

The Human Body in Southern Slavic Folk Sorcery

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In many charms, as in other rites, we often express a need to know with what part of the body one should commit a certain action: do we spit on the fourth finger of the left hand, do we touch something with a heel of the left foot, or cut hair from the back of the head? I have found within Slavonic sorcery that there is a principle of systematization that with its discrete rules does or doesn't allow communication of what we will. The instigation of will can be determined by a set of rules. These rules rise above one's will and function as rules of use, as rules of verbal language-of will.

In magical-religious texts, the body is not usually seen as a biological organization comprised of organs with specific functions, but above all it is seen as a spacious organized whole, with its parts having a certain symbolic meaning. Thus, certain parts of the body become signs by which mythic contents are expressed.

The view we hold, based upon the above parameters allows a creation of analogies between the human body and other forms of the real world. This means that man, in his creation of the model of the world that surrounds him, puts forth his body as a measure of the universe. When bringing in the

connection of the human body and universe, we create a base for the creation of cosmogonical myths, in which the body of the mythic hero, the First Human, gives birth to the universe. In the *Upanishads*, the cosmos is created from the parts of the body of Purusha: - from his *mouth* exited words; from his *eyes* came light, from light sun was made; from *ears*, the ability to hear, from this ability came the cardinal directions; from his *skin* grew hair, from *hair* plants were created; from *heart* came spirit, from spirit the *moon* was made; from the *navel* came apana, from apana – death; from his *phallus* flowed sperm, from sperm, was *water* created. In ancient India, they believed Purusha was a synonym for human.

Visantians interpreted the name of Adam as an abbreviation (ADAM), created of the Greek first letters in the words for East, West, North and South, concluding that man is a little universe (microcosm). In an apocryphal manuscript from Bosnia, “*Skazanije popa Ilije Ilica*”, the creation of humankind is considered God’s work; all was created of parts of the universe. God created *body* from earth, *eyes* of the sea, *blood* from dew, *mind* from clouds, *strength* from wind, *bones* of stone, *hair* of grass, *spirit* of the Holy Ghost.¹

Formation of the symbolic picture of the human body is based on a series of binary oppositions, which are present in the texts of traditional culture as an operative aspect of mythic thinking, as I will explore in this article.

Naked – Clothed

Immediately after the birth of a baby, the child is considered to be on the border between culture and nature, and that is why it is not *dressed* but *swaddled*. The previously worn shirts of the mother or father are usually used for the first swaddling. This way, the marginal status of the child in the family is bridged. The swaddled child is not the same as the dressed, because the diaper wraps around the body, making it an undivided whole, and the cloth is sewn by the measure of the child’s body. Until the baptism, the child is called *goljca*, *golco*, *kuslja* (meaning naked little thing), emphasizing his or her different status in his relationship to other people. Upon his/her baptism, the baby gets their name from their godfather and their shirt from their godmother, and with that, he or she is initiated from nature into culture.

One's name and clothes are seen as a measure of a human being and that is why they may be hidden when there is danger from malevolent spirits.

Because the opposite of the human world from the wild can be seen as an opposite between clothed and unclothed (naked) in terms of magical communication, where the direct contact of human with demonical beings is requested, man has to be unclothed when participating in magical rites. In Bulgarian history, men who "banished" the dragon from their village were naked. Also, among the Serbs, the blacksmith and his wife made tiny tools of iron, naked, at midnight, for magical protection.

Body-Soul

The idea that humans consist of *body* and *soul* is present in Slavic, as in many other

cultures across the world. After the death of the body, the soul leaves it and goes to the other world and the body decays. The relationship between the soul and body can be seen in dichotomies: inside/out, permanent/changeable, invisible/visible.

Among southern Slavic nations, the belief that the soul of some people can leave the body and return to it after some time is very widespread. According to this belief, such leave-taking can happen during the night at a specific hour. The people who have the power to do this usually have demonic characteristic, according to folklore, and they are the

enemies of humankind, called witches, or *mora*. But, they can also work for the benefit of the human race, such as the *Zdhuaci*, for example, who fight against the daemons of hail clouds. As a proof of the folk belief that some people with demonic characteristics can separate the body and soul, many people will testify to how they have seen how a witch can be stopped from *Macva*-separating her soul from her body. During the day, they say, if one suspects that a woman is a witch, a needle with a red string should be thrust in her shadow in the area of the head. If a woman is truly a witch, it is believed that she can't move from that place until sunset.²

There is a less-known traditional understanding of the soul leaving its body. In the Serbian-

Bulgarian-Macedonian tradition of spellcrafting, a very archaic form of magical behavior has survived, in which the cunning man or women banishes a demonic force with her/his soul.³ This is done with a movement of the mouth-a yawn. That is why cunning-folk yawn during a healing ritual. If the cunning woman doesn't feel like yawning, she hasn't found any disease. In some charms involving children, a cunning man or woman may threaten demonic forces with the soul of a child's mother.

Everyday people cannot cast spells for themselves, only cunning folk can do it for them, often older women, among Serbs called *bajalice*, Croats in Herzegovina - *mole* and *lice*, in Kotari in Dalmatia - *vidigoje*, in Macedonia - *basmarici*, *bajalici*, *bajaljki*, in Bulgaria - *bajacki*, *basmarki*, in Slovenia - *zagovarjalki*, Russia - *zagovoscici*, etc.⁴ Those who can do harm with spells are called in Serbia - *vracarice*, *vrazalice*, *cinjarice*, Monte Negro - *madjionice*, *carovnice*, Croatia - *coprnice*, Russia - *koldunje*.⁵ Knowledge of spellcrafting is transmitted only within the family, from elders to young, and according to this tradition, a young cunning woman begins working only after the old one stops. There are common ways of transmission of spellcrafting knowledge (in some cases *bajalice* transmit knowledge before puberty; in Bulgaria the old *bajalica* spits in the mouth of young one.) According to sayings of some cunning-folk, they have started to cast spells after the order of God's Mother, St. Petka, faeries, etc. which have come to them in dreams or during long illness and have discovered their ways of spellcraft. In some areas (eastern Serbia, *Banat*, western Herzegovina), a cunning woman, during a spell, falls into some kind of altered state of consciousness – a very sleepy trance-like state, losing consciousness. From this it is traditionally believed that, her soul, while in such state, is fighting with a demon of disease or visiting the faeries asking them for the return of health to the ill person. A Cunning woman has the obligation to keep a secret of spellcrafting and to always say any verbal part of spell correctly even if she sometimes does not understand it. Spell ("*basma*") is understood as an "instrument" of a special kind, which carries power since the Old Times and which assignment is to return balance. A

Cunning woman often does it in a symbolical way, creating some kind of parallel model, in which existing conditions, using specific magical procedures, translate into another - wanted state. According to assignation, spells can be sorted into spells for medical, economic and social life. As for the structure, spells can take the form of established phrases, prayers, beseeching or a developed, more complex, scheme.⁶ For every occasion a unique spell exists but, in some cases, the text of one spell can be modified to suit a different need, with the cunning woman simply improvising. During spellcrafting, *bajalica* uses some tools, which have magical functions. They can be part of the non-verbal message of the spell - on one level, and on another – an illustration of cunning woman's intention (usually expressed in the form of a threat). The first group consists of: salt, eggs, flour, objects connected to fire, dead-man's things, parts of some animals and plants. The second group consists of: sharp tools (knife, axe, thorn, spindle), objects with strong smells (garlic, incense), cleaning tools (broom). Commonly, part of casting spells is the unusual behavior of participants. This behavior is, in some way, different than every-day, normal behavior. It is characterized by inverted behavior, such as silence, taking off clothes, spitting or swearing. Dragging some objects through a hollow tree, or their measuring has an important role in magical casting. Spells are cast in specific time and specific place, some cast during full, some during waxing moon. The day of the week is of some importance (very often spells are cast on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday); time of day (often some borderline time of day is chosen - morning just before sunrise, and night immediately after sunset, however some spells are cast in the middle of the night). Special marked places with some kind of ritual importance are often chosen for spell casting. Such places represent the boundary between common and alien space, starting from fireplace, doorstep, roof, fence, etc. Borderline places between land and water can be used as places for spellcrafting (wells, rivers, springs, watermill, bridge). "Unclean" places such as pig stys and graveyards are also used. Places with some kind of vertical line constantly present (chimney, standing stones, trees) are used for such activities too. In some instance Slavic ways of spellcrafting have been influenced by written magical literature (apocryphal prayers, curses, magical formulas). There are three lines of

influence: Visantian (via Greek language), Roman-Germanic (via Latin and German) with only a little influence from Turkish, Arabian, Islamic sources.

The most archaic form of spell craft is present among Slavs in the Balkan-Carpathian area and in Northern Russia.

Horizontal Division of the Body

The body is divided into three parts horizontally: – head, chest and legs. There are many forms of magical healing which work using this system. In Macedonia, to heal irrational fear among children, a cunning woman places nine horseshoes near the head, chest and then knees. In *Levca* and *Temnic*, the cunning woman “replaces a cock for a man”, for the magical healing of epilepsy. A midwife does this when the epileptic falls asleep. She will tear off the head of a young black cock that hasn’t sung yet and bury the cock’s head beneath the epileptic’s head, while the body of the cock with the wings is buried beneath the epileptic’s waist, and the cock’s legs are buried beneath the epileptic’s legs.⁷

Waist-Belt

The symbolic view of the human is usually based upon the clothed man. Clothing in traditional Slavic culture holds an importance for the *belt*, which separates the body into two parts: – the *upper* (clean) and *lower* (unclean) half. Because of this separation, the belt has a very important meaning; it becomes a medial element, which brings together two opposites. From this idea originates the very important role of the waist-belt in Slavic magic tradition. The cultural idea of girding one’s waist has become a key element of cosmological Slavic myth, within which people believe that there is a world above us and underneath us. Those who live above us put the belt on just below their armpits, and those beneath us, put the belt around their thighs. But we, since we are in the middle world, gird our waists.⁸

Among simple folk in Russia in the 19th century, the belt was considered a sacred object because it was gifted upon baptism. It was considered rude if one prayed to God, ate and slept without the belt. In Herzegovina there still exists the custom of burying a child who has died with a belt around its

waist. It is believed that if the child is buried without the belt, it couldn't have anything of its own in the other world.⁹

Because the belt is a boundary between two opposite principles, it has a very important role in magical practice. In eastern Serbia, if one wants to be protected from bullets, one must shoot down a piece of mistletoe from a tree and sew its twigs into one's belt.¹⁰ In Bosnia, a child who cries a lot is thought to be cursed. The cursed child's waist is girded with a string woven with four colors – red, yellow, black and orange.¹¹ As a protection from night demons, known as *mora*, people put a belt over themselves during the night. When a *domacin*, who is a large property owner, suspects that there is *cuma* (an evil night spirit) in the village, he orders everyone to take off their belts, tie them together, and wrap them all around the houses. In Macedonia, for protection of the whole village, twin brothers till the ground around the village with a plough and twin oxen.

With the girdling of one's waist the opposition of up/down, clean/unclean, human/inhuman, is neutralized and thus, the possibility of conflict with malevolent spirits is neutralized too. For the same reason, Montenegrans girdled their waists with a belt when they walked through the cemeteries and let it drag behind them.¹² People from Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia think that if they approach a wolf, they should unbuckle their belt and they will surely save their lives. Other than the neutralization of the above said opposites, this custom makes the human himself a zoomorphic being, because the belt is used as a tail, and with it trailing behind, the difference between human and animal is negated.

The belt is also a horizontal axis and because of that it can take attributes from the female paradigm. The belt, together with a vertical axis; i.e. the height of a woman, creates a cross which point of intersection is the navel. Because of that, a belt is used in magical actions connected to giving birth.

Encircling a man, the belt is his measure too, and in archaic texts a man's measure can replace a real human. For example, if a man to whom Fates send illness cannot go to a doctor or nurse, he sends his belt.¹³ In Kosovo, the rainbow is called "the belt" and it is thought that if one passes underneath

it, s/he will change into the opposite sex: male will become female and vice versa.¹⁴

The Legs

The symbolic function of the legs is usually based on their connection to earth. A very important element is that they are seen as an ending of the body, since the head is the body's beginning. Because of that, a charm begins from the head, gradually banishing illness into the legs and from there – out of the body:

*“Bezi urok iz glave na prsa,
“The curse runs from the head into the chest,
iz prsa na trbu,
from the chest into the belly,
iz trbua na bedra,
from the belly into the thighs,
iz bedra na tabane...”
from the thighs into the soles...”*

There is a belief that above the head of a dying man, there is a guardian angel and below his feet, the devil, and each of them calls his soul.¹⁶ The attack of malevolent beings usually begins from the legs. Here is a description of an attack of the night demon, *mora* from Herzegovina:

“First, beginning from the toes on the left foot, a man feels some very heavy presence there: - something is pulling the toe and he feels it climbing on the leg; it feels like a huge stone falling on the leg. From the leg it goes into the stomach and, then, into the chest.”¹⁷

Knees, heels, sock and shoes are also very important in magical actions. When people suspect that a strong wind is caused by the devil, they say: “Under the left knee!”¹⁸ to banish the wind. In Bosnia, people believe that they can see witches if they, during the Easter dinner, spit the first bite of the dinner in the hand and look around. They believe that then they may see witches flying around glowing like sparks.¹⁹ In Slavonia, some believe that

if an old woman falls, it is because a male witch hit her in the knee.²⁰ There are many charms that use the touch of the heel for healing. The curses using the heel are usually used to cure diseases connected to the stomach. The most powerful heel is the one with which a cunning woman or man has killed a snake. The connection between shoes and the abundance of the earth can be seen in some Christmas customs – on Christmas Eve everyone take their shoes off before they go to bed so the crops grow evenly.²¹ To protect oneself from spells, one should wear one red and one green sock.²²

Vertical Division

Left and Right

Of all the opposites of the body, the most noticed one is the one concerning the left and the right side of the body. The right side is seen as a good, favorable, positive and as a male side; the left is marked as bad, unfavorable, negative, and a female side. Because of the communication with an unclean force, which goes with the same paradigm as the left side, spells are often cast with the left arm. “The left arm doesn’t hold a cross”, is a common expression in charms. For enhancing the powers, a cunning man would, when he sees the first snail in the spring, touch his head with the fourth finger on the left hand and say: “Whatever you are, go back!”

Front side – Back side of the Body

In spell crafting and divination, the front side of the body has these attributes – mine, human, and favorable, while the backside of the body is connected to the alien and inhuman.

For better communication with the spirit world, elements from the *backside of the body* are used: for an example, a sick man is wiped with the backside of his shirt. In love magic, cookies are made with water that has been trickled down one’s spine and has been collected on one’s bottom.²³ In the making of an amulet against ill luck, the hair from the backside of the head is used. The opposite front/back side of the body can be translated into the wider opposition of forward/backward (going backwards, spitting over the left shoulder while doing the spell).²⁴

Center – Periphery of the Body

Hair and Nails

In folk magic, the nails and the hair are often used; sometimes hair from the beard and eyelashes too. All these elements can be sorted into peripheral opposition. The hair and the nails symbolize continuous birth and dying (expressed through constant growth and cutting) and through this, the symbol of perpetual change is expressed which is the goal of cunning-folk.

The hair is associated with the negative principle and the chthonic world. Because of that, there is a belief that one should not throw his hair into the water or else it will turn into snakes.²⁵ Among Serbs, after a death there is a custom that men must go without hats until the deceased is buried. After the burial ceremony they do not shave for 3 or 7 days.

The hair, like the nails, according to the *pars pro toto* principle, can be a substitute for humans. In a spell to cause a man's death, one has to take some of his hair, three nails from his toes and three from his fingers, a piece of his clothes and all is put into a rag doll made of the man's clothing and buried in the grave of an anonymous person.²⁶

In charms, when an illness returns to a person, first, the cunning woman or man will hit him/her in the *nails*, then *joints*, *body* and *head* (*from the periphery toward the center*), and when the illness is banished from the person: - then it goes from *the brain into the bones*, from *the bones into the flesh*, from *the flesh into the skin*, from *the skin into the hair*, and from *the hair into the grass* (*from the center toward the periphery*).²⁷ Almost identical practices can be found among Germans: "A German adjuration addressed to a worm enjoins it to "go out" from the patient's marrow into his veins, then from his veins into his flesh, and so forth until is outside the body altogether."²⁸

The picture of the world that surrounds humans is created by the same process of thoughts, which are also used for observance of one's own body and its situation in that same world. The key for understanding the world in mytho-poetic text is created on the perception of the human body and its

status in the world space. The body becomes the heuristic model for the understanding of the cosmos.

The Voice

The Voice and the Light

The voice has had a very important role in the history of the Slavic culture. In cosmogonical myths, the voice is the beginning of the creation of the universe, because the light and the voice are opposites of the dark and silence. The first sign that a newborn baby has come into this world is its voice; and the first sound it hears is its voice. The voice separates it from the dark womb, but it leads it into the coldness of the world and risk. And later, as an adult, when this world threatens him or her in any period of his life, when it makes him or her incapable of dealing with hard situations, s/he raises their voice – in screams, cries, and pleadings. By spellcrafting; i.e. with the help of the words; that is the voice, the disturbance of the order in life, which is threatening to humans, is removed.

Among Slavs who live on the Balkans, the verbal part of the charm is called “*basma*”. This word is of ancient Slavic origin and its root is **bha-*, which forms two major groups of words – one with the meaning “to speak”, and the second “to light”.²⁹ Independent of the hypothesis of semantic connections of these two verbs; in charms there are two opposite paradigms – the first are *the light and the speaking* (the sound) and the second is *the dark and the silence*. The first paradigm is attributed to humans and their social space, and the second – the wilderness and the chthonic world.³⁰

In formulas for banishing unclean forces, the places to which those forces are sent are described as dark and where no voice can reach them (the voice of the rooster, the bell and the sound of an axe hitting the tree, most often).³¹ During contact with such beings, accidental or otherwise, the person is obliged to be silent or else she can be severely hurt.

The spirit forces such as *ala*, werewolves, witches, and devils, are believed to endanger even the main sources of light – the Sun and the Moon. That is when there is an eclipse. People defend themselves during an eclipse with

shouting, ringing bells, hitting pots and other things, or else complete darkness would reign.³²

The Whispering and the Singing

Charms are often realized in vocal form, and, according to the rule, in a special vocal way. The most often way is whispering. Among Poles, the cunning woman lowers her head and very quietly whispers the charm. This way of spellcrafting was present even among ancient Assyrians and among other nations also; for example, the Hebrews. The whispering has a symbolic function. It can be seen as a spirit speaking i.e. the cunning woman is “an instrument”, transmitter of an entity’s language/speaking. In other words, she is “the gateway” through which, by speaking, a super-human force travels. It is enough for her to make contact with the power, which helps her, and to mark the cause of action. She describes the present situation, names the diseases, etc. in the charm. The helping power is often the Christian God, but among the Serbs the older system has survived and besides God, the helpers may be the Virgin Mary, and fairies who are like sisters to the cunning women.

There are other forms of spellcrafting also. In southern Serbia, some cunning-folk speak their charm in a monotone or even voice, which sounds more like singing than speaking. They fall into trance and, through the song, say the cure for the ill person. Some of them, after coming into the usual state of consciousness, cannot remember what they said while singing.³³ Some cunning-folk call for the help of their sister fairies, or even the soul of a drowned person.³⁴

Here is an example of the concept of a charm having supernatural powers. This is the charm against the bite of poisonous snakes and it comes from Macedonia. As a charm, the song heard in a dream is used. Before spellcrafting, the person says: “My rooster lays the red eggs.”³⁵ With this anti-behavior, the “upside down” model of the world is created, which should bring the neutralization of the human-snake’s poison to a position of opposition, where the snake’s poison is seen as an unclean spirit from the wild space.

Based upon the above listed examples, cunning-folks' singing and whispering can be connected because both transcend the simple, one-sided function of speaking as a social act, extending the possibility of communication with beings outside of the human world. The only difference is that one form "lowers below" the normal speaking (the whispering), and the second "rises above" it (the singing). Both forms demand a special emotional state (ecstasy or deep gravity. Among southern Slavs there are traces of the cunning-folk falling into trance similar to shamanistic journeying while whispering. In such forms of healing, *the voice* and *tears* have special symbolical meaning.

The Voice and the Soul

In a description of a charm against a curse, the cunning woman starts to yawn and tears start to drop from her eyes if she finds the disease she has been looking for. In Herzegovina, a cunning woman falls into a feverish state, sweats and bursts into tears. Sometimes even foam starts to fall from her mouth and cascades to the ground.³⁶ The usual rule is that the cunning woman speaks the charm with untied hair or, as among Vlachs in eastern Serbia, she is completely nude.³⁷ If this picture of a cunning woman is in contrast to the picture of some female mythological beings that cause diseases like the *forest* or *mountain mothers* and *babice*, one can see some striking similarities, also. These creatures are often depicted in the state of extreme rage and anger, with wide-open eyes and bared teeth. By sometimes bringing themselves into a special state of fury, cunning women take the "wild" upon themselves as the most convenient way to deal with the malevolent spirit force. In some charms, there are traces, which show that the cunning woman fights against the unclean force with her own *soul*, because of that, she constantly *yawns* and speaks the whole charm with the "whole voice", i.e. without a pause. Numerous examples show that *the voice* is seen as an outer manifestation of the spellcrafter's *soul*, which hunts down demons like a hunting dog.

The Voice and the Tears as the Axis Mundi

There are specific type of charms spread over the central Balkans among the Slavic population and partially among the Vlachs, which can be called "the story about suffering and healing of a man".³⁸ According to the contents, it can be divided into several groups.

The first group includes the charms against infected wounds, inflicted by sharp objects accidentally. These charms are present in eastern Serbia and western Bulgaria. They are formed by this model:

1. The person goes outdoors to collect herbs and hurts him/herself on some sharp object;
2. The wound gets infected and the person starts to cry because of the strong pain;
3. His/her voice goes high, up into the sky and the Virgin Mary hears it and asks about his/her trouble;
4. After the person repeats his/her story, the Virgin Mary soothes his/her pain and promises that a cunning man or woman will show up and ease the trouble.

The sharp objects are plants like *Dispacus silvester*, *Genistra germanica*, Hawthorn (*Crataegus sp.*), and things like the bone of the snake, the tooth of the wolf, the claw of an eagle, etc. These plants and parts of the animals have special magical function in other charms and magical rituals too.

The second group consists of charms, which differ from the first group by the cause of disease; in this group, the disease is caused by a malevolent spirit force on which a person stumbles upon in the field. Because of that, the circle of diseases is much bigger, and so is the action of the charms. Dangerous beings, which cause illness, are named thus: *ala*, *babice*, the three headed snake, and fairies. The sick man will also cry and his prayers are answered by his patron saint or even Christ.³⁹

Except for the permanent structure, there is an archaic formula tied to the voice and the tears in these charms. The Virgin Mary or the saints help the suffering person only when she “screams up to the sky, and cries down to the earth”. With this formula the symbolic union between the sky and the earth is created: - the endangered person builds up the cosmic axis, which means an expression of a need for correction of disturbed order. The creation of an axis means the bringing to life, the sacred time of the beginning, that is an archaic order in which everything has had its steady place and where no human being has been threatened by beings from an alien world. There is

another level of symbolism here too: the axis is built up by real things, which are also the attributes of the Thunderer (the voice) and Mother Earth (the tears, moist). It is interesting that in some charms, the cosmic axis is symbolically created by the voice of a rooster and crying: "Roosters are crowing on the earth, while the crying goes high up to the sky".⁴⁰

Magical Function of Genitals

The symbolic picture of the human in texts about folklore and ethnographic work is created on a binary principle. In the vertical perception; the strongest expressed opposition of the head/the legs, which is seen as binary opposition up/down, that is the beginning/the ending is translatable in the opposition clean/unclean. Because the final points on the human body are on the head and the legs, they become a person's "measure". Considering that it is believed that some people are capable to take away someone's "measure" with their evil eye; covering the head (with the hat or scarf) and wearing shoes (besides its pragmatic function), has the opposite symbolic effect - that of hiding "the measure" of the human body, as a way of protection against curses.

Under the much more severe rule of covering, which is very old and present in almost all nations worldwide, are the parts of the body from the navel or waist down including genitals and anus which must be covered at all times. These parts of the body have special status in the culture and except for the covering they are also forbidden to be spoken of in public. Some magical actions are, however, based on the intentional breaking of the rule of not showing and not naming the genitals.⁴¹ The complete understanding of this phenomena would require an in depth discussion of marriage customs and beliefs connected to sex and birth giving but since that is not the topic, it will be only mentioned in passing here.

Mystery of Conception

As many researchers have noted, in some traditional cultures conception is a great secret. Among other "primitive" nations the connection between sex and conception is not understood, or conception is ascribed to unknown forces.⁴²

In Serbian folk stories and poems there exists an international motif of “miracle conception”, where the woman gets pregnant without sexual intercourse, usually when she tastes the powder of a dead man’s skull.⁴³ Among Bulgarians the motif of becoming a hero from stone is widespread. The late V. Cajkanovic, an eminent Serbian folklorist, showed the unbreakable connection between marriage customs among Serbs and the cult of the ancestors.⁴⁴ He noticed that behind the diversity of marriage customs lies an inauguration of the bride into a new family unit, which consists of three parts: leaving the old family unit- coming into a new home- entering into a new family unit. The primary meaning of these rituals lies in getting consent from the ancestors, the protectors of home, and for the enlargement of family. The second part of marriage customs is the protection of the new couple from the forces of malevolent spirits. There’s a connection between the ancestors and malevolent spirits. A couple can get in contact with them in spite of the boundary between the living and dead through the sexual act. With certainty one can say that contact is made during the first sexual intercourse. The defloration of the bride means opening the way into the world of the ancestors and direct contact with them because the female genitals are associated with a hole/abyss, and along with that, with the “gate” of the other world.

That is why, in a folk riddle, the bride is called “*pracijepaca*” and the groom is called “*pracijep*” (the one who’s making cleft, who opens with a sharp and hard tool): “*Pracijepaca* and *pracijep*, between them a nice flower (couple and godfather).”⁴⁵

The forcing of sex on a woman is called shattering.⁴⁶ Virginity is thus very important because the first sexual intercourse is seen as opening the way for the ancestors. Otherwise some other ancestors, who can be dangerous, may have already made contact and in such cases the bride is returned home with a broken ewer in her arms. This is a symbolic way to say that she isn’t “whole”. If the groom’s family has decided to accept her, it is the family’s duty to publicly announce, in a ritual way, that she isn’t a virgin. These announcements are equal to those done when a child is born with a caul over its face. If the family does not ritually announce it, the child becomes a witch (as in demonic being, not a village cunning person).

So, the groom's first sexual intercourse with a bride means opening the gate of the chthonic world in a symbolic way. This is very risky for him, his family and community in general because some demonic dangerous force might come from that other world. This is why the bride is ushered into a groom's home accompanied with noise and uproar-to scare away any lurking daemonic forces.

In Bosnia, when people make noise around the bride and groom's room they are called wolves.⁴⁷ When we know that wolves are "keepers" of the boundary between wild and social space and that they are enemies of malevolent spirits, this magical action is then understandable.

The ancient symbolic view of a male's genitals as "penetrator" and the female's genitals as "abyss" shows that they are the only condition of conception which is seen as a gift of the chthonic world. At the same time, these body parts, symbolized, on a macro level, place the touch of this human world and the other world (shadow of ancestors) between clean and unclean and tabooed space-their showing and usage are controlled by community laws. Such a thought pattern dictates a fear of a possible irregular relationship between the living and dead, and an uncontrolled breakthrough of evil souls (unclean force) through the female abyss.

The Penis – The Devil – The Stone

For the reconstruction of the ancient beliefs about the genitals there is some importance of the paradigm of *the penis – the devil – the stone*, which can be noticed by comparing certain phraseological constructions in the Serbian language. There are some obscene expressions and vulgar names for the penis, with which the idea of "destruction" is expressed, similar to the expression "Go to hell".⁴⁸ A similar but emotionally stronger idea can be found in cursing followed by hitting a rock with another rock.⁴⁹ The wish for destruction of the cursed one is expressed as *capturing into the stone*.

It should be stressed that *the stone* has a very wide usage in the charms where it has the function of the mediator between the humans and an unclean force. Certain cultic *stones* in southern Serbia and Macedonia are famous because women who cannot have children will come to them and perform

certain rituals such as crawling underneath. Symbolically, it could mean an “exchange” of the worlds – crawling underneath the stone a woman “travels” to the Otherworld and “dies” to return again to this world as a new woman capable of having children of her own. There is also another level of symbolism in this ritual. By crawling underneath the stone, a woman breaks into the chthonic space, imitating the entering of the penis into the vagina. Since the times of ancient Greeks and Romans, the usage of the hag stone in magic is widespread, and its chthonic characteristics are shown in those rituals where it is used.⁵⁰

From medieval and later descriptions of “the meetings of the witches”, very often obscene scenes are mentioned, with the devil presiding over them. Eroticism and temptation are the most important characteristics of this being. In one description, he is blamed for the spilling of semen during sleep: “He comes whenever, and the semen is spilled because of the dirty thoughts with which he fills the head of the one who dreams”.⁵¹ A euphemism for the witch is *the stone lady*.⁵²

The motif that connects, at least on the first look, very different words/ worlds, is the symbolic connection to the abyss and chthonic space.

The Genitals in the Model of Wonder

In the folk charms of the Slavs from the Balkans, from both Muslims and Orthodox Christians, there is a circle of certain charms which are created on the model of wonder; where actors have huge genitals and use them outside of the parameters of normal usage: - use them as a wand, as a dress, wearing them as bags over the shoulders. It is interesting that their real name is used despite the fact that it is very uncommon to use the real names of genitals in patriarchal society. This shows that these charms should be seen as a special form of magical speaking which is used only in special situations and only by the special person in question – the spellcaster. The ones who usually have huge genitals in these charms are dogs, wolves, odd-looking and old men. All charms are against the evil eye. The model of wonder is created in them and this picture of wonder is produced to distract the attention of the one with the evil eye. Other than this, we can also speak about the older level of symbolism – the presence of an androgynous dog-

like being who exists by itself and has no need to make contact with others. Thus the cursing (evil eye) is a form of taking someone's quality and with the breaking of the curse, it becomes formless.

Conclusion

Magic and religious notions of Slavonic custom show the human body as a spatially organized entity divided according to binary opposition. The body is divided into the upper (pure) half, which holds the head and chest, and the lower (impure) part, holding the rest of the body. The waist marks the boundary between the two parts, and thus has developed as a mediator, and has an important function in magic rituals. The body is also divided into the right (favorable) and left (unfavorable) side, the front ("one's own") and back ("another's"), the central (stable) and peripheral (changeable) part. The latter parts of the opposites (lower, left, back, peripheral) play a more important role in the performance of magic rituals, as they are associated with the space and spirits of the chthonic world. For this reason, specific parts of the human body are preferred above others in magic, such as the foot, left arm and leg, back of the head, back, heel, hair, nails, and body secretion.

The principle of symmetry is present in the perception of man – he is a single with pairs (eyes, ears, nostrils, arms, legs), as opposed to demons who are often represented as asymmetric. Man is comprised of body and soul, and differs from demons by his ability to speak, that is, his voice. In some incantations, voice and tears are elements that build the axis of the world (axis mundi) in a symbolic manner. Culture develops patterns that control contacts between the living and the dead. Since the dead affect fertility and fecundity, land and cattle, and the continuation of the family lineage, consummation of the marriage of the bride and groom is important, as a "clearing of the way" to the tree of the forefathers, thus the insistence on the virginity of the bride.

Notes-

Editor's note: where an English translation of a book or journal title is provided the authors have made this translation

1 Dusan Popovic, *Tragovi bogumilske jeresi u srpskom narodnom predanju (The Traces of Bogumil Heresy in Serbian Folk Tradition)* (Beograd: Karadzic IV, 1903), 178.

2 Sava Majstorovic, *Caranja u Macvi (Spells in Macva)* (Beograd: Raskovnik X, 1983), 19.

3 Vlastimir Stanimirovic, *Basme (Charms)* (Beograd: Arhiv SANU, 1993), 209.

4 The term 'cunning man or woman' is used after consulting Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk, Popular Magic in English History* (London, Hambledon and London, 2003), see Ch.7 European Comparisons.

5 For comparison of cunning-folk names in different South Slavic nations see footnote number three in Joseph L. Conrad, *Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form and Content* (Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1987), 559.

6 For systematic research of the structure of the charms see Joseph L. Conrad, *Magic Charms and Healing Rituals in Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Southeastern Europe, 10, No. 2, 1983), 99-120. and Joseph L. Conrad, *Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form and Content* (Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1987), 548-562.

7 Stanoje M. Milatovic, *Narodna medicina Srba seljaka u Levcu i Temnicu (The Folk Medicine of Serbian Peasantry in Levca and Temnic)* (Beograd: SEZb, 1909), 364.

8 *Ibid.*, 450-451.

9 Nikola Begovic, *Zivot Srba granicara (The Life of Serbian Border-keepers)* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1986), 265.

10 Tihomir R. Djordjevic, *Zle oci u verovanju Juznih Slovena (The Evil-eye in the Beliefs of Southern Slavs)* (SEZb LIII, 1938), 203.

11 Stanko Sielski, *Hamajlija (The Amulet)* (Zagreb: Etnografska istrazivanja i gradja, 1941), 220.

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13 Milenko S. Filipovic, *Zivot i obicaji narodni u Visockoj nahiji (The Life and Folk Customs in Visocka nahija)* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1926), 188.

14 Tatomir Vukanovic, *Srbi na Kosovu II (Serbs on Kosovo)* (Vranje: Zbornik etnografskog muzeja, 1986), 457.

15 Josip Lovretic, *Otok (The Island)* (Zagreb: ZNZ, 1902), 153.

16 *Ibid.*, 199.

17 Aleksandar Petrovic, *Mora* (Beograd, GEM XI, 1936), 97.

18 Petar Z. Petrovic, *Zivot i obicaji narodni u Gruzi (Life and Folk Customs in Gruzia)* (Beograd: SEZb LVIII, 1948), 334.

- 19 Tatomir Vukanovic, *Vjestice (Witches)* (Vranje, SEZb LXX, 1958), 956.
- 20 Josip Lovretic, *Otok (The Island)* (Zagreb: ZNZ, 1902), 143.
- 21 Petar Z. Petrovic, *Zivot i obicaji narodni u Gruzii (Life and Folk Customs in Gruzia)* (Beograd: SEZb LVIII, 1948), 227-228.
- 22 Milorad Radunovic, *Ostala je rec (Only the Words Are Left)* (Beograd: SKZ, 1988), 324.
- 23 Radisav M. Djordjevic, *Da covek ide kao slep za zenom (A Man goes Blindly After a Woman)* (Nis: Kica III, 1907), 36.
- 24 Stanoje M. Milatovic, *Narodna medicina Srba seljaka u Levcu i Temnicu (The Folk Medicine of Serbian Peasantry in Levca and Temnic)* (Beograd: SEZb, 1909), 310.
- 25 Milorad Radunovic, *Ostala je rec (Only the Words Are Left)* (Beograd: SKZ, 1988), 330.
- 26 Stanoje M. Milatovic, *Narodna medicina Srba seljaka u Levcu i Temnicu (The Folk Medicine of Serbian Peasantry in Levca and Temnic)* (Beograd: SEZb, 1909), 292.
- 27 Vladimir Ardalic, *Basme iz Bukovice u Dalmaciji (Charms from Bukovica in Dalmatia)* (Zagreb, ZNZ XVII, 1912), 359-360.
- 28 Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2000), 71.
- 29 See Joseph L. Conrad, *Magic Charms and Healing Rituals in Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Southeastern Europe, 10, No. 2, 1983), 101.
- 30 Ljubinko Radenkovic, *Simbolika sveta u narodnoj magiji Juznih Slovena (World Symbols in Southern Slavic Folk Sorcery)* (Nis: Prosveta, 1996), 27.
- 31 See Joseph L. Conrad, *Magic Charms and Healing Rituals in Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Southeastern Europe, 10, No. 2, 1983), 106, 111-112, 118; and Joseph L. Conrad, *Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form and Content* (Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1987), 550, 554.
- 32 Nenad Dj. Jankovic, *Astronomija u predanjima, obicajima i umotvorinama Srba (Astronomy in the folk-stories, customs and sayings of Serbians)* (Beograd: SEZb LXIII, 1951), 111-112.
- 33 Dragutin M. Djordjevic, *Zivot i obicaji narodni u leskovackom kraju (Life and Folk Customs in the area of Leskovac)* (Leskovac: Prosveta, 1985), 146.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 147-149.
- 35 Stevan Simic, *Narodna medicina u Kratovu (Folk Medicine in Kratovo)* (Zagreb: ZNZ 42, 1964), 421.
- 36 Radmila Filipovic-Fabijanac, *Narodna medicina istocne Hercegovine (Folk Medicine of Eastern Herzegovina)* (Novi Sad: GZM, 1968), 47.

37 S.P.Gacovic, *O bajanju i vraćanju Vlaha istočne Srbije (The Charms and Spells of the Vlahs of Eastern Serbia)* (Zajecar: Razvitak, 1986), 91.

38 See Joseph L. Conrad, *Magic Charms and Healing Rituals in Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Southeastern Europe, 10, No. 2, 1983), 115-116; and Joseph L. Conrad, *Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form and Content* (Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1987), 557-558.

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40 Vlastimir Stanimirovic, *Basme (Charms)* (Beograd: Arhiv SANU, 1993), 292.

41 See Joseph L. Conrad, *Magic Charms and Healing Rituals in Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Southeastern Europe, 10, No. 2, 1983), 116-118; and Joseph L. Conrad, *Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form and Content* (Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1987), 556-557.

42 E.Nojman, *Istinsko poreklo svesti (The True Origin of Consciousness)* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1994), 25.

43 Tihomir R. Djordjevic, *Deca u verovanjima i obicajima nasega naroda (The Children: Beliefs and Customs of our Nation)* (Nis: Prosveta, 1990), 23-29.

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46 *Ibid.*, 476.

47 Tihomir R. Djordjevic, "Tovijine noci" u nasem narodu ("Tovija's Nights" in our Nation) (Zagreb, ZNZ XXIX, 1933), 15.

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49 *Rjecnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika (Dictionary of the Croatian and Serbian Language)* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1980), 857.

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52 *Recnik srpskohrvatskog književnog i narodnog jezika (Dictionary of the Serbo-Croatian Literary and Folk Language)* (Beograd, SANU, 1992), 157.



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