seemingly supernatural phenomena in psychoanalytic terms. *Julia Gyimesi* reveals the connection between spiritualism, parapsychology and the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis.

Without doubt this volume has been unable to cover all of the possible variations of the connections between body and soul, life and death, man and the spirit world, and has instead offered but a handful of examples from this rich world. Certain of these articles have reinforced already known facts of scholarship, presenting previously unrecorded regional, ethnic or denominational variants of universal religious notions. Others have reported on the existence of some formerly unknown idea, belief or ritual practice. The temporal dimensions of this world are extremely broad and the passing of time has kept the rituals also in a constant state of change. The papers included here offer us numerous examples not only of the new concepts of New Age spiritualism but also the modified, novel ideas of the canonised religions and the transformations of their rites. On the other hand, we also experience a striking lack of change. In the context of these fundamental existential questions “even the ancient Greeks” had stated a number of ideas

and claims that are identical to the notions of modern man. As the present volume testifies, despite the obvious differences in approach and perspective, the scholar of ancient and medieval religions and the contemporary anthropologist will give strikingly similar answers.



# **1. BODY, SOUL, DOUBLE**

# ON HUNGARIAN LÉLEK “SPIRIT, SOUL” AND THE FINNO-UGRIC “SOUL” OR “BREATH” OR SIMPLY “STEAM”

VILMOS VOIGT

It is a well-known fact among linguists that the common Hungarian word *lélek* “soul” originates from an old Finno-Ugric family of words. The connection was attested initially more than two hundred years ago by a Hungarian scholar, Sámuel Gyarmathy: *Affinitas linguae Hungaricae cum lingvis Fennicae originis grammaticè demonstrata*. (Gyarmathy 1799, 93, 264, 267, 279); and later, similarly by the Finnish linguist M. A. Castrén (first in the journal *Suomi* 1844, 32; and then also in his comparative Ostyak grammar, in the corrected version: *Versuch einer ostjakischen Sprachlehre, nebst kurzem Wörterverzeichnis*. St. Petersburg, 1858). Now it is a statement common to all Hungarian, Finnish, and Finno-Ugric etymological dictionaries.

In terms of comparative studies of religion, the common Hungarian noun *lélek* (where the *-k* is a nomen-derivative suffix) reflects a kind of dual concept, with the exact meaning “breath”, from which the meaning “soul” is straightforwardly understandable. The other pillar of the dualism is the concept of “shadow soul” (*Schattenseele*), which will be treated here later with rich data and a thorough analysis (See Paulson).

However, if we carefully list the corresponding Finno-Ugric words, another striking feature can be observed.

The entry in the comparative etymological dictionary (Rédei 1986, 247–8), with abundant references to earlier publications of reconstructed basic Finno-Ugric words, **lew13** shows the following correspondences (I quote in shortened form and with simpler orthography): the Finnish *löyly* “bath heat; vapour, steam” (from which the Lappish word *lew’lu* “steam-bath” is derived)—Estonian *leil* “vapour, steam”; especially in the room of the steam-bath—Lappish *liew’lâ* “steam, e.g. in a bath house”—Wotyak, Syryan “breath”. The Ob-Ugrian (i.e. Ostyak and Vogul) words refer to “breath, soul”. Since all the pertinent Hungarian data mean “to breathe” and “soul”, it would be very easy to say that from the Finno-Ugric vocabulary of **lew13** only the Finnish words are significant in comparative

religion, whereas Lappish and Estonian words connected with “steam-bath” might have been developed only later, thanks to the popular development of the famed North European “*sauna-culture*”. Among the other members of the Uralic group of languages (i.e. among the Samoyeds) the same (Finno-Ugric) word has not been recorded (see Kulonen 1995, 131–2). However, there does exist in Yukagir a noun *lul* = “smoke”.

If we turn to some of the historical sources, the problem is rather more complicated.

The eminent Hungarian linguist of the twentieth century, János Balázs, studying the family of old Hungarian words *reg/rejt* “to be in ecstasy; to hide”, has hinted at a special connection of the nouns with the meanings “heat” and “vapour”. In several papers, first in Hungarian, then in German (and finally in English; Balázs 1968) he stressed the significance of vapour in one of the very first eyewitness descriptions of West Siberian shamanism.

An influential, and later sometimes neglected figure in early Russian imperial ethnography, Vassily Fedorovich Zuyev (В. Ф. Зуев—1754-1794), conducted in 1771-1772 an officially planned research trip along the river Ob (as a member in the “great Siberian expedition” led by the German born scholar, Peter Simon Pallas, one of the most important members of the then just emerging Imperial Russian Academy). Zuyev’s field notes were widely used and transformed for the great summarising work of the expedition led by Pallas (in German), but his original fieldwork descriptions about the Ostyak and Nenets peoples from the Berezovo district were published only centuries later (Zuyev 1947). In Chapter 11 (*ibid.*, 43–50) Zuyev describes the activities of the shamans. In the title of the chapter, Zuyev mentions the Nenets (Samoyed) term *tadybe* or “shaman”; however, his fieldwork-based description of the shaman’s *séance* is about the Ostyaks (Khanty).

Balázs (also quoting former reports and summaries concerning Ob-Ugrian, and Samoyed “shamanism”), finally refers to P. S. Pallas (Pallas 1776, 62), where we read the following: “The Ostyak sorcerers use a hand-drum like most Siberian shamans. During the trance they are said to enter convulsions, ... until they [i.e. their public] imagine that they see blue smoke appearing above the sorcerer”. (In the German Original: “bis in ihrer Einbildung ein blauer Rauch über dem Zauberer entsteht”.) Balázs (quoting a Hungarian Finno-Ugric linguist, Bernát Munkácsi 1889, 285–92) refers, furthermore, to an earlier, similar account by a Swedish prisoner-of-war in Russia, J. B. Müller, who in his work (Müller 1720) also speaks about the shamans of the Ostyak, whose *séance* lasts “bis ein blauer Dunst, welcher für den wahrsagenden Geist gehalten werde, erscheine” (Munkácsi 1889, 287). There is no doubt about the ethnic relevance of Müller’s report, who participated in the (second) “missionary”

campaign in West Siberia (before 1715) led by the hard-working monk Filofey Leshchinsky (a Polish convert from Roman Catholicism to the Russian Orthodox Church and therefore certainly bigoted), with the aim of baptising all the Ostyaks and Voguls. Zuyev and Müller were eyewitness observers; on the other hand, Pallas never visited the regions where the Samoyeds and Ostyaks lived. Munkácsi has already made the supposition that the relevant descriptive sentences in the third volume of Pallas' work go back to Zuyev's fieldwork notes (as to the only and ultimate source).

In Zuyev's description, the fortune-telling Ostyak shaman (ворожей or волхв "magician") lies on the ground beside a big fire which is burning in the tent, uttering unintelligible words, while waiting for the devil, who gives him the required knowledge. The rest of those present are making a terrible noise around the shaman, until "a blue mist or smoke appears above the shaman" ("пока над ним синей туман или дым явится"). Then the shaman chases the others away, but himself continues in the smoke (весь в дыму стоит) from the smouldering fire (Balázs 1968, 60–1; referring to Zuyev 1947, 45). According to Balázs, the trance of the Ostyak shaman was thus brought on, not by eating hallucinogen fungi or by drinking alcohol, but by inhaling the "blue smoke or vapour". After a careful search for Siberian comparative data, Balázs concludes the following: it is common for pine twigs, leaves, bark, or grease, butter or other food-stuff to be thrown into the fire, producing a specific smell and density of smoke. This phenomenon gives us a good etymology for the Hungarian words *rév/rejt* "heat, hide" and hence "falling into ecstasy".

A kettle with boiling water by the fireside was very often observable at a Central Asian shaman's séance. There are several references to the shamans inhaling the vapour during the performance. In his much-loved study, the noted Swiss philologist, Karl Meuli (Meuli 1935) analysed the text in book IV, chapter 73 of Herodote's *History* (446 BC), where the Greek historian describes the funeral (or more precisely purificative) ceremonies of the Scythians. There are stakes fixed in the ground in such a way that they incline towards one another, around which pieces of felt are stretched as tightly as possible. Inside this booth they put a dish into which a number of red-hot stones are placed. Then the Scythians take some hemp-seeds, and creeping under the felt coverings, throw them down upon the red-hot stones; immediately the seeds begin to smoke, and give out steam unequalled by any Greek steam-bath (Balázs 1968, 65).

Balázs adds further arguments, for instance the archaeological finds in Pazyryk in the High Altai Mountains, where similar "sweat-lodge" constructions have been excavated in the *kurgans* of the Mountain Scythians, who lived there in the fifth century BC. He refers to the first

available reports of the excavations by S. I. Rudenko (Balázs quotes Rudenko's summarising book in Russian from 1953), reaffirmed by later finds. (See the many recent publications about the Scythian antiquities. I do not go into detail here.)

According to Balázs, the explanation of the “blue vapour” element of the Ostyak shaman's séance is simple. Sudatories have been known among the Slavs, Germans, Greeks, Macedonians and others since time immemorial. The Scythian purification booth, as well as the Ostyak smoke tent, are both “sweat lodges”, akin to today's Finnish *sauna*, North American sweat lodges, and the traditional Japanese steam-bath.<sup>1</sup> The Hungarian words *rejt/révül* (with the meaning “heat, to faint”) may reflect the traditional shamanistic “sudatory” techniques among old Finno-Ugric peoples. If this assumption is valid, we could reinterpret, to some extent, the etymologies of Finnish *löyly* “heated vapour” and Hungarian *lélek* “breath” > “vapour” and “soul” together. Since in cold winter it is an everyday experience—even in Hungary, and certainly in Siberia—to see the “breath” as “vapour”, and the historical semantics of “soul” also as “steam” seems to be perfectly acceptable.

I do not want to conceal that such a daring historical-linguistic conclusion is not without its uncertainties. In northern Europe, among Russians and non-Russians alike, the “steam-bath” is an old institution and has been known at least since the early Middle Ages (Vahros 1966). One might think that the Finnish (Estonian and Lappish) heat-bath culture was borrowed from there and does not in fact have primordial Finno-Ugric parallels. As for the Ostyak data, we do not know too much about the recent form and history of Ostyak “heat-tents”. Between Scythians and Ostyaks or Hungarians there are thousands of miles and years without any connecting data. Neither are there any traces here of “old Hungarian” steam-baths. *Gőz*, the common Hungarian word for “steam”, has no clear etymology (Benkő 1967, 1092–3), and looking at its phonemic structure, it might not be derived from the Finno-Ugric word stock. Curiously, János Apáczai Csere in his Hungarian Encyclopedia (1653) used the word *lélek* for “steam” (Apáczai 1653, 134–5)<sup>2</sup> but this is a *hapax legomenon*. Another important Hungarian word, *pára* (“smaller steam, vapour, soul”), also used as a pitiful reference to animals, is a medieval loanword from a Slavic language (Benkő 1967, 1092–3). (If we analyse minutely the

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<sup>1</sup> For an interesting comparison of American Indian, Japanese and Finnish sweat-baths: Pentikäinen 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Seventh part, XIII: 169. “A páráktól kövér füstöktől és lelkektől, mellyek a föld mélységes és tágas barlangjaiban rekedtek” [“smokes rich in steam and spirits enclosed in deep and large subterranean caves”]. The orthography was simplified.

expression *szegény pára* “poor steam” for “animal” it can be explained by the Christian classification of souls of humans versus animals.) Today both words are used as terms of traditional Hungarian bath culture, but do not indicate a pre-conquest (*i.e.* before AD 896) stratum. The common Hungarian word for “bath” is *fürdő*. Most probably it is a derivation from the verb *forog* “to roll”, suggesting a bathing technique similar to the birds, pigs, hippopotami (etc.) who roll themselves in water and mud.<sup>3</sup> The archaeology of early Hungarians has not as yet produced any traces of “sweat-bath” constructions. Some archaeologists (e.g. Gyula László 1944, 439) have suggested as parallels the “leather-covered sweat-huts” from the South Russian steppe, and have referred to the rich bathing traditions of the early Bulgarian rulers, described by Byzantine sources, which also mention the “leather bathtubs” of early Hungarians. All of that is a possibility, and not a proof, and does not add to, nor derive from the Finno-Ugric etymology of “vapour, smoke, breath”, especially in its religious context.

There is no space here to describe the entire history of the “bathing culture” in Hungary. One thing is clear: bath buildings have existed in Hungary since the age of Roman Pannonia. The Ottoman invasion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries introduced the Turkish bath system. But we lack any reliable reference to Hungarian steam-bathing.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from what has been said before, that the ancient Finno-Ugric word *lew13* has the formal meaning of “a kind of vapour”, as can be seen in exhalation (both of humans and animals), steam, smoke, etc. As for the several meanings of the word, there is no borderline between them. A more general and more sophisticated meaning for “soul” was specified later. Every Siberian knew how inhaled breath-vapour is visible on cold days. When they attended the shaman’s *séance*, they were waiting for the appearance of a “blue steam”; furthermore, they might have thought that

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<sup>3</sup> For the origin of the pertinent Hungarian words, see any good etymological dictionaries, e.g. Zaicz 2006, 237; s.v. “fürdik”.

<sup>4</sup> See the summarising entry by Magyar and Kelényi 2005. Ákos Palla in an excellent article (1958) analyses an anecdotic reference. Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos in his lesser-known book (usually quoted as *De cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*) mentions that for a reception at the imperial court a servant should bring for the *lutron turkikón* or a *skythikón tzerga* a leather basin (*kinztergés dermatines*). The Greek terms were translated in Hungarian historical works as “Turkish base” and “Scythian felt”, assuming that they originally belonged to the steam-tent bath of early Hungarians. In fact, there is no reference in the text to bathing, and the Greek *tzerga* is a Turkish word for “felt”. Similarly, the Hungarian *cserga/cserge* is a Turkish loanword, again with the meaning “felt”.

the “soul” of the shaman was flying away in the form of “blue steam”. They observed the phenomenon of the “last breath” too, though they could not “see” the soul flying away from the dead person.

Ivar Paulson (1958) has expressed the view that among Uralic peoples, similarity and conservatism among “soul” concepts is striking, while on the other hand, the cults of the dead are more varied, given their ecologic and social differences. In the dualistic system of soul concepts, **iewl3** refers to “Atemseele” and “Körperseele”—this soul is visible through breathing and is bound to the (human or animal) body. On the other hand, there is another “soul”—the “Freiseele” or “Totenseele”, where the soul is not bound to the body, and is, of course, as such the soul of the dead person. The common Finno-Ugric word for it is **iće ~ iše**, which is known (sometimes in derivatives) in the Finnish, Vepsian, Estonian, Lappish, Cheremis, Zyrian, Ostiak and Vogul languages (Rédei 1986, 79–80). According to some linguists, the Hungarian *iz, isz*, “a kind of malignant disease”, belongs to the same etymology. The word in Balto-Finnic, and some Permian and Volga Finnic languages became a reflexive pronoun, with the meaning “itself”. It is missing from the Votyak and Mordvin languages. Among the Ob-Ugrians its first meaning is “shadow”, and hence “soul”. The Samoyed languages have different words for the same meaning. Whether the Hungarian [*iz*] is really akin to that group of words is possible, but also questionable. Especially among the Ostyak, there are stories about [*es, is*], telling of its “shadow” and “revenant” character. In some cases, a man has two different souls: one of them being the [*es, is*]. All the narratives fit well into the dualistic soul system.

There is no reason to doubt that the primary meaning of the word **iće ~ iše** is connected with “shadow”. (It is from that fact, that comparative religion developed the term, “Schattenseele”.) Given this interpretation, it is evident that shadow is both closely connected with the person, and at the same time “separable” from it. Another truism is that dead persons are thought not to have a shadow. The cult and fear of shadow, or losing one’s shadow, is a worldwide folklore motif.<sup>24</sup> It is easy to understand why that special kind of soul could become a reflexive and strengthening pronoun. (The Latin *ipse* has a similar semasiology.) When, in Hungarian, people use the word *árnyékvilág* (“Diesseits”, “this world”) as opposed to *másvilág* (“Jenseits”, “the other world”) they are following the Christian world view, which stresses that we live in a temporal world of “shadow” (*umbra*) as opposed to the “eternal” one. This use of the word “shadow” has nothing to do with Finno-Ugric or Siberian concepts of the soul.

As for the historic development or priority between the two main Finno-Ugric words for “soul”, there is no clear suggestion, nor is one very necessary. The reason for this is the general development of beliefs.

In Hungarian there are no traces of ancient soul dualism. Even if we accept for the historical semantics of the word [iz] that there are changes of its meaning, from “shadow” to “soul of the dead”, then “malevolent spirit” and finally to “demon of a disease”, hence “name of the disease”, all the semantic development happened long before there existed written data of Hungarian language and beliefs. Still, it is noticeable that [iz] occurs in curses: *egyen meg az iz / egyen meg a fene / egyen meg a süly* etc. say: “let that disease destroy you” (literally: “eat you up”)!

As for “shadow”, the common and widespread Hungarian word is *árnyék* (Benkő 1967, 179; see also Berrár and Károly 1984, 89, also with curious meanings for names of various plants). It might be a loanword and a compound word, but until now nobody has been able to find a plausible etymology for it. It is clear from the source material that in medieval Hungary its meaning was: “a covered edifice”, more precisely perhaps a kind of tent, a “hut of leaves”, which produces a “shadow”. Shadow lore in Hungarian folklore is known, but it is less developed than in several other European folk traditions. (See, for instance, the above-mentioned expression *árnyékvilág*.)

On the other hand, Christian connotations of the word are well known. From comparative religion we know that in Hungary, too, the word “refrigerium” had the meaning of “protective cover, shade”, and hence “religious belief”<sup>5</sup>.

Hungarian data point to *lélek* alone becoming a kind of “spirit”, too. It is also used in the scholarly sense of “Seelenwanderung”. This meaning is current to this day. *Lélek* was a possible name for a “spirit”, and generally accepted even for the “Holy Spirit” in Hungarian Christian terminology. As early as in the oldest written text in Hungarian, in the *Halotti beszéd* (“Funeral Sermon”, written about 1195) the word *lélek* means the “soul of the dead person” in the full Christian context. Here, I am not going to embark upon a description of the Christian semantics of the word *lélek*.

My message is simple: for any concept of “spirits” there must be a basic concept of “soul”. The Hungarian word *lélek* has a long history and interesting antecedents and, at the same time, shows the continuous capacity to absorb the development of religious ideas.

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<sup>5</sup> See Marót 1937, whose study was written in accordance with the classical study by Van der Leeuw 1936.



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# EYES, HAIR AND SINGING: SOUL CONCEPTS IN THE BELIEF SYSTEM OF SIBERIAN NGANASANS

VIRÁG DYEKISS

The Nganasans (referring to themselves as *nya*) are Samoyedic people inhabiting the Taymyr Peninsula in northern Siberia. Their belief system is characterised by soul concepts that are closely connected to body parts. This is a well-known common characteristic of small northern groups. The Nganasans were traditionally nomadic reindeer hunters, following the route of wild reindeer for most part of the year.

Their knowledge of Russian developed slowly. Today we can still find some Nganasans who do not speak Russian at all. This is the reason why ethnologists Boris Dolgih and Andrej Popov, who visited the area in the 1930s, could find hardly any Russian-speaking Nganasan. Therefore, they had to conduct their research in Dolgan and, with the help of an interpreter, in very poor Russian.

In the 1970s, Galina Grachova collected folklore with a special focus on the concepts of death. Her experience was that Nganasans used the Russian word *dusha*, meaning “soul”, for “heart”, “blood”, “breath”, “eye” and other body parts in the correct context (Grachova 1983, 58–69). However, in their books neither Grachova nor Yuri Simchenko, who conducted several research projects among Nganasans, mention which particular soul qualities are attributed to the different body parts. When examining the traditional soul concept of Nganasans, they use the terminology of Ivar Paulson (Paulson 1958), who carried out an extensive study in Siberia. Grachova and Simchenko observe the appearance of the shadow soul (*sidanka*), the breath soul (*bachu*) and the collective soul (*tinsie*) that connect the members of the community. They only touch upon the connection between the body and these soul concepts, even though the folklore material clearly indicates that the perception, the awareness and the concept of the body play a predominant role in soul concepts.

In this study, the author analyses soul concepts present in the Nganasan folklore narratives. The Lithuanian researcher Labanauskas Kazis, and

Russian linguist Valentin Gusev with their colleagues all contributed to a text corpus in Nganasan, which serves as the most important source for this study. The texts, accurately recorded for linguistic analysis, together with a precise translation and a special dictionary, tripled the size of the accessible Nganasan corpus. After a thorough, critical review, folklore texts recorded in Russian can also be used as source material. Thus, Galina Grachova's field notes and the published works of Dolgih's folklore research from the 1930s and the collections of Simchenko from the 1970s and 1980s can also be included in the analysis. The folklore texts, used as sources, mainly include myths, epic songs and some narratives about famous shamans. The most important texts are the long heroic epics, the *sitabis*. These belong to the genre of epic songs, and have recitative, sung and also spoken parts. All the texts used for the analysis are based on the lifestyle the Nganasans led before they settled. Thus, they represent their traditional worldview. Since these stories were considered to be sacred, their main elements changed very slowly over time. The same conclusion can be drawn from the similarity of the various texts.

From the contrasting data, it is clear that Nganasans did not have a unified set of beliefs about the human soul and life. Therefore, we are only able to draw a broad picture.

Based on the folklore texts, the soul that gives life to the body is closely linked to specific organs. The most important connections concern the head, especially the eyes and the hair, and another set of organs, namely the heart-stomach-skin- (spine?) complex, which are also closely linked to celestial bodies.

### **Soul Concepts and the Head—The Role of the Hair, Eyes, Mouth, Ears and Head as a Whole**

The eyes (*sejmy*) have primary importance when studying the concept of the soul. The eyes change at the very moment the soul leaves the body. Almost the first thing that newborns do is to open their eyes. Eyes, therefore, are a symbol of life. In mythical times, Mother Earth gave animals and people eyes. This concept is present in the thanksgiving ceremony of hunters, when they place the eyes of their prey on the ground in order to ensure further success in hunting. Every animal has eyes, and so they also have a soul. Due to the creative power attributed to the eyes, it is forbidden for women to look into the eyes of the captured animal because with the animal's last breath, its soul could either enter the woman and make her pregnant, or blind her. There are two contrasting possible punishments for breaking the taboo: receiving an evil soul or losing one's

own. The eyes of the reindeer only have importance at the moment of death. On the other hand, due to their specific lifestyle, the eyes of carnivores (especially wolves) are mentioned more frequently and with admiration. In this way, Nganasans encourage animals to help them (NT-87\_7perevalov.doc), since animals may have better eyesight than people.

The size of the eyes, and their presence or absence are important signs in myths. Evil creatures of the underworld have narrow, almost invisible, deep-set eyes or no eyes at all. Creatures with no eyes have a big mouth in order to eat people or breathe illness upon them. Kind gods have large, sometimes fiery eyes. The power of a god can be marked by the number of eyes covering his/her clothes (NT-87\_7perevalov.doc).<sup>1</sup> The first accessories of new shamans are their headdresses, which are sometimes covered with fringes. The eye symbol on the headband represents the shaman's special eye that can look into the distance. With this eye, the shaman can find people who are lost in a snowstorm, and it is also a passage between the living world and the underworld.<sup>2</sup> Some people, heroes and others, can influence their environment with one glance, because their shining eyes are more powerful than those of the ordinary human. This is best demonstrated by the story of the protagonist of one of the heroic songs. Seu Melangana's name in Nenets means *sparkling-eyed* (T\_SeuMelangana.doc). It is surprising that he cannot use the power of his eyes in every situation, only when he is facing the enemy. In such a case, his sparkling eyes blind the enemy so much that it chooses to run. Ordinary human eyes cannot establish a direct connection with the supernatural. In folklore texts, glitter and strong light always indicate the presence of the supernatural as something that eyes cannot bear.<sup>3</sup>

Expressions with the eye tell us more about various emotional-physical states. In the heroic songs, being drunk is always depicted as a negative state, as a loss of strength. The drunken eye causes blurry vision and impaired judgement skills (T\_SeuMelangana.doc). Nganasans express insanity by saying that the person's "eyes don't see", the person uses the nose and the mouth instead, which is characteristic of evil creatures. When somebody gets frightened, he/she will have "only one eye left" (K-99\_ngadea.doc).<sup>4</sup> In some stories, the eyes leave the body if the person

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<sup>1</sup> The [hero] has eyes squinting and blinking on his armour.

<sup>2</sup> This idea can be very explicit in myths: the eye that has been cut out becomes a lake with a silver mountain in the middle. After the hero had accomplished his quest, it becomes an eye again (K-06\_syn).

<sup>3</sup> In the heroic song, the Basa ngoybue, Sungirl's husband warns his parents not to visit him for some time because the light would blind them. 367.

<sup>4</sup> K-99\_ngadea.

wishes. The most interesting story on this subject is about a man who regularly plays hide-and-seek with his eyes until one day his wife hides the eyes which, disembodied, begin to shout (VL-08\_sejmitu.doc). Closing the eyes can hide a person from dangerous creatures. This is a method used by the hunter who doesn't want to be seen by a bear (NS-08\_ngarka.doc). Eyes can also become dirty which results in white plaque or cataracts.

After death, eyes have no more function in this world. The disappearance of the light in the eyes is a sign of death. The process of dying is also described by phrases with the eyes. According to Nganasan wording, at the moment of death, the eyes close or "freeze and harden" (K-97\_djajku.doc).<sup>5</sup> As opposed to light, frost and the frozen landscape are characteristics of the underworld. Light fading in the eyes at the moment of death must have been a general experience among Nganasans. Not only because of their hunting lifestyle, but also during animal sacrifices, they customarily killed dogs and domesticated reindeer by strangling them; they saw when their eyes changed after taking the last breath. When eyes close and are covered with red cloth at the end of life, they open again in the Realm of the Dead (Num1.doc). This transition can be disturbed if the funeral ceremony is not conducted properly (for example if white cloth is used instead of red), resulting in the dead person's eyes not opening in the underworld (Simchenko 1996, 105).

As we can see, the eyes are closely linked to breath, consciousness and birth. Hair had a different role in the Nganasans' worldview. Both men and women treated their thick hair with reindeer fat. Divided in the middle, they wore it in two tight braids with one lock of hair taken from the middle, twisted then attached to the side of the head. Nganasan hair ornaments included metal decorations, discs and chains (Popov 1984, 129–30). The discs represented the Sun, while the chains represented its invisible connection with the planets (Grachova 1983, 58). Hair was considered to be a link (*bunu*) that connected them with Mother Moon or in other texts with Mother Sun, and was also a link among the members of the clan. The thread connected to the Moon is formed at birth. When a person dies, this string is cut by the Moon Mother, or an evil spirit bites it in two (Grachova 1983, 64).

The Nganasan word for clan, *tinsie*, is also the word used for this thread. During the courtship process, young people exchange their hair ornaments as a sign of attachment (Kino-06\_babushka-Turgale). The connection among the members of the clan becomes especially important

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<sup>5</sup> K-97\_djajku His eyes have long been frozen. 95