

Shirts, Cloaks and Nudity: Data on the Symbolic Aspects of Clothing*

Éva Pócs

This study discusses the beliefs and rites related to spinning, textiles, robes, and nudity that markedly outline some coherent symbolic systems within European belief systems. Their deep structure consists in the symbolic series of oppositions of *nature-culture*, *raw-cooked*, and *life-death*. In this binary universe, nature is characterized by the absence of cultural processes and products: ploughing, sowing, domesticating wild animals, the furnace, smithery, the iron, spinning and weaving, clothes, and Christian sacraments. The paper will discuss how the “raw” world of nature was tamed; how human beings, born as natural beings, were transformed into social beings, in the course of which the main role among the basic working processes of human culture is attributed to spinning and weaving.

KEYWORDS: spinning, clothing, nudity, culture, nature, raw, cooked

This study discusses the beliefs and rites related to shirts, cloaks, spinning and weaving, textiles, robes and nudity that markedly outline some coherent symbolic systems within European popular belief systems, both Christian and pre-Christian.¹ These might be present collectively in the various semantic strata of certain belief or ritual complexes or may function as a guiding principle, an ideological foundation constituting the core of certain belief complexes. Their deep structure consists in the symbolic series of oppositions of *nature-culture*, *raw-cooked*, and *life-death*.² In this binary universe, human beings are defined as “living, not dead” and as “humans, not animals”, as the resident of a centrally

* First Hungarian edition of the study: Pócs 2008. The translation into English has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement № 324214. The current English version, aside from a few newly-acquired references, is identical with the original text.

¹ After the publication of the present article in original Hungarian, Mirjam Mencej’s significant study appeared, in which she discusses the symbolic significance of spinning in a review that is extensive in both geographical and temporal terms. At the time the present translation was made, I was sadly unaware of this new paper and could then not refer to those of Mencej’s results that are relevant to my topic and which the author summarizes as follows, “...according to the traditional European conceptions, spinning, the material for spinning (fibres – un-spun wool) and the results of this activity (thread, yarn) bear important symbolic meanings related to the basic aspects of human existence – birth, fate and death.” (Mencej 2011: 77).

² Cf. Lévi-Strauss 1964; on the symbolic systems of raw and cooked see Pócs 1992.

positioned inhabited space characterized by culture in opposition with nature, the uninhabited and uncivilized periphery where wild animals, demons, and dead souls dwell. Nature is characterized by the absence of domestic animals and cultivated plants, as well as by the absence of cultural processes and products: ploughing, sowing, domesticating wild animals, the furnace, smithery, the iron, spinning and weaving, clothes, and Christian sacraments. In what follows, we will discuss how the “raw” world of nature was tamed; how human beings, born as natural beings, as “savages”, were refined and transformed into social beings, in the course of which the main role among the basic working processes of human culture is attributed to spinning and weaving, cooking and baking, and the craft of smithery.

Regarding their symbolic scope and their concrete place and role played in European culture, sometimes this can only be reconstructed from fragmented traces existing in folklore texts; in other cases, it can be modelled from living beliefs and currently operating rites. Apparently, the world described by nature-culture and raw-cooked oppositions, and especially the symbolic role of spinning and weaving, of textiles and of the shirt, is equally present in geographically and chronologically distant Christian and pre-Christian cultures, regardless of linguistic barriers. Most of the examined phenomena have pre-Christian and Christian equivalents; the investigated features of clothing appear to be archaic traits leading back to Europe’s ancient past; they are probably general characteristics of archaic worldviews, valid beyond the cultural frontiers of Europe, or perhaps everywhere, surviving in fragments and integrated into Christianity. The examples will be primarily from Hungary and East-Central Europe, but randomly extended to further places and ages; but we could look anywhere and at any time from Sicily to Iceland, from Estonia to the Caucasus, and the similarities and the identical meanings of symbols would be conspicuous. There are only differences and local specificities in terms of details, such as certain special text folklore motifs, characteristics of deities rooted in the mythology of different peoples, or the dates of rituals related to the calendar of saints.

PUTTING ON CLOTHES

The main topic of this study is to explore how putting on clothes (and creating textiles that constitute the basis of the clothes: spinning and weaving) turned the “bare naked” human being into a social being; how it “introduced” people into the world of culture; how the “shirt” became an expression of identity, a tool of fulfilling one’s social role;³ and how clothes protected humans from the demons and the dead attacking from the world of nature. The “boundaries of the body” – as Mary Douglas explained – have equivalent social boundaries;⁴ the clothes protecting the body are essentially fending off the threats against the social order. The examined data explain all this in the language of myths, rites, and beliefs.

³ As Bo Lönnquist emphasizes, following Erving Goffman, clothes play an important role (at least in European cultures) in making self-identification and fulfilling social roles possible (Lönnquist 1979).

⁴ Douglas 1966: 115.

Separating our topic from the coherent context of the “raw-cooked” systems is somewhat artificial, because apart from the emphasized textiles or shirt, other cultural achievements (mentioned above) could play a similar role in the rites of “human initiation”; and a similar role to “raw” nudity is played by the absence/prohibition of sexuality (limiting sexual activity during the ritual period or having rites performed by those who are excluded from sexual activity, such as children, virgins, old women), fasting and muteness, and the absence of “human” speech. These aspects will be mentioned only briefly.

In the context of our discussion, shirts and other cloak-like pieces of clothing directly enveloping the body play a fundamental role in the rites; nonetheless, as we will see, textiles in general, and the instruments and by-products (tow, yarn, scutcher, distaff and spindle) of the process of creating these clothes and the processes themselves, such as spinning and weaving, may fulfil a similar function. This last aspect is also combined with ideas of “weaving” gods and demons, which will also be touched upon.

I have already discussed certain aspects of this topic in a previous paper⁵ about the werewolf as a dual or transitional creature mediating between nature and culture. The definite nature-culture opposition of werewolf beliefs also helps us to understand the more general aspects of this duality, which are not directly related to, albeit being originally based upon werewolves. The following example gives a clear reference to the context of clothing under study, the unclothed state (and the fireless, “raw” circumstances) of the creatures of nature. The verse is an excerpt from the Romanian *colinda*, *Nine splendid stags*⁶ (commonly known from Béla Bartók’s *Cantata Profana*):

*our slender bodies
cannot hide in clothing,
they must hide among the leaves;
we must make our tracks not
in your hearth’s warm ashes
but along the forest floor.*⁷

The statusless and intermediary state of those who were born werewolves is essential from our perspective, as is their belonging to nature, being “naked” and not cultural beings. In this context, the human being, until its initiation into culture and society, appears not as a human but a demonic creature bearing certain natural traits. In the case of those born with a werewolf fate, these traits are manifested in animalistic features (in the beliefs of Central European peoples, for instance, being born hairy, with teeth or wings, are considered to be such features). Being born “in a caul” foreshadows or ensures a werewolf-fate (or an ability of sight or some “trance-capacity” in general), and not only for werewolf creatures. The metamorphosis of werewolves can be related to being

⁵ Pócs 2011.

⁶ *Szarvasokká vált fiúk* [The boys who turned into stags] 1971: 217.

⁷ English translation from Béla Bartók’s cantata by Thomas Ország-Land (http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Bartok_Bela-1881/Cantata_profana/en/39014-Cantata_profana downloaded: 09.06.2017)

born in a caul, according to the beliefs of German, Slavic, and Romanian peoples, and sporadically according to Hungarian beliefs as well.⁸

The metamorphosis of turning into an animal expresses the dual identity of the werewolf. The werewolf is the human's animal alter ego, its "animal skin" or "second skin", the "boundary" of his body, its replacement, or facsimile – the transformation is basically turning the skin "inside out", as a result of which the "hairy" animal identity is concealed.⁹ The symbolic tool of turning into an animal in beliefs is to put on the wolf skin (bearskin), or the shirt made of it, the "wolf-shirt" or, as they call it in the central and western parts of Europe, the "wolf-belt".¹⁰ The caul is also representative of a second skin ensuring the possibility of transforming into an animal for those who are born with it.

The truth of the saying "clothes make the man" is attested by one of the common practices of transforming a naked werewolf back into a human being: to put on clothes. Since Antiquity, according to recorded beliefs across Europe, the werewolf becomes a wolf when taking off its human clothes; if meanwhile the clothes are stolen, he will not be able to transform back.¹¹ Creatures of nature temporarily turning into human beings by putting on clothes (and the opposite) is a common legendary, mythical, and epical motif in Europe; we only have to think about the tale of *The Swan Woman*.¹² The shirt of the human being is, thus, a cultural variant of the natural wolf-shirt or the caul.

Clothes worn directly on the body, similar to the wolfskin or the caul, are representations of the person,¹³ or, in certain cases, can be the alter ego of the person. Another text example refers to clothes – in a much more sophisticated way and also closer to the concept of the werewolf's double skin – as a "reflection", a "double", something that "embodies" the free spirit. *The Hymn of the Pearl* (sometimes called *Hymn of the Soul*) of the apocryphal and presumably gnostic texts of *The Acts of Thomas* describes a golden cloak decorated with precious stones that the apostle wore in his youth. He later recalls finding his old cloak as follows:

...and because I remembered not its fashion, for in my childhood I had left it in my father's house, on a sudden, when I received it, the garment seemed to me to become like a mirror of myself. I saw it all in all, and I received all in it, for we were two in distinction and yet gain one in one likeness...¹⁴

⁸ On the roles of the caul and on the signs of birth in general, see primarily Belmont (1971: 28–30, 50–63, 189–190). For a more detailed presentation and further references see my previously-mentioned study.

⁹ The Latin (*versipellis*) and perhaps the Romanian (*priculici*) terms mean "inverted skin". For a detailed account of these topics see Pócs 2011, including an extended bibliography of the *werewolf* topic; here, I only mention two important works related to the double skin of the werewolf and the complex of "skin inversion": Lecouteux 1992: 121–144: "La métamorphose, le double, le loup-garou" chapter; and Vaz da Silva 2002: 53–48: "Double skins and metamorphosis" chapter.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the numerous data of Hertz (1862) about the wolf-shirt and the wolf-belt, from Armenia to Ireland and the antique Greeks: Hertz 1862: 79–97.

¹¹ Hertz 1862: 91–92, 95, 97. For the sources and references to *werewolf* beliefs see my article: Pócs 2011; here I only mention the most important references and the ones not included in the said article.

¹² *The Swan Woman* (*The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife*, ATU 400; Uther 2004: 231–233).

¹³ The shirt is "Hülle der Seele": Jungbauer 1931: 1709. The name of the caul in several – for instance Southern Slavic – languages is "shirt" or "little shirt".

¹⁴ *The Acts of Thomas*; *The Hymn of the Pearl* (<http://gnosis.org/library/hymnpearl.htm> downloaded: 09.06.2017).

Archaic werewolf beliefs representing the duality of nature and culture constituted the mythical background of rites of passage of human life in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe until the 20th century; they also played an important role in relation to the rites associated with fending off demons and healing illnesses originating from nature. The shirt's cultural initiation role is manifested most directly in the rites aiming to fend off the werewolf-fate at birth: dressing in a shirt the new-born who, on the basis of certain marks at birth, are predestined to a werewolf-fate; a rite of "human initiation" and acceptance into the group known across the Balkans. In Bulgaria and Serbia, for instance, there was a custom of putting a shirt on babies born during the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany, so that they do not become a *karakondzul*, a demonic werewolf. Even though during this period spinning was a taboo, in one single night three women made a little wool shirt for the new-born infant, which the endangered child had to wear. The trio of women, thus, accepted the infant into the community of the living.¹⁵ The similar western Bulgarian rites and beliefs emphasize another aspect of spinning a werewolf-shirt: here, the custom was that when a *zmej* child is born (that is, a werewolf child born with a tail and little wings under its arms) a shirt is made with a rudimental technique (from torn oakum), so that, instead of an aggressive werewolf, the infant becomes a *zmej* (dragon-man) who as an adult will be able to protect his village from the demonic dragon that brings hail: the *hala*.¹⁶ As we can see, the demonic, aggressive force of nature is tamed by putting on a shirt and strengthened, to become a positive, culture-protecting force.



Image 1: Christening shirt, Gyimesközéplök (*Lunca de Jos*), Harghity county, Romania (Photo Eszter Csonka-Takács, 2005.)

¹⁵ Zečević 1980: 168; etc. On the wider context of rites to avoid a *werewolf* fate see: Pócs 2011: 112–115.

¹⁶ Georgieva 1983: 80.

Putting on a shirt as the symbol of becoming a human being also appears in the aspects of rites of passage with the purpose of gaining a new social status, which are also consecrated by Christian sacraments. In the Christian interpretation and practice a person does not have a name or clothes before baptism: it is “stark naked” (which in the literal translation of the Hungarian expression is “mother-borne naked”) and not a part of society, a demonic creature possessed by the Devil until baptism, until Satan has been exorcised from it. Besides giving a name, the most important way and a sign of ending the statusless situation is the christening shirt given to the new-born by the godparents (this is a part of Catholic baptisms to this day);¹⁷ cf. with the new white garment of the early Christian catechumens.¹⁸

A telling addition to these is the legendary motif of the “unbaptized children” who return as ghosts; according to this, these souls, dwelling in this intermediary state, are symbolically baptized. If they hear them crying, they give them a name and throw a piece of clothing, representing the christening shirt, in the direction of the sound so that the soul of the child can reach its final status in the otherworld.¹⁹ Let us cite an incantation from Gyimes (*Ghimes*)²⁰ to heal abscesses, which refers to the raw universe of nature:

...on a high mountain rock,
where no man goes,
no shirt is made for unbaptized children,
no pretzel is baked...²¹

According to certain German and Hungarian beliefs, giving a christening shirt also helps the eventual adults after their death to obtain their status in the otherworld: in the absence of this, the dead will become erring souls, revenants. Judit Morvay collected the following data from an informant in Abaújlak²² who said that he had not received a christening shirt at his baptism. His mother was too embarrassed to remind the godmother, and she was in great trouble since she was unable to replace it: “Whether I will be able to rest, we will see; maybe I will come back as well.”

The act of giving a (parental) shirt as a sign of acceptance into society also appears in secular rites in several parts of Europe (it was probably a common European practice as well). Jungbauer refers to German, Russian and Lusatian data to explain that, as an initiation rite into the family, the new-born is wrapped in the shirt of the father or the apron of the mother;²³ we know of similar Macedonian data as well.²⁴ In Finland, before going to the

¹⁷ On the christening shirts see Kapros 1986: 267; Csonka-Takács 2008.

¹⁸ According to the data of Eszter Csonka-Takács, the vicar of Gyimesközéplök (*Lunca de Jos*) traced back the custom of giving a christening shirt precisely to this: Csonka-Takács 2008: 139–141.

¹⁹ The question remains if it was also an actively practiced rite. For more detail on this see: Pócs 2002.

²⁰ Harghita County, Romania.

²¹ Erdélyi 1999: 843.

²² Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, 1967; a then 85-year-old man.

²³ Jungbauer 1931: 1717.

²⁴ Petreska 2006: 229.

baptism, they pulled the infant through the sleeve of the mother's birthing shirt in order to fend off the evil eye;²⁵ in Csík (*Ciuc*; Romania) there was a belief according to which the infant, if first picked up wrapped in the father's shirt, would like the father more, whereas if wrapped in the mother's shirt, then the baby would like its mother more.²⁶ These data also appear to be fragmented residues of initiation rites, similar to the Hungarian data concerning the belief of dressing the new-born in the garment of the mother or the father against the tentatives of substituting the child as a changeling.²⁷ (The belief that demons substituted infants can be related to the demons of nature: until the infant is baptized, as an intermediary being, it can be easily abducted by demons who "take it with them").

In several parts of Europe, the "initiation shirt" was a known part of the rituals preceding baptism and of some of the rites related to marriage, and even more so, the rites before the wedding. The shirt made by the bride as a gift for her groom is commonly known as a symbol of accepting the groom into his new family. The shirts of the German bride and groom were considered signs of initiation into a new social group; a similar role was attributed by the Irish to the new cloak that women received when they got married.²⁸ The situation was similar in many parts of the Balkans.²⁹

In historical Europe, we can also recognize the process of spinning wedding shirts as an initiation rite; preparing the wedding shirt of girls was a ritualized occasion in several parts of the Balkans, during which the girls not only proved that they were ready for marriage but in this way obtained their new status. Béla Gunda published Serbian, Macedonian,



Image 2: Groom's shirt, Mezőkövesd, Borsod county, Hungary (Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, No 116834 (Györgyi 1965, 235)

²⁵ Vuorela 1967: 63.

²⁶ Benedek H. 1998: 58.

²⁷ Sarkadkeresztúr; Bihar County, Bondár 1982: 52; Lakócsa, Somogy County, MNT II. Furthermore: against being swapped, the infant was put in the groom's shirt of the father: Tiszaszederkény, Borsod County, MNT II; *ibid*: further similar data.

²⁸ Jungbauer 1931: 1722; Mahon 1978: 286.

²⁹ Daničić 1910: 73–74, 85.

and Bulgarian data about the village girls spinning, sewing, and embroidering their shirts intended as dowries together, in a separate hut built especially for this purpose: the girl who completed the work was considered “ready to marry”.³⁰ As a parallel to the shirts initiating or accepting someone into the family, we also mention the ancient Roman and medieval adoption cloaks and the term by which they referred to adopted children: *fili mantellati*;³¹ or the ritual of accepting someone as a disciple: Robert Eisler mentions the prophet Elijah who took Elisha as his disciple by laying his own cloak over him.³²

Other data describe the act of spinning and weaving wedding shirts (or more generally textiles given as dowries) as an act engendering a new life, a new phase of life. This aspect is especially underlined in the love poetry and epic literature of the Balkans, in which love and marriage are spun and woven into the shirts or other wedding textiles. One Serbian wedding song includes a dialogue starting with “What are you weaving? A husband...”. In another Serbian song, the girl “spins” her own fate:

*A young woman sits on high,
On high and on spacious ground,
Spinning silk, making braids
With these braids, she converses.*³³

The Hungarian parallel of this song is from Zoboralja. The reference is by Manga from the 1940s: the people who came to ask for the dowry were led to the bed where the bride’s godmother was spinning on a distaff while singing.³⁴ Robert Eisler, in his book on the symbolism of textiles, describes the oldest known Greek marriage rituals including the aspect whereby finishing the shirt by the time of the wedding creates the marriage.³⁵

If one can “weave” life, one can “weave” death as well. Zoja Karanović and his co-author published a Serbian song according to which the girl wove death instead of life into the handkerchief made for her wedding:

*...When I wove them,
The earth shook
And cracked right across,
When I bleached them,
Winds began to blow
And lifted them thrice.
That was proof for me
What my towels were for...*

³⁰ Gunda 1979: 270–272.

³¹ “cloaked sons”; Jungbauer 1933: 1589–90.

³² Eisler 1910: 245.

³³ Karanović – Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2002: 33–45 (several other similar songs).

³⁴ Bakó 1987: 100.

³⁵ Eisler 1910: 128.

In other words, she had been weaving a funerary shroud instead of a wedding kerchief: if the veil was torn, it predicted for the girl that the marriage would be unfulfilled.³⁶ As the opposite of spinning and weaving, the unravelling of textiles might have a similar significance. Rober Eisler, in the above-mentioned work, refers to the legends of brides (for instance Saint Agatha)³⁷ who, though weaving their wedding shirt but not wanting to get married, in an act of untying their wedding, unravelled their weavings over and over again. This act with similar meaning is already known from the Odyssey: the only way for Penelope to keep away her suitors – that is, to make her new marriage impossible – was to unravel by night what she wove during the day. The data from Csíkszentdomokos (*Sândominic*) published by Lajos Balázs belongs to this same circle of ideas: the girls, strictly respecting the rules of making the groom's shirt, were very careful not to mess it up by accidentally sewing something reversely so that they would not have to unstitch the sutures, which would obviously derail the wedding.³⁸

The fate-changing role in wearing certain clothes also appears in the data about the act of wearing new garments at the beginning of a new life phase or of a new calendar cycle, as well as in wearing a shirt that was given on an important festival day for the first time. In Serbia, the shirt worn while taking the first steps or on the first school day could be an indicator of status, bring luck or fend off bad fate and illness; the same was believed by the Irish about the shirts given as a gift at the new year or Easter.³⁹ There are interesting Herzegovinian data about cursed shirts, and the mothers' curses cast on shirts.⁴⁰ The medieval equivalents are the data on the curses "woven into" a cloak published by Valerie Flint.⁴¹

In addition to the association with rites of passage and of other festive rituals, there is a rich source material across Europe that presents the process of making a shirt as an act of starting or creating a new life. Ljuba Daničić cites a long series of Serbian data about love magic, getting a husband, keeping a husband, magic used for having children, all of which were performed with a shirt (of the husband or the groom).⁴² She also mentions girls' and women's shirts of the same function;⁴³ for instance, a girl, after having finished the shirt made for her love, slept on the shirt for a night⁴⁴ – these acts of magic were usually performed on the Tuesday or the Friday of a new moon.⁴⁵ Sorcerers also tried to obtain a piece of the groom's shirt that they could use for all sorts of magic.⁴⁶ In light of

³⁶ Karanović – Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2002: 49.

³⁷ Eisler 1910: 122–140.

³⁸ Harghity County, Romania; Balázs 1994: 191–192, 198.

³⁹ Daničić 1910: 56–58, 85; Mahon 1978: 286.

⁴⁰ Daničić 1910: 88.

⁴¹ Flint 1991: 226. The author also mentions the ecclesiastical prohibitions concerning *Godwebbe*, the weaving of wool.

⁴² Daničić 1910: 89–91.

⁴³ Daničić 1910: 62, 80–81.

⁴⁴ Daničić 1910: 81.

⁴⁵ Daničić 1910: 60.

⁴⁶ Daničić 1910: 72.

the above, it is only logical that one can inflict love-related bewitchment with the shirt of a deceased person;⁴⁷ and that love vengeance involves the tearing up of the unfaithful man's shirt;⁴⁸ unravelling or unstitching a shirt could play a role in breaking up lovers, as a Romanian spinning song explains in the form of a dialogue:

– *What are you spinning?*
 – *I am not spinning but unspinning:*
 – *Bachelors from all work bees,*
 ...
*From all of the houses...*⁴⁹

There are Italian, German, Serbian, Irish and Hungarian data about shirts involved in magic in aid of conception; for instance, according to Italian data, barren women went to bed wearing the shirt of women who had children.⁵⁰ Finally, we also mention the shirts used in love divination being put under the pillow at Christmas and other occasions at the beginning of a new year, which are commonly known from the past ritual practice of Hungarians.⁵¹

The rites related to shirts that accept a child or a woman into the family or to spinning and weaving also provide protection; this group of data is not clearly distinguished from the data discussed above. Warding off the attack of demons from nature with shirts or other pieces of clothing is almost a natural consequence of the demons' nudity. Apparently, human beings and their households can be protected by these achievements of culture, as well as with the tools and processes involved in the creation of clothes. Besides being motifs of folk narratives, all these were part of living ritual practice in many places across 20th century Europe. It often went beyond its presumed scope: textiles, threads, and the oakum itself became a popular means of prevention or healing in the case of troubles of non-demonic origins. The importance of performing the rites under "raw" circumstances is apparent from many of the relevant data: the shirt protecting from nature had to be woven in silence, after fasting, by a virgin or an old lady (after the end of sexual activity), then put on inside out; animals had to be protected from demons with an inverse, left-handed braid, one had to use raw, unspun oakum, unbleached linen, broken spindle, and so forth. The taboo periods of spinning and weaving, that is, when the "raw" conditions of nature were temporarily extended onto the world of culture, played an important role.

In the German linguistic territory, the *Nothemd* or *Schutzhemd* protected against dragons and weapons.⁵² These *Schutzhemds* and *Glückshemds* were made in a particular way at a special time (for instance, during the twelve days of Christmas), spun or woven by a

⁴⁷ Daničić 1910: 67, 110–111.

⁴⁸ Daničić 1910: 67.

⁴⁹ Kligman 1988: 59.

⁵⁰ Seligmann 1910: II. 225; Daničić 1910: 56–58, 79–87, 90, 92; Jungbauer 1931: 1719; Mahon 1978: 285.

⁵¹ See e.g. Pócs 2014: 1005–1006.

⁵² Jungbauer 1931: 1713.

virgin or a seven-year-old girl, or sewn on a Sunday, perhaps even consecrated in secret (for instance, by hiding the shirt under the altar cloth), and they were known to protect one from various illnesses or the court of justice, war injuries or even from Hell.⁵³ The protective function of cloaks made under similar circumstances is also known in several parts of Central Europe.⁵⁴ A diverse list is known from the Balkans to Finland consisting of scarves, aprons, threads laid on something as protection after childbirth against the swapping of unbaptized infants or against the evil eye, or hung on the barn door against witches or on the window to avert demonic pressure, or hidden in the bed, or twisted threads wound around the afflicted part of the body.⁵⁵ We also have Hungarian data: for instance in Kostelek (*Coşnea*),⁵⁶ in order to avoid the substituting of a child they twisted the yarn in the other direction with the left hand.⁵⁷ Textiles also served to protect against the storm demons that bring hail,⁵⁸ according to a Bulgarian reference, there was a custom for several southern Slav people to cut the shirt of a young woman in four and wave it in the four points of the compass when a hail storm was approaching.⁵⁹ According to data from Csongrád County, the Hungarian *táltos* children were covered with their mother's apron when a hail storm was approaching so that the storm demons would not abduct them.⁶⁰

The shirts made in one day or on a festival day – otherwise under taboo of spinning and weaving – are equally known in this context, for instance in the case of Bosnian Muslims.⁶¹ Ritual weaving of linen during a time of drought was known among the Ukrainians from Polesje. According to the publication of Svetlana Tolstaja, old women or virgin girls gathered in a place to make a towel as long as possible; this, they would place over the icons in church or, if the length of the towel was sufficient, they wrapped it around the church.⁶² Károly Jung refers to data from Vojvodina (Serbia) collected by him among Hungarians, about a thread sewn into a skirt or worn as a necklace against the witches who attacked in the period between Christmas and Epiphany (*kétkarácsonyi cérna*, which literally means “thread from two Christmases” because this period between Christmas and Epiphany was called the time “between two Christmases”).⁶³

In the practice of Transylvanian Hungarians, a known protective instrument against the “fair woman” (*szépasszony*) harming horses or, in the Transdanubian region, against the “weasel woman” (*menyétasszony*) who sucked the milk of cows, was to hang a small spindle or stick a distaff with oakum in the stable, while they instructed the weasel to

⁵³ Jungbauer 1931: 1713–14.

⁵⁴ Jungbauer 1933: 1587–88.

⁵⁵ Daničić 1911; Seligman 1910: 225–227; Schubert 1984: 96–105.

⁵⁶ Băcau County, Romania

⁵⁷ Several data from Kostelek Kostelek (*Coşnea*), Băcau County, Romania, published by Takács 2001: 483–484.

⁵⁸ See for instance Pócs 2003: 177–178.

⁵⁹ Moroz 1989: 150.

⁶⁰ Kistelek (Csongrád County), collected by Vilmos Diószegi in 1954. Hungarian Folk Belief Archive, *Foggal született gyerek* (Child born with teeth).

⁶¹ Seligmann 1910: 11.

⁶² Tolstaja 2001: 191.

⁶³ Jung 1983: 89–90.

work.⁶⁴ In relation to these acts, rules about the “raw” conditions (gestures performed inversely, with the left hand, with a broken spindle) are present: according to data from Magyarhermány (*Herculan*),⁶⁵ if the mane of a horse was interwoven or tangled then it had been braided by the devil at midnight. As a remedy, they wound five or six ells of hemp thread spun with the left hand on a broken spindle and stuck it above the head of the horse in the beam. The devils did not dare approach it.⁶⁶ It was similar in Erdőfüle (*Filia*):⁶⁷

*When you go home, tell your mother to take some oakum or wool and to spin with her left hand as much as to be able to stick the spindle backwards into the distaff. Stick it above the horse, and it will be mounted [by the fair women] no more.*⁶⁸

The Swedish put a wool knot on the back of the animals when driving out the flock; in Karjala, they protected the sheep from bears with red threads, the shepherds tied pieces of wool onto their own clothes and on the back of the sheep as well, and the same measure of protection was taken in Estonia.⁶⁹ An 18th century manuscript from Siklós (Baranya County, Hungary) gives the following advice:

*For the wild animals not to hurt your cattle, spin a thread on the day of Easter before sunrise and tie it under the animal's tail.*⁷⁰

Often the protection of animals was also related to threads or textiles spun or woven on the taboo days of spinning, such as the “wolf days” in the Balkans or during the twelve days after Christmas; it was also the period in which they performed the rites involving wool to ensure the protection of the flock.⁷¹ In these cases, there is also some sort of sacrificial character, and we will briefly return to this question later. At this point, it is worth mentioning the Serbian data about the beliefs surrounding prohibitions on weaving in the places of the dance and of the assembly of the werewolves and the unbaptized (and other demons of nature). If, however, someone were to weave at such a taboo location then the remainder of the cut textile threads could be used for love magic.⁷² Consequently, the demonic locations of nature equally belong to the above-mentioned raw conditions that make the world of culture fertile.

⁶⁴ See for instance: Bosnyák 1982: 100; collected by Kinga Jankus in Csikjenőfalva (*Ineu*, Harghita County Romania) in 1996; collected by Éva Pócs in Csikkarcfalva (*Cârța*, Harghita County, Romania) and in Gyimesközéplak (*Lunca de Jos*, Harghita County, Romania), in 2002 and 2003; collected by József Gagyi in Csikdelne (*Delnița*, Harghita County, Romania) in 1995; Gönczi 1914: 214.

⁶⁵ Harghita County, Romania.

⁶⁶ Máté 1984: 199.

⁶⁷ Harghita County, Romania.

⁶⁸ Zakariás 1992: 191.

⁶⁹ Rantasalo 1945: 56, 58.

⁷⁰ Bellosics 1900: 355.

⁷¹ See e.g. Mencej 2001: 315–320; 2009.

⁷² Daničić 1910: 93–95.

The use of shirts or other pieces of clothing for healing purposes is not devoid of the reminiscence of nature-culture systems. Shirts are direct accessories of people as social beings; they are their “doubles”; this is why it is possible to heal the clothes instead of the patient or to bewitch the owner on the basis of the *pars pro toto* principle of magic. This is what makes magic or healing possible with the shirts of virgins or of barren, old people. There are countless examples of these actions, basically from across Europe. Serbian data from the collection of Daničić include incantations pronounced over the patient’s shirt,⁷³ healing with the shirt of a virgin girl,⁷⁴ the beautiful girl exposed to witchcraft soaking her own shirt with the dew on Saint George’s day.⁷⁵

The other aspects of the healing technique of *measurements* do not directly concern our topic, but the “raw” conditions of these healing methods are worth mentioning. A few references from Elfriede Grabner’s rich collection should suit the purpose: according to Czech data measurement had to be done with a thread spun backwards on Good Friday before sunrise; on other occasions, one had to use “raw”, “untampered” yarn.⁷⁶ According to a 1481 sermon, superstitious old ladies measured the heads of the patients with “raw”, “uncooked”, “unreeled” yarn, or “raw” textiles.⁷⁷

SPINNING AND WEAVING DEITIES, HEAVENLY SHIRTS

In every European culture we have examined, beyond the above-described system based on the opposition of life and death, which is adequate as regards the horizontal duality of the human world as a cultural centre and nature as a chaotic periphery, there is the triple system of heaven (deities deciding fate and providing protection) – earth (human world) – underworld (the dead and demons), in which threads, textiles, shirts, and cloaks play a cosmic role related to the universe, the creation of the universe, the fate of humanity, and so forth. Because of deities who spin the thread of destiny or weave the shirt of fate, known from the mythologies of several peoples, and also because of the connections and analogies related to the microcosm and the macrocosm, the beliefs of the human world are infused with mythical constellations; individual rituals are associated with the fate of humanity and of the world. Spinning, textiles, shirts, and cloaks gain a cosmic perspective referring to the whole universe and all humanity, they become divine attributes, and this consecrates and strengthens their role in the human world. M. L. West, when writing about Indo-European mythology, summarized the cosmic image of world-weaving deities appearing in several mythologies in the chapter *World Wide Web*: according to the Atharvaveda, for instance, the morning and the night firmaments are “created” by being woven by two goddesses; cosmic weaving is also found in Greek mythology, applied “to

⁷³ Daničić 1910: 84.

⁷⁴ Daničić 1910, 58.

⁷⁵ Daničić 1910: 90.

⁷⁶ Grabner 1967: 542.

⁷⁷ Grabner 1967: 550–551. The author claims this to be “the residue of a more ancient level of culture” – with which we can obviously agree.

the seasonal clothing of earth with vegetation and crops”. In the cosmogony of Pherecydes of Syros, a wonderful robe is mentioned in relation to a world tree, which is decorated with the earth and surrounding ocean.⁷⁸

The “fate-women” who spin or weave one’s fate, are known in numerous European (German, Greek, Roman, and perhaps Baltic and Slavic) pre-Christian cultures; they even had living traditions in the 20th century Balkans or among eastern Slavs.⁷⁹ The *Moirai* decide over human fate, life and death, by spinning the “thread of fate”. The framework of this paper is not sufficient to discuss this topic in detail; I have to mention, however, one relevant aspect of it: according to certain mythical beliefs from the Balkans, they play the role of mythical midwives assisting at childbirth who decide upon the alternative (human or animal) life options of werewolves born in a caul.⁸⁰ Thus, the act of assigning someone to an existence in culture or nature is in some way related to spinning as well; cf. with the above-discussed fate-deciding role of spinning and weaving shirts. The most recent study of Karen Bek-Pedersen highlights an interesting aspect of German mythology, to be precise the *Njáls saga*, which presents the *Valkyrie* as creatures who spin and weave military fortune.⁸¹ She discusses a special room in the otherworld where the women weave the fate of battles: heads are falling from the weaving loom (cf. the witch spinning and weaving soldiers in the Hungarian folk tale of Prince Mirkó).⁸² This obviously meant death on the battlefield; at the same time, the woman weaving here creates her child from a basket containing woollen thread: thus, the medieval text describes exactly the divine weaving practice of bringing life and death.⁸³

We know of another aspect of mythical or divine spinning. Otto Brendel studied the Greek, Roman and Hellenistic representations of *Moirai* and various spinning goddesses. Since the thread is reeled on a spindle, the result of the spinning is spherical, and can often be interpreted as the universe rimmed with thread. As Brendel remarked, in Plato’s description⁸⁴ in 375 BCE, Er of Pamphylia during his vision, while seemingly dead and his soul ascending, sees the Earth from above and sees it as a world held together by threads and ropes.⁸⁵ Accordingly, not only human life, but the entire universe appears as a spinning accessory or the product of spinning (see image 3 and 4).

Twentieth-century folklore data, especially in Eastern Europe, are rich in motifs of heavenly weaving, and usually the weaving of shirts. There are in particular Byzantine, eastern Slavic apocryphal legends or incantations, songs derived from them, or Byzantine iconography, which represent the Virgin Mary as she sits spinning in the middle of the world,

⁷⁸ West 2007: 372–373.

⁷⁹ On fate-women beliefs and legends of fate alive even into the twentieth century in Eastern European folk belief, see the overview of Rolf Brednich (1964).

⁸⁰ I have discussed in more detail the *Moirai*/fate goddess-type beings of European mythologies: Pócs 2001. About the contemporary Slavic “fate-women” who weave the thread of life: Schubert 1984.

⁸¹ See on this Bernáth 2005: 324: in the German mythology, the Norns were responsible for spinning and weaving the thread of fate; the Valkyrie were explicitly battle- and death-spirits whose speciality was war fate.

⁸² AaTh 463A; Prince Mirkó (*Mirkó királyfi*) see Dömötör 1988: 239–242.

⁸³ Bek-Pedersen 2008.

⁸⁴ Allen 2006: 10 614–10 621.

⁸⁵ Brendel 1977.



Image 3: The *Moirai* spinning the globe (Brendel 1977, table XXIII)



Image 4: Aphrodite spinning the globe (Brendel 1977, table IX)

on a marble stone on an island in the sea, or as she sits weaving on a golden throne among women working with silk threads.⁸⁶ What is she weaving? If she is sitting in the middle of the world, it must be something related to the fate of the entire world. In other songs in which a shirt is being woven, it is birth or marriage that is being spun, similarly to the above-discussed data about “earthly” shirts. Heavenly shirt-weaving is obviously associated with mythical celestial weddings: these items of clothing are usually made for or by gods. Robert Eisler refers to Greek and Roman data, as well as to the heavenly shirts of Christian saints.⁸⁷ Estonian mythical songs mention the shirts of Mary and Christ woven in heaven; we also know of similar Romanian Christmas songs of profane content. One of the most beautiful examples is a *colinda* collected and published by Béla Bartók about the marriage of the Sun with his sister, the Sânzieni (the fairy of the summer solstice),⁸⁸ according to which the Sun tells the fairy to spin silk for him so that she can become his bride. Octavian Buhociu published a *colinda* according to which Zâna Magdalina was embroidering on top of a blooming tree with a golden thread:

...und bei Stricken dachte sie,
Wie sie es wohl anstelle zu heiraten.⁸⁹

The Estonian (Setu) mythical songs collected by Madis Arukask are about a heavenly house seen in a vision in which four girls are spinning and weaving shirts for God, Mary, and the saints. In the songs with a similar topic published by Jakob Hurt, Mary wears her golden shirt in Heaven and the girls, on their heavenly altar duty, weave a cloak for God and for Mary in a blue house in Heaven.⁹⁰ We can also mention Bulgarian Christmas *koledas* in which Christ’s shirt is sewn in Heaven, or in another, in which a girl receives a shirt from Mary for having nursed Jesus.⁹¹

These songs from Orthodox Eastern Europe might be related to an early medieval apocryphal legend of Mary spinning and weaving. According to the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew from the eighth or ninth century, at the time of the Annunciation of the heavenly conception, Mary was embroidering the veil of the temple (the curtain surrounding the sanctuary; cf. the church as a symbol of the universe) with a carmine thread.⁹² According to the fifth-century manuscript of the Protoevangelium of James, Mary was spinning a scarlet silk thread: the church virgins – of whom she was one – chose the colours among them by lot.⁹³ Mary’s textile-related activities are, thus, also in connection with fertility

⁸⁶ Mansikka 1909: 193–210, 283, 293.

⁸⁷ Eisler 1910: 122–140.

⁸⁸ Bartók 1968: 152–154.

⁸⁹ Buhociu 1974: 28.

⁹⁰ Manuscript collection by Arukask from 1999, which I had the chance to consult at the Department of Folkloristics at the University of Tartu. Hurt 1904: 19–20: the short extract of the song’s content.

⁹¹ Moroz 1989: 150.

⁹² Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 1996: 54–55 (part 8 and 9).

⁹³ Protoevangelium of James 1996: 10 (X.2–XII.1). The relevance of this data was drawn to my attention by the reference made by Eisler (1910: 191).

and the conception of new life. Following the scene of the Annunciation, the Gospel of James strongly suggests that completion of the spinning is an act that creates a child and that the temple veil indicates the divine nature of the child:

*12. And she made the purple and the scarlet, and took them to the priest.
And the priest blessed her, and said:
– Mary, the Lord God hath magnified thy name, and thou shall be blessed
in all the generations of the earth.⁹⁴*

The temple veil woven at the birth of Christ – according to the New Testament – would later be torn: this event accompanied a universal catastrophe coinciding with a solar eclipse and an earthquake, namely the death of Christ. See Chapter 27 of the Gospel of Matthew according to the Berean Literal Bible:⁹⁵

*50. And Jesus, having cried again in a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.
51. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom.
And the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split...*

Let us recall the microcosmic variant of the universal tearing of linen, namely when the wedding handkerchief is torn in two. And finally, let me give a – somewhat unorthodox – reference by the Hungarian poet, Endre Ady. In his poem *A nagy tivornyán* [On the great feast] he describes the cosmic dimensions of the horrors of World War I as follows:

*The world is set, come and feast
Rampage about, World, the worst
Of all Hell has just broken loose on you...
...
And Madness, be coy no more,
Linens and veils are torn.
...
The weave of the entire world is unravelled...*

The diabolic opposite of divine weaving appears in the central and eastern European folklore as well. Besides the reference of the black cloak woven for the Devil,⁹⁶ we should mention the Hungarian legend about the shirt woven for the Antichrist, for Satan, according to which the fairies weaving and sewing the shirt always unravel their

⁹⁴ Ibid (English translation by Roberts-/http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/infancyjames-roberts.html downloaded: 09.13.2017). On the iconographical representations of the Spinning Mary and on conceptualizations of the Annunciation as an act of spinning see: Badalanova 2004: 217–222.

⁹⁵ Eisler 1910: 250 also refers to this Biblical reference. English translation: http://biblehub.com/blb/matthew/27.htm downloaded: 09.13.2017).

⁹⁶ Jungbauer 1933: 1586.

work because if the shirt were completed the world would perish. This, therefore, is the diabolical inversion of the motif of unravelling; the divine shirt-weaving, if serving Satan, instead of a world-creating act of cosmic proportions would become an act of world destruction:

The fairy girls are sewing a shirt for the Antichrist. Then, when they sew it, and it is almost ready, they examine it. There are flaws in it here and there. They unstitch it. It is not right! They sew it together again, because if that shirt was sewn together the right way, the world would end. If they could sew the shirt of the Antichrist. While the world stands, they will not be able to sew it, because it is never finished.⁹⁷

In comparison with the weaving of marital shirts, which create the microcosm, heavenly weaving or the weaving of the temple veil are acts that create the world, the macrocosm. Robert Eisler and Gustav Jungbauer published numerous examples of “cosmic cloaks” and “world mantles” depicting the universe, the mountains, the waters, the flora and the fauna, from Babylon to Greece, from Rome to Egypt, as the attributes of various gods. Such gods are for instance Isis, Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo and Joseph from the Old Testament (the last as a deity who dies and resurrects and obtains grains from the underworld; besides his starry cloak, the association of the names of his brothers with the zodiac signs is also an interesting reference in this regard); Jungbauer even adds Odin to this list.⁹⁸ The goddess-like folklore figures of Balkan fairies can also have starry mantles.⁹⁹

The first data about the starry mantle of the Virgin Mary originate from Greek and Syrian Christianity. Besides the stars, these cloaks often depict the entire visible world: the earth, the sky, the flora and fauna.¹⁰⁰ Present-age data about Mary, the queen of Heaven covered in a starry mantle, are also published from the territory of eastern Christianity.¹⁰¹



Image 8: Virgin Mary in a starry mantle, panel painting by Sano di Pietro in the oratorio of the Monastery of Saint Bernard in Siena (Eisler 1910, I. figure 7)

⁹⁷ Karcza, Zemplén County, Balassa 1963: 63.

⁹⁸ Eisler 1910: chapter I; Jungbauer 1933:1579–82.

⁹⁹ Moroz 1989: 150.

¹⁰⁰ Eisler 1910: chapter I.

¹⁰¹ Mansikka 1909: 161–162; Jungbauer 1933: 1581–82.



Image 5: Adad in a cosmic mantle, Babylonian ivory relief (Eisler 1910, I. figure 7)



Image 7: Venus Physica, on a Pompeii mural (Eisler 1910, I. figure 16)



Image 6: The “bull-killing” Mithras in a starry mantle on a Roman cameo (Eisler 1910, I. figure 9)

Saints were also occasionally depicted wearing a starry (blue) cloak, Christ as well, as *Sol Invictus* or as *Christus Cosmocrator*.¹⁰²

The microcosm is interwoven with the symbolism of the macrocosm; the divine cosmic cloaks convey power and blessing to the ordinary man, they invest ordinary shirts with a mythical perspective (or ordinary shirts are made heavenly through a divine blessing; cf. the christening shirt consecrated by the priest or the “world tent” at Jewish weddings).

The cosmic cloak may also indicate that someone is chosen by God, or it could sacralize someone; it is also the sign of the power of heavenly origin (cf. coronation robes, the cloak of priests, which are also often starry cosmic cloaks¹⁰³). The robe of Pallas Athena, the *peplos*, woven and renewed every four years for nine months by two designated girls, and then taken on a festive procession on the festival of Panathenaia, was also a sign of the renewal of world domination, a sort of cosmic initiation rite. The cloak depicted the victorious battle of the goddess with the Giants: in other words, it is the act of creating the world itself that is woven in the tissue.¹⁰⁴

The heavenly shirt might be a sign of “belonging”, presenting such a shirt as a gift can be a gesture of accepting or initiating someone. As the christening or marital shirts offer a new status in human society, the “heavenly” shirt means the acceptance or adoption of someone in the heavenly community. Erzsébet Tóth, an 18th-century Hungarian *táltos* woman from Jászberény, claimed at her 1728 witch trial that she was the daughter of God, moreover, that she was the second person of the Lord God, and Jesus Christ had covered her with his mantle.¹⁰⁵ The marital shirt also appears in Christian visions, in that of medieval mystic women, as the clothes of the brides of Jesus Christ; and resurrection as a heavenly initiation by putting on clothes the colour of white light (for instance in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas) is also present in the imagination of medieval Europe.¹⁰⁶

To come back to the microcosm and to the connections between the weaving of the world and of individual fate, these divine mantles and cloaks are especially suitable for protecting people from the dangers of nature: the symbol of world domination becomes a mantle protecting the world.¹⁰⁷ We can also refer to a non-Christian example: in Serbian beliefs, the *vile* lay their golden robes, spun and woven by them, on the human settlements in order to protect the people.¹⁰⁸ In the series of divine protective clothes, the most common motif in iconography, legends or prayers is the cloak or mantle of Mary. In the legends, the “Virgin with the Mantle” with her starry cloak or purple mantle protects people, cities, temples, bishops, the pope, princes, and also families including their dead.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Jungbauer 1933: 1581.

¹⁰³ Eisler also describes an Egyptian priest in a starry leopard skin: Eisler 1910: 221. The sacred – often starry – coronation robe with special powers spread from Byzantium to the West (Jungbauer 1933: 1588–89).

¹⁰⁴ Hegyi 2003: 66–67; Eisler 1910: 256–257. There are several vase images and other representations depicting the handing over of the *peplos* (for instance on the Pantheon Frieze), which make this connotation clear.

¹⁰⁵ Pócs 1999: 136.

¹⁰⁶ Benz 1969: 342–352.

¹⁰⁷ On cosmic cloaks and their protective role see, in addition to Eisler’s book: Jungbauer 1933: 1578–86.

¹⁰⁸ Karanović – Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2002: 45.

¹⁰⁹ Jungbauer 1933: 1583–85.

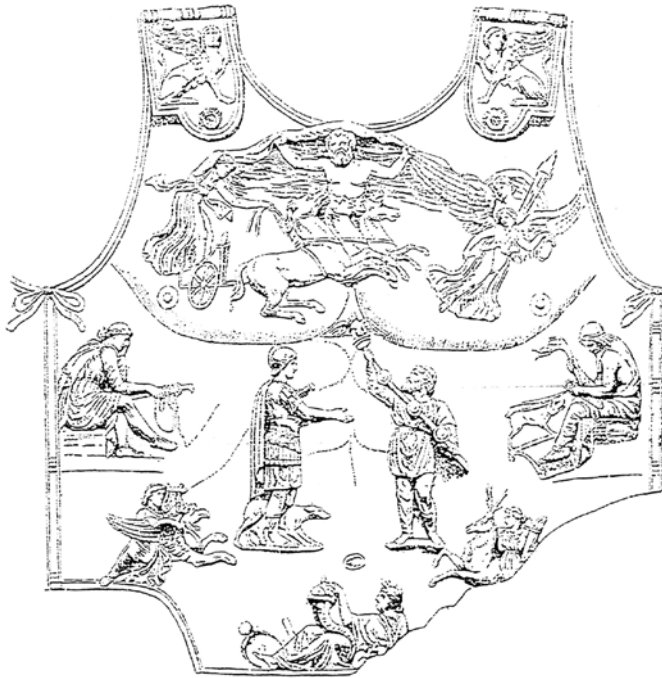


Image 9: Coelus with a cosmic cloak on the breastplate of the Augustus statue of Prima Porta (Eisler 1910, I. figure 7)



Image 10: Virgin with the Mantle: Illustration in the *Speculum humanae salvationis* codex preserved in the Dominican Monastery of Saint Blaise in Regensburg (around 1380–1420; Esser 1994, figure 21)

József Lángi has provided us with an overview of the Hungarian representations and the main functions of the Virgin with the Mantle from the time when this imagery spread from Byzantium to Europe in the 13th century. Religious orders played an important role in the introduction of the idea of the Virgin's protective mantle, which is why the representations of Mary covering monks or friars with her mantle is very common.¹¹⁰ From the 18th century on, saintly Hungarian kings also appear under the protection of Mary. During the time of the great epidemics, Mary's cloak protected against the plague;¹¹¹ it was initially an important healing relic as well,¹¹² and inspired the popular plague-amulets depicting the Virgin with the Mantle.¹¹³

The mantle as the attribute of saints (St Ursula, St Cunegond, and especially St Martin) appears in legends and other representations,¹¹⁴ and these cloaks could have had the same role in medieval religious ritual practice as the relic of Mary's mantle. There are Orthodox incantations and legendary motifs from Eastern Europe about the starry cloak/altar-cloth/towel of Mary, Mother of God which protected against witches and demons.¹¹⁵ Adolph Franz writes in his collection of benedictions about Irish and German data regarding the cloaks of various saints (St Columba, Bishop Deodatus, etc.), which were laid over the ploughed land for rain and against drought, or to fend off hail.¹¹⁶ (Cf. anti-hail "profane" textiles.) From present-day popular belief and ritual practice, we can mention the use of the cloak of Orthodox priests with the purpose of healing and protection from Satan;¹¹⁷ Adelina Anguseva mentions such medieval and early modern examples concerning the mantles of Bulgarian priests.¹¹⁸ In general, we can establish that the above-described textiles protecting one from nature also appear as textiles of divine origin, or with a heavenly blessing, protecting people in both the lay and the priestly practices.

The protective microcosmic role of heavenly mantles and world cloaks can also be found among the motifs of Hungarian incantations, and especially of archaic prayers. Let us cite a few commonly known and widely spread motifs. For instance, from an incantation from Mindszent (Csongrád County): "Heaven is my shirt, The Earth is my hat..."¹¹⁹ A prayer motif from the cloth in the collection of Zsuzsanna Erdélyi:

*Before me, there are seven thousand angels of the Lord Jesus,
I am wearing his carmine shirt, his armour.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁰ For more on *Mary with the Mantle* as devotional image, see Brown 2017.

¹¹¹ Lángi 2006: 50–59, 320–334. See also the old Hungarian representations of the Cloaked Madonna: Szilárdfy 2003, panels XXXVI–XXXVII. and CL–CLI.

¹¹² Esser 1999: 247. In Constantinople, the relic of Mary's mantle guarded at the temple of Blakherna had an extended cult: Lángi 2008: 50.

¹¹³ About amulets protecting against the plague see: Esser 1999: 244–246.

¹¹⁴ Jungbauer 1933: 1583–85.

¹¹⁵ Mansikka 1909: 162–163.

¹¹⁶ Franz 1909: II. 17.

¹¹⁷ My own collection from Hungarians in County Harghita, Romania.

¹¹⁸ Anguseva 2004: 477.

¹¹⁹ Pócs 1985–1986: II. 413.

¹²⁰ Jászberény, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County; Erdélyi 1976: 237.

*Lord-coloured Saint Benedict, cover me fully with your cloak...
The mantle of Virgin Mary,
The cloth of my window,
So that no infection can enter... (Adács, Heves County)*¹²¹

*Saint Benedict should consecrate my heart,
He should cover me with the sacred mantle of Jesus Christ.
(Kadarkút, Somogy County)*¹²²

Besides the deities of the “learned” mythologies, in the “popular” mythologies of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe we can also find goddess-like yet at the same time demonic women with the attributes of spinning, or having a scutcher, a spindle or a distaff. The mythological element of triple figures (the Moirai, the Parcae) is recalled by the three spinning women of Eastern European incantations.¹²³ The “fair women” and the witches of Eastern Hungary, as well as the Romanian *strigoi*, have scutchers as attributes;¹²⁴ the Romanian “lord of the wolves” appears as a ghost creature spinning with a distaff in the forest.¹²⁵ The Russian *Baba Yaga*, the Romanian *Joimarița* and *Marți Seara* (‘Tuesday evening’) and the Hungarian *Kedd asszonya* (‘Tuesday’s woman’) all have features of two-faced beings, fertility goddesses and demons.¹²⁶ The *csuma* disease demon of Hungarians in Moldova (Romania) can also be represented as a spinning woman, as an example below will show. These characteristics of spinning and weaving can also have an underworldly, diabolical aspect: there are data regarding dew carried to the underworld on a weaving board, or people abducted on weaving boards to a wedding in Hell.¹²⁷

Similar, but more goddess-like figures are Saint Friday (*Sveta Petka*) or Saint *Paraskeva* of Orthodox peoples; the “Pannonian”-Austrian-Moravian-Czech-Slovakian Lucia or Luca (Lucy); the Slovenian *Pehtra Baba* and *Torka/Torklja*; *Frau Sälde* from the Alpine region; *Seligen* in the Tyrol; the German *Holda/Hulda/Holle*; and the south German *Perchta*. They have even more characteristics related to agricultural fertility than the ones cited earlier; sometimes they have the features of “fate-women”. These heterogeneous belief-creatures probably have many secondary features, but their main shared characteristic, besides the attribute of spinning and weaving, is that on the days in the week or in the year according to the calendar, or during certain periods associated with the dead or with nature (such as the twelve days after Christmas for the *Perchtas*) spinning

¹²¹ Erdélyi 1976: 188.

¹²² Erdélyi 1976: 242.

¹²³ Hako 1956: 82–89; Mansikka 1909: 193–210.

¹²⁴ About the Hungarian “fair woman” with a hemp scutcher: Salamon 1987: 95–97; about the Romanian *strigoi*: Mușlea – Birlea 1970: 251–268, 407.

¹²⁵ Senn 1982: 2.

¹²⁶ References to only a few important references from the extensive literature of the topic, since there is no room to go into detail here: Szabó 1910; Róheim 1913; Mușlea – Birlea 1970: 201–206; Ivanov 1974; Becker 1990: 111–141; Pócs 1990: 572–576; 2015; Karanović – Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2002: 45–47.

¹²⁷ Moroz 1989: 135–136. There is no room and no sufficient knowledge of the material to discuss this topic in detail, but it would definitely be worthy of further research.

and weaving (and sewing, and often other women's activities, including bread baking) is forbidden. A wide overview of these goddess-like, non-Christian demonic beings can be found in a recent study by Mirjam Mencej. When discussing the belief creatures who punish those who break the weaving taboo, she focuses on the symbolic significance of spinning and weaving related to life and death, associating them with the three mythical female figures who spin the threads of fate.¹²⁸ In the Balkans, all these prohibitions are associated with the “wolf days” and with the dates of werewolf transformation related to Moon cycles. Their characteristic features include the punishment of those who violate their taboos; as well as the below-mentioned offerings.¹²⁹

It is characteristic of both groups of mythical beings that their features can resemble those of fairies and witches in Hungarian, Russian, and Southern Slavic legends. The narratives about the aforementioned “spinning” ghostly beings of the Alpine region and of the variants in the Balkans and Russia sometimes have motifs of the “Lord of animals”; in other cases – or at the same time – they appear as patrons or initiators of werewolf sorcerers.¹³⁰

I have mentioned above the offerings given to these creatures of nature: the data describing the specificities of these offerings are more precisely about these mythical figures appearing as spinning creatures. These offerings are related to the occasions of ritual spinning and weaving, healing, and the preparations of apotropaic and “human initiation” shirts. Often making the shirt is in itself the offering made to the mythical being (for St Paraskeva, St Friday, Lucia/Luca or Tuesday's Woman), and, as mentioned before, it is typically done on their festival days or during a calendar period when the activities of spinning and weaving are under taboo. (This is characteristic of every offering-like ritual mentioned here.) Thus, the role of the shirt woven during the weaving taboo is not only to “dress up” in an act of taming the demon attacking from nature, but also as an offering to the demon.¹³¹ To refer to a common, shirt-related offering ritual: in the eastern part of the Hungarian linguistic region the *csuma* shirt is a shirt woven to stop the *csuma* (popular name for plague, cholera) demon threatening the community.¹³² We know of similar, sacrificial shirts woven for disease demons in Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria.¹³³ What is special about the following information from Moldova published by Péter Halász is that here the *csuma* (cholera demon) appears as a woman with a distaff:

¹²⁸ Mencej 2010.

¹²⁹ Zingerle 1857; Lütolf 1865; Mannhardt 1904–1905: I. 99–107; Waschnitius 1913; Schwarz 1935; Kretzenbacher 1959; Kuret 1969; 1975; Muşlea – Birlea 1970: 407; Becker 1990: 137–144; Kroječ 2008; Mencej 2009; Pócs 2015. Mária Bíró took notice of the important role played by “spinning” goddesses related to childbirth and fertility in this region in connection with late Roman archaeological artefacts (she associated them with Roman goddesses and also with spinning Parcae). (Bíró 1994). I mention here that in Estonia, according to Mall Himae, it must have been very common in the past to have spinning and weaving taboos on certain days for the sake of the animals' health and well-being; although it was not associated with such demonic creatures, it was exclusively related to the (revenant) dead ensuring fertility: Hiimäe 1998: 185–225.

¹³⁰ About the *werewolf*-initiation see: Pócs 2011: 119–121. On the “Lord of the animals” belief and its spread through Europe see: Schmidt L. 1952; Paulson 1964; Mencej 2001.

¹³¹ For more on this see Pócs 1982; 2011: 191–192.

¹³² See for instance Bosnyák 1980: 156 regarding Hungarians in Moldova, Romania; Hoppál 1976: 4–5 regarding Hungarians in Szék (*Sic*), County Cluj, Romania.

¹³³ Tolstoj 1994: 151, 153; Candrea 1944: 138.

The csuma is a great disease, a typhus disease. It is also sent by God. During the night, they say that there is an ugly midwife walking around, holding a distaff. My sister died of it at the age of fourteen. She couldn't digest her food, her head was aching, she went blind, deaf and mute, all she did was snuffle. Then she finally died. To make sure that the csuma didn't come to the village, the women had to gather and, over the course of one night, until twelve o'clock, they had to spin the hemp and weave and sew a shirt. They sewed a children's shirt, and they had to leave it on the edge of the village by twelve o'clock. Then they put it there, and the csuma received it and will never come to the village again. It was given a shirt.¹³⁴

Belief in the efficacy of spinning and weaving a shirt for the plague or cholera demon appears to be common in the Balkans,¹³⁵ and was probably an occasionally practised ritual as well, the precise course of which is not clear in the narratives. However, the emphasis on some sort of “raw” feature is present in every text: virgins or old women, weaving naked and/or in silence, with incomplete tools. Often the nakedness of the demon is underlined. For instance, in the data collected by Zoltán Kallós in Gyimes, the *csuma* appears as a naked child, and this is why one has to make a shirt for him.¹³⁶ Preparing the offering during a taboo period also provides “raw” conditions, because, as we have noted, these periods of prohibitions were the times when nature “entered” the world of culture.

Above, I have made mention of the data regarding the spindle, wool, oakum and so forth ensuring well-being and protection for animals. One can often decipher an aspect of offerings from their contexts: sometimes even the publishers of the data describe it as an offering. In Finland, for instance, it is forbidden to kill weasels, as the animal is considered to be the spirit of the stable that also appears as a “spinning” or bewitching demon; the weasel has to be given a woollen offering so as to protect one's livestock.¹³⁷ (Cf. the oakum put out in the stable for the *menyé tasszony* – “weasel woman” – or the “fair woman”.) Mirjam Mencej discussed this in her book about the master of the wolves in Slavic beliefs and rites, citing Serbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian data regarding the wool offerings given to these spirit creatures on the taboo days of wool work, spinning and weaving.¹³⁸ I believe that the data about the mythical creatures (such as the Romanian *strigoi*, the Bulgarian fairies or the Slovenian werewolf) who would steal the instruments (scutcher, distaff), the raw materials or the semi-finished products of spinning and weaving (flax bundles, oakum, yarn, linens) on days on which linen or wool work were taboo, are also in some way referring to an offering. There are two interesting correlations to be mentioned in relation to this.

¹³⁴ Hungarians in Magyarfalu, County Băcau, Romania; Halász 2005: 397–398.

¹³⁵ Romanian, Serbian and Macedonian data: Candrea 1944: 138; Jung 1993: 63; Tolstoj 1994: 151, 153; Karanović – Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2002: 45.

¹³⁶ Jung 1993: 64.

¹³⁷ Hako 1956. Incantation of spinning women: 82–89.

¹³⁸ Mencej 2001: 316. Also see for Bulgarian reference: Arnaudov 1917: 74.

The werewolf-like metamorphosis of the Romanian *strigoi* is associated with certain otherworldly “spirit battles” that, according to the Balkan tradition, are similar to the battles fought by the above-mentioned werewolf sorcerers. The *strigoi* battle for the well-being of their community on the festival days of St George, St Andrew or St Stephen (also known as the “wolf days”) when spinning activities are under taboo. (The battles are among the groups of – basically demonic werewolf – figures of “dead” *strigoi*. The guardian spirit of the neighbouring village is the enemy, playing the role of the demon attacking from nature.) The stolen scutchers will be the battle-horses and combat weapons of the *strigoi* spirits in the “otherworldly” battle. In the village of the winner, there will be fewer deaths, and it will be avoided by epidemics at the expense of the village of the others. This is, therefore, a kind of fate-determining, a divine judgment-like battle fought with the tools of spinning, as if the *strigoi* fought a battle with the objects of the taboo-day offerings for the lives of human communities, which they ensured in exchange for receiving these objects.¹³⁹

The Bulgarian *rusalki* steal yarn and linen because they need them for weaving their own shirt.¹⁴⁰ The motif of weaving a heavenly shirt appears in the spirit battles of the *strigoi* as well. After the battle, they gather at an “abandoned house” where they spin the flax stolen from houses, they whiten and sew the linen into shirts. If they are not finished before the cock crows, they have to leave the work unfinished.¹⁴¹ This is also an act of shirt-weaving that defines fate; the uninhabited house, the unfinished work are all synonyms of the unravelling, of failure; it means the opposite of the effect on shirts woven by a “world creator”. (Cf. the unstitching of the Antichrist’s shirt.) This gives a divine aspect to the ambivalence of these mythical beings, who may accomplish world-creating acts to protect humanity.

I will not detail the question of flour, milk, and bread offerings related to the figures of *Lucia/Luca*, *Pehtra baba*, *Paraskeva/Pjatinica* or the *Perchtas*, as it would take us very far off our topic. I only mention that, through these goddess figures (and other undiscussed motifs, such as the battles fought for agricultural fertility by werewolf-sorcerers against chthonic demons or against the dead who take the crops to the underworld), there are chthonic agrarian god-features and otherworldly motifs of fertility that are attributed to the archaic nature-culture systems. In addition to the opposition of nature and culture, that of Earth (the world of the living) versus the underworld (the world of the dead) appears. We also come across time cycles of life-death-life in accordance with the alternation of agricultural cycles. However, for now I will bypass these questions and only underline that the presence of the *raw-cooked* systems of *nature-culture* can also be perceived on this level. On the days or during the periods of the spindle/distaff goddesses, for instance, the taboo of baking bread and of bread as offering both appear in the same context as the “sacrificial” shirt offered during the spinning taboo. Bread baked despite the taboo has “raw” characteristics (for instance, unleavened flatbread) – and all this is in connection

¹³⁹ On the *strigoi* battles see: Muşlea – Birlea 1970: 251–268.

¹⁴⁰ Moroz 1989: 112.

¹⁴¹ Muşlea – Birlea 1970: 267.

with the traits of these beings that are related to agricultural fertility: in many cases, one can decipher that the raw offering was given to *Pjatinica*, *Lucy*, or *Perchta* in order to ensure a good harvest.¹⁴² The rituals surrounding these presumed agricultural offerings could prescribe certain raw conditions related to the spinning of flax. According to some Hungarian data, as a penance for violating the taboo, one has to give unleavened bread as an offering to *Luca*.¹⁴³ In light of the above, it is only logical that as an opposite of the completed shirt, which serves the initiation into culture, the introduction into nature and the acquirement of knowledge related to the world of nature take place with raw methods and raw products: for instance, with the use of tow, or with threads spun during the spinning taboo. There is a wealth of Hungarian data about this. According to a belief from Bogyzisló (Tolna County), for instance, if someone sits in front of the church to spin on the night of Luca or at midnight on Christmas, they will see devils.¹⁴⁴ In the Ormánység, wise men and women have seven-year-old girls spin yarn for them with which they can turn the transformed girl back to her original state.¹⁴⁵ The data from Sárretudvari describe how a cunning shepherd acquires supernatural knowledge by spinning a whip on St. Lucy's Day.¹⁴⁶ Spinning "Lucy's whip" as a means of learning special skills is supported by substantial data published by Géza Róheim, but we can also mention St. Lucy's Chair, which was often fabricated by spinning, which made demonic witches visible and which was also a means of acquiring knowledge.¹⁴⁷ According to data collected by Vilmos Diószegi in Egyházasdaróc (Vas County), the *garabonciás* gave a cure-all spindle to those who donated milk to him.

As mentioned above, there were mythical beings with spindles and distaffs who appeared as initiatory figures: the fairies according to Croatian and Hungarian examples, however, initiated earthly mortals into becoming fairies with the help of yarns. Zoran Čiča described the initiation of the *vilenica* (fairy sorcerers communicating with fairies) on the basis of 17th-century Dalmatian witch trial testimonies: on Good Friday, the *vila* descends from the sky to a tree to teach the women healing; she is linked to the women gathered around the tree by a thread.¹⁴⁸ Mihály Csordós, a cowherd from Gyalóka (Sopron County), said in his 1744 court testimony that certain women (who can probably be identified as fairies) gave him a yarn with the help of which he could heal.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Regarding semi-finished products, or products representing an inferior technological state playing the role of "raw" offerings in European belief systems see: Pócs 1982; 1992. For more on this also see: Becker 1990: 142.

¹⁴³ Pócs 1982; 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Collected by Diószegi Vilmos.

¹⁴⁵ Zentai 1971: 209.

¹⁴⁶ P. Madar 1967: 195.

¹⁴⁷ Róheim 1920: 86–87; or see the group "Recognising witches" (*Boszorkány felismerése*) in the Archive of Folk Beliefs, which includes numerous data regarding Lucy's whip and – especially from Southern Hungary, Lucy's chair.

¹⁴⁸ Čiča 2002: 138; similar: Đorđević 1953: 129.

¹⁴⁹ Schram 1970: II. 195–196, 203–204. For more details on the fairy sorcerer see: Pócs 2009.

DISROBEMENT

One element that fits well into the oft-mentioned series of natural “raw” circumstances is nudity, a very frequent precondition of rituals that initiate into culture, fend off the attacks of nature, or heal demonic illnesses, and which furthermore also plays an important role in fertility magic, divination and communal rituals of rain and crop magic. As illustrated by the above examples, “clothes make the man”; accordingly, nudity is a regression within the archaic system of nature-culture, a return to nature. Turning clothes inside out fulfils a similar function, playing a role in situations adequate with nudity or other “raw” conditions. As an analogy of the werewolf turning its skin inside out, the eversion of human clothes is also an abolishment of the clothes, that is, an act of “taking off” culture.

In addition to the examples of Sándor Solymossy,¹⁵⁰ Géza Róheim, (from 1925),¹⁵¹ Thomas Sebeok,¹⁵² or Mihály Hoppál,¹⁵³ the other work by Géza Róheim, in which he brings Hungarian and other Central European examples of clothes turned inside out that protected against or aided in the recognition of witches, should be mentioned.¹⁵⁴ For the case of an unbaptized child dressed in an inside-out shirt, I could mention the data collected by Tamás Grynaeus in Dávod (Bács County), or the data collected by myself in several Hungarian regions.¹⁵⁵ According to German data, the reason for putting the christening shirt inside out on the child is to prevent it from becoming a *Mahr* demon (cf. the above-cited Serbian data concerning the *karakondzuli*).¹⁵⁶ There is much data about love magic, marriage divination or magic of conception carried out in a state of nakedness,¹⁵⁷ obviously in combination with other circumstances. A typical occurrence from Dalmatia: if a woman is childless, she should sleep with her husband, then get up during the night and, by candlelight, should walk around the room naked, her husband chasing her until he catches her. They should repeat this every night until the woman gets pregnant.¹⁵⁸

A great deal of data can be referenced in relation to weather magic: such are the fertility rites of collecting dew or naked immersion in water.¹⁵⁹ Rituals to fend off hail are also sometimes performed naked or in clothes or hats turned inside out.¹⁶⁰ (Let us remember that, according to beliefs living almost to this day, hail was brought by storm demons, the unbaptized, or devils.¹⁶¹) Both in Hungary¹⁶² and more broadly across Europe, nudity

¹⁵⁰ Solymossy 1943.

¹⁵¹ Róheim 1925: 54–58.

¹⁵² Sebeok 1948.

¹⁵³ Hoppál 2002.

¹⁵⁴ Róheim 1920: 46, 53.

¹⁵⁵ Hungarian Folk Belief Archive, Group *Kereszteleetlen gyerek* (“Unbaptized child”).

¹⁵⁶ Jungbauer 1931: 1717.

¹⁵⁷ See for instance Serbian and Croatian data: Koštiál 1910; 1911; Eckstein 1935: 882–889.

¹⁵⁸ Koštiál 1910: 287.

¹⁵⁹ Eckstein 1935: 858; Tóth G. 2001; Pócs 2003: 168–170.

¹⁶⁰ Eckstein 1935: 895–899; Gaerte 1952: 235, 244–248.

¹⁶¹ See on this Pócs 2002.

¹⁶² See for instance the above cited authors on nudity.

played an important role in boosting agricultural fertility in festive, occasional crop-magic rites and in individual magic.¹⁶³ It is a frequently required condition in apotropaic rites as well: people, animals, or even plants, the arable land, or the vegetable garden were protected from demons, ghosts, dragons, witches, devils, plant pests, and even thunderstorms by rites carried out naked or wearing inverted clothes, mostly by walking around, although there were many other variants.¹⁶⁴

In addition to divination and rites of incubation performed naked, we also need to mention nudity in relation to repentant and mourning rituals.¹⁶⁵ Stripping away, along with other “inversions” and taboos creating “raw” conditions, is usually described as the general characteristic of the liminal phases of mourning or funerary rites.¹⁶⁶ This is a natural connotation of nature’s temporary regression. Gábor Klaniczay mentioned nudity as a regressive phenomenon connected to social exclusion in his discussion of heretic movements, the Franciscan movement and other medieval and 18th-century protest movements articulating the opposition of nature-culture; movements that used the wearing of rags or complete disrobement as an indication of leaving society and of opposition towards the social order.¹⁶⁷

Putting on clothes, as we could see, is an initiation into society and into culture; those who disrobe will step back into nature. This view is supported by the data about nudity accompanying the transformation of men into demons (werewolves, witches, incubi, etc.) considered as dual creatures,¹⁶⁸ or the data emphasising the nudity of demons as opposed to the clothed human being – besides their other “raw” features. Such references can be found regarding the raw-meat-eating werewolf, the *csuma* demon mentioned earlier, the Slovenian “dog-headed” demon (who comes from the “end of the world” to attack humanity), or the Greek *kallikantzaroi*. The latter are demonic werewolves who arrive from the underworld among the humans in the twelve days after Christmas; they are distorted, physically malformed, black men: they are naked, they rip off their clothes, they eat raw meat.¹⁶⁹

Nudity is, thus, an extra-societal, and therefore asexual state of being. This coincides with what Victor Turner writes about nudity in relation to the liminal state of rites of passage: during this state, the human being is not a social being, only an individual, invisible in terms of social structure.¹⁷⁰ The system of nudity is, therefore, not an “erotic” but an “abstinent” phenomenon; not – as research has often concluded¹⁷¹ – the presence

¹⁶³ Eckstein 1935: 871–876, 890–895; Košťál 1911: 287.

¹⁶⁴ See for instance the rich material of Géza Róheim on Hungarian, Austrian and other neighbouring nations. (Róheim 1920: 46–47, 53); or the examples of Eckstein and Gaerte: Eckstein 1935: 841–854; Gaerte 1952: 235.

¹⁶⁵ Eckstein 1935: 868–871.

¹⁶⁶ See on this for instance Ivanov 1969 and Fox 1973.

¹⁶⁷ Klaniczay 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Eckstein 1935: 859–862.

¹⁶⁹ Schmidt B. 1871: 239; Lawson 1910: 208, 253; Kretzenbacher 1968.

¹⁷⁰ Turner 1972: 339.

¹⁷¹ See for instance Róheim 1925: 58: in relation to data on nudity of Hungarians and other neighbouring people (fertility sorcerers, healers, vermifuge, etc.) he mostly underlines the erotic aspect, he talks about the “repetition of libidinous situations”; Solymossy (1943) and later, referring to him, Sebeok (1948) interpret the removal or inversion of clothes as a riddance of some kind of harmful spirits dwelling inside the clothes, with which I also disagree.

but the absence of Eros. In this regard, I have to agree with Mihály Hoppál who, after having summarized many other aspects of the research on nudity (presently not relevant here), came to the conclusion that the “denial of Eros” is some sort of purification, an acquirement of knowledge that entails retreat and suffering.¹⁷²

As I have shown in my study examining werewolf-beliefs, when discussing the special features (such as the caul) manifesting at the birth of mediators “commuting” between the worlds of nature and culture (“fertility sorcerers” of werewolf-nature), which allude to nature, these are cases of the regression of people who “dressed” themselves into culture/society; all this to ensure the rebirth of life rooted in nature/death, to ensure the circle of life and death. The werewolf-mediator initiated into human society has to “submerge” again and again in nature in order to ensure that, as a cultural being, it will be able to defeat its natural adversary, its own alternative in the system of nature (the werewolf defeats the wolf, the dragon-man defeats the dragon, etc.). We only have to recall the Bulgarian data, at the beginning of this paper, about the dragon-child who had to be dressed on the first day in a shirt woven under “raw” conditions so that it could later successfully fight against the hail-bringing *hala*.¹⁷³ As an analogy to this, and as the conclusion of the above-cited data, it can be established that human beings, through fertilising “raw” ritual nuances that refer back to nature, ensure the success of rites that create, develop and protect society and culture. With the absence of Eros, Eros can be recreated.

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¹⁷² Hoppál 2002.

¹⁷³ See the relevant references of “werewolf-sorcerers” – for instance the “alter ego battles” for the fertility of crops – for more detail see: Ginzburg 1983 [1966]; Pócs 1999, chapter 7 and Pócs 2011: 121–125.

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LOCATION OF USED MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

- MNT = *Magyar Néphit Topográfia* [Topography of Hungarian Folk Belief] (survey collection conducted in the 1970s, the material is in the Archive of Folk Belief)
- NA = *Magyar Néphit Archivum* [Hungarian Folk Belief Archive] (at the HAS Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of Ethnology, Budapest)
- EA = *Ethnológiai Adattár* [Ethnological Archive] (Museum of Ethnography, Budapest)

SRAJCE, OGRINJALA IN GOLOTA: SIMBOLIČNI VIDIKI OBLAČIL

ÉVA PÓCS



Študija obravnava verovanja in obredja, ki so povezana s srajcami, ogrinjali, predenjem in tkanjem, haljami in goloto, ki imajo pomembno vlogo v nekaterih simbolnih sistemih, tako krščanskih kot predkrščanskih, v evropskem ljudskem verovanju. Lahko so v celoti prisotni v različnih semantičnih slojih določenih verovanj ali obredij ali pa delujejo kot vodilno načelo, ideološka osnova, ki je osnovna podlaga za nekatera verovanja. Sestavljeni so iz simbolne serije nasprotij *narava – kultura, surovo – kuhano in življenje – smrt*. V tem binarnem vesolju so človeška bitja opredeljena kot ‚živa, ne mrtva‘ in kot ‚ljudje, ne živali.‘ Živijo v osrednje pozicioniranem naseljenem prostoru, čigar značilnost je kultura v nasprotju z naravo, ki se nahaja na nenaseljenem in neciviliziranem obrobju, kjer prebivajo divje živali, demoni in mrtve duše. Za naravo je značilno, da tam ni domačih živali ali gojenih rastlin, prav tako pa tudi ne kulturnih procesov in izdelkov kot so oranje, sejanje, udomačevanje divjih živali, peči, kovaštva, železa, predenja in tkanja, oblačil in krščanskih zakramentov. V nadaljevanju se osredotočam na vprašanja, kako je bil ukročen ‚surovi‘ svet narave in kako so se človeška bitja, ki so se rodila kot naravna bitja in ‚divjaki,‘ kultivirala in se preoblikovala v družbena bitja. V tem razvoju osnovnih značilnosti človeške kulture pripisujejo osrednjo vlogo predenju in tkanju, kuhanju in peki ter kovaški obrti.

Njihov simbolični okvir in konkreten položaj in vlogo v evropski kulturi je včasih mogoče rekonstruirati zgolj na podlagi drobcev, ki jih najdemo v folklornih besedilih; drugič pa jih je moč rekonstruirati na podlagi verovanj in obredov, ki so še zmeraj v rabi. Očitno je svet, za katerega sta značilni nasprotni si dvojici narava - kultura in surovo – kuhano, predvsem pa simbolična funkcija predenja in tkanja tkanin in srajce, prisoten tudi v geografsko in kronološko oddaljenih predkrščanskih in krščanskih kulturah, ne glede na jezikovne prepreke. Večina preučenih pojavov ima predkrščanske in krščanske ustreznice, saj kaže, da imajo omenjene oblačilne značilnosti arhaične korenine v starodavni evropski preteklosti, splošne poteze arhaičnih pogledov na svet, ki presegajo kulturne meje Evrope in so morda veljavne povsod, njihovi drobci pa so integrirani v krščanstvo.

Pričujoča raziskava se osredotoča na naslednja vprašanja: kako je oblačenje (in pa predenje in tkanje, ki ustvarjata blago, to pa predstavlja osnovo za oblačila) preoblikovalo »golo« človeško bitje v socialno bitje; kako je ljudi ‚vedlo‘ v svet kulture; kako je ‚srajca‘ postala izraz identitete in sredstvo za izpolnjevanje družbeno vlogo posameznika; in kako so oblačila ščitila ljudi pred demoni in umrlimi iz sveta narave, ki so se spravljali nadnje.

Vsaka evropska kultura, ki smo jo podrobneje pogledali, ima poleg zgoraj opisanega sistema, temelječega na nasprotju med življenjem in smrtjo, ki je ustrezen glede na horizontalno dvojnost človeškega sveta kot kulturnega središča in narave kot kaotičnega obrobja, trojni sistem nebes, zemlje in podzemnega sveta. Nebeška

božanstva odločajo o usodi in zagotavljajo zaščito, pod njimi je zemlja, se pravi človeški svet, pod njim pa podzemni svet demonov in umrlih. V tem trojnem sistemu imajo nit, blago, srajca in ogrinjalo kozmičen pomen in se navezujejo na kozmos, ustvarjanje vesolja, usodo človeštva, itd. Zaradi božanstev, ki tkejo nit usode ali predejo srajco usode in se pojavljajo v mitologiji določenih narodov, pa tudi zaradi povezav in analogij, ki se navezujejo na mikro in na makro kozmos, so človeška verovanja prežeta z bajeslovnimi principi, individualna obredja pa povezana z usodo vsega človeštva in sveta. Predenje, blago, srajca in ogrinjalo tako pridobijo kozmični vidik, ki se nanaša na celotno vesolje in vse človeštvo, in postanejo atributi božanskega, to pa posvečuje in krepi njihovo vlogo v človeškem svetu.

Eden od elementov, ki se lepo umeščajo v poprej omenjeni niz naravnih, ‚surovih‘ stanj, je golota. Golota je zelo pogost predpogoj ritualov, ki človeka vpeljejo v kulturo, ščitijo pred izbruhi narave ali ozdravijo bolezni, ki so jih ljudem zavdali demoni. Poleg tega ima golota pomembno vlogo pri magiji plodnosti in pridelka, pri prerokovanju in pri skupnih obredih za dež. Kot ponazarjajo zgornji primeri, »oblačila naredijo človeka.« Zato je golota regresija znotraj arhaičnega sistema narava-kultura in predstavlja vrnitev k naravi. Podoben namen in vlogo kot golota in ostala ‚surova‘ stanja ima tudi obračanje oblačil na napačno stran. V analogiji z volkodlakom, ki obrne svojo kožo navzven, je obračanje človeških oblačil znak odlaganja oblačil in pravzaprav pomeni ‚odlaganje‘ kulture. Nadetje oblačil pomeni sprejem v družbo in v kulturo, tisti, ki jih odložijo, pa se bodo vrnili k naravi. Golota je tako stanje izven kulture in zato brezspolna. Med liminalno fazo v obredih prehoda človeško bitje ni družbeno bitje, zgolj posameznik, ki je v družbeni strukturi neviden. Koncept golote tako nima ‚erotičnega‘ pomena, pač pa se navezuje na koncept ‚vzdržnosti‘ – ne pomeni prisotnosti Erosa, kot so pogosto ugotavljale raziskave, pač pa njegovo odsotnost. Bolgarski deček-zmaj, ki je moral biti prvi dan oblečen v srajco, stkano v ‚surovih‘ okoliščinah, se je zato lahko kasneje uspešno boril proti *halu*, ki prinaša točo. Kot analogijo lahko za zaključek zgoraj citiranih podatkov ugotovimo, da človeška bitja s tem, da gojijo ‚surove‘ različice ritualov, ki se obračajo nazaj k naravi, zagotavljajo uspeh obredij, ki ustvarjajo, razvijajo in varujejo družbo in kulturo. Z odsotnostjo Erosa je Eros lahko ponovno vzpostavljen.