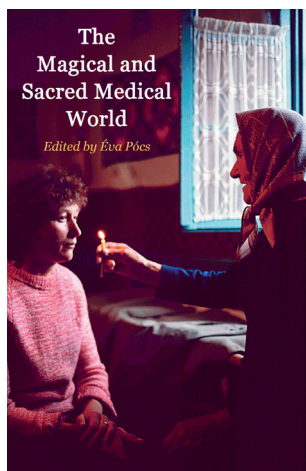


Приказ

## Traditional Medicine as a Hybrid Culture Phenomenon

*The Magical and Sacred Medical World*. Ed. Éva Pócs. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 525 pages



In the last few decades, the research of traditional magical medical practices has been marked with more intensive international cooperation, which is happening, among other places, under the auspices of a special department founded within the International Society for Folk Narrative Research – Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming. This tendency is also supported by the book of proceedings entitled *The Magical and Sacred Medical World*, yet another one in the series of publications which has been edited by the renowned folklorist and religion anthropologist Éva Pócs. The book of proceedings is a collection of 22 studies from various scientific centres (from Bulgaria, Norway, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Canada, Ukraine, Germany, Estonia and Slovenia).

Traditional medicine domain magical practices have been observed from different disciplinary viewpoints: from the perspective of folkloristics, sociology and religion history, linguistics, cultural anthropology and, finally, psychiatry, too. A whole array of questions regarding the co-relation of magical ritual practices and official and/or vernacular manifestations of religiousness, the place of magic in different communities' cultures and its role in the construction of social reality has been opened up alongside the question of verbal magic problem. The studies in the book are divided into four thematic sections: *Magical and Supernatural Causes of Illnesses; Physicians, Magicians, Healing Priests; Punishing and Healing Saints, Miraculous Healings and Healing Methods, Medicaments*. What ensues is the data about the authors, names and terms index.

The study which opens up the volume is Janine Rivière's *Hag-riding: Demons of Desire or Symptoms of Disease? Medical Theories and Popular Experiences of the Nightmare in Premodern England (2–36)*, which deals with the demonic being called *mahr/mare/mara* and *nightmare*. The descriptions of the experiences of encountering this demon and consequences of such an encountering are compared with the explanations offered in medical literature be-

tween the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The complexity of relationships established among various types of dream origin interpretation discourses is depicted in that way. Svetlana Tsonkova investigates medieval magical texts (apocryphal prayers) for the protection against the demon called *nezhit* (*Burnt without Fire: The Illness Demon in Bulgarian Late Medieval Magical Texts*, 37–58). The first part of the study is directed at the demonic being characteristics analysis summation and the second at the prophylactic texts' genre characteristics. Genre analysis paves the way for the complex problems of relations between canonical and apocryphal prayer and verbal charms, but also the relations between the official and folklore religiousness, oral and literary. Laura Iancu's paper (*World view, Religion and Disease in Magyarfalu*, 59–77) is based on the fieldwork in a Hungarian community in the region of Moldova (Romania). Concepts of death connected to the terms *evil* and *unclean* are described, as well as healing practices carried out by Catholic and Orthodox priests. The illness understanding and community's primary inclination (particularly of its elderly members) towards traditional healing are explained by social and economic factors, but also by traditional worldview domination. The beliefs about illnesses connected to witchcraft in the eighteenth-century Ukraine are the focus of interest of Kateryna Dysa (*Magical Causes of Illnesses and Their Cures in Eighteenth-Century Ukraine*, 78–92). Those are illnesses which commence abruptly, with unusual symptoms and some curious events preceding the onset of the illness (a meeting or argument with a person suspected to practise witchcraft and the like) are often mentioned in the cause of illness interpretations. Ádám Mézes analyses the manuscript entitled *Visum Reperitum*, one of the fundamental sources of believing in vampires in Banat in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by German surgeon Georg Tallar in the historical context of the Habsburg Banat, with the comparison of the manuscript and printed version of the work (*Georg Tallar and the 1753 Vampire Hunt: Administration, Medicine and the Returning Dead in the Habsburg Banat*, 93–136). Various levels of text in which Tallar comes across as both a local culture and medical expert and as a writer with Enlightenment ambitions are deliberated in the paper. József Gagyí's paper – '*She Condemned Me, so that I Die...*' *Wrongdoing, Punishment, Disease: Individual and Communal Explanations* (137–154) is a meticulous case study of a personal experience of illness and the problem whose origin is considered to be witchcraft, alongside the social implications of witchcraft narratives articulated in the community. Moreover, the ways in which these narratives can be used as a means of manipulation are observed.

The part of the book of proceedings dedicated to the ones who perform magical healing practises begins with the study by Christa Agnes Tuczay, which offers a broad insight into the techniques and types of divinisation in classical antiquity and the medieval period, including the healing practices connected to divinisation (*Divination by Spirits and Spirit Mediumship in the*

*Middle Ages*, 156–175). The author puts emphasis on the intertwining of the diabolical and prophetic in the perception of communication with the other-worldly, especially in theological interpretations, female mysticism in particular. Thus, the conceptualisation of the communication with the other world reflects gender stratification, social spheres and power relations in the Middle Ages. Ane Ohrvik's paper (*Understanding Medical Knowledge and Practice: Strategies for the Reading of Early Modern Norwegian Manuscripts*, 176–191) is an invaluable contribution to the history of medicine which branches out from the line of study aimed at seeing 'history from the bottom up', cancelling the limits and hierarchy between the 'educated' medicine and folklore medicine knowledge. The practices and knowledge preserved in the so-called *black books* are described from this perspective, too. Those are manuscripts which contain chants, charms and magical formulas, as well as descriptions of what should be done simultaneously with the uttering of the text. Madis Arukask offers the portrait of a Vepsian seer (Veps. *tedai*, Rus. *znaharka*) (*Talking to Vepsian tedai: Different Roles, Concepts, World*, 192–210). The investigation matter is, apart from social positioning, the reconstruction of this healer's worldview elements (the relation towards her proper magic knowledge, belief system and its hybrid characteristics, moral principles, spiritual world understanding). The second layer of this paper is methodological in its nature and it opens up the questions connected to the emotional relations on the researcher/interlocutor level and also the ones regarding the problem of the possibility of complete understanding of the interlocutors who are different cultures' representatives. Gábor Vargyas sums up the relevant literature on Shamanism, taking the side of the theories which perceive the figure of shaman as essentially ambivalent (*Magic and Counter-Magic and the Social Position of the Bru Shaman-sorcerer (Central Vietnamese Highlands)*, 211–227). As the possessor of supernatural powers, shaman is simultaneously the one who helps, but also the one who is a potential threat to the community. It is the same angle from which some light is shed on the position of Vietnamese Bru community shaman (*Magic and Counter-Magic and the Social Position of the Bru Shaman-sorcerer*, 211–227). The author shows that witchcraft and sorcery can be both the mechanisms of social control and manifestation of real social tensions. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi regards traditional medicine's current state in Uzbekistan in a wider socio-political context (*The Quran, Spirits and Bioenergy: On Religious Healing in Uzbekistan*, 228–245). Namely, the healing practices expansion new wave is interpreted also as part of revivalist tendencies i.e., the discourse layer about the national identity (re)creation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, the author notices innovations and transformations, particularly the New Age spiritism elements incorporation. The study by Tünde Komáromi offers a similar angle of observing, given the fact that he regards the contemporary exorcist practice which takes place in liturgical

context in a monastery in Russia, whose central figure is father Herman (his portrait is provided in detail) also as part of re-traditionalist currents (*Exorcism in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra*, 265–296). In author's opinion, social crisis is the cause of the growing need for spiritual leaders, belonging to religious communities and believing in miracles. Exorcism is also the focus of Dániel Bárh's study (*Benedictions Serving Early Modern Benedictine Medicine*, 246–264). The text offers a minute description of the benediction manuscript dating from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, unusual because of the prominent frequency of medicinal benedictions. Therefore, it is yet another indication of medical practices' hybridity, in the community of monks of Pannonhalma in this case.

Mirjam Mencej's study *Mythical Beings Punishing the Breaking of Taboos on Spinning* (298–329) marks the beginning of the third thematic section of the book of proceedings. The author analyses female demonic beings which are connected to spinning in a number of traditions. Taboo and punishment system is correlated with the thesis of circular movement as one of the ways of making contact with the otherworldly. Namely, Mencej deems that spinning ban regarding the liminal points of the annual cycle can be explained as a form of preventing the unwanted and potentially dangerous contact with the other world from being established. Emanuela Timotin scrutinises the nomenclature and characteristics of the saints' characters in Romanian verbal charms corpus noted down between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Divine Healers in Romanian Manuscript Charms*, 330–342). Special attention is paid to St. Cyprian, St. Nicetas and St. Cosmas and Damian. The relationships between their functions in charms' texts, motifs in hagiographies and elements connected to their cults in folklore religion are analysed. Healing practices regarding dream culture are illuminated extensively and analytically in Éva Pócs's study – *Dream Healing: The Nocturnal World of Healing and Bewitchment* (343–376). Special attention is paid to dream divination phenomenon, dreams induced by spontaneous and ritual practices (the appearance of a saint who heals or gives advice about healing in a dream, sleeping in cult places and the like) and some light is shed on the dreams related to witchcraft. The author sees the dreams, among other things, as a sacral communication form, as culturally conditioned phenomenon, but also as an expression of individual religiousness. The role of cult places in traditional healing is also deliberated in Albena Georgieva's study (*Miraculous Healing at Sacred Places: Procedures and Narratives*, 377–398). It provides an analytical description of various magical practices (sleeping in a church, the usage of water from holy springs, passing through or under sacral objects and the like) and narratives of miraculous healings connected to them. The aforementioned narratives have multiple interpretations pragmatics-wise: as part of local sacral history, as a form of establishing and confirming the sacral nature of certain space, of educating and dispersing the knowledge about the magic sphere and as part of creating communities and their identities complex mechanism.

The final part of the monograph entitled *Healing Methods, Medicaments* begins with Nora Zergi's paper (*An Attempt to Identify Homer's "Moly" as Mandrake*, 400–404), which offers a possibility of identifying the plant hidden under the phytonym *moly* in Ancient Greek literature. The author postulates that it is actually mandrake. Another classical antiquity tradition-oriented research is Anna Judit Tóth's *Telesma and Stoicheion: Magical Statues in Byzantium* (405–434) with regard to statues which were ascribed healing powers. The changes in the conceptualisation of such beliefs in the Byzantine period are investigated, including the incorporation of Christian interpretations. The practice of sleeping in cult places is once again regarded, this time from the diachronic perspective (in antique and medieval tradition) in Ildikó Csepregi's study (*Pork as a Wonder Drug, or Religious Taboo as Magical Medicine*, 435–447). Judit Kis-Halas investigates various alternative healing practices registered during exhaustive fieldwork in Hungary spanning over many years (*Soldiers of Christ on Earth and in Heavenly Jerusalem: Psychotronics: A Contemporary Esoteric Healing System*, 448–493). It is a complex system in which western Esotericism elements, New Age ideas and traditional folklore medicine practice operate simultaneously. From methodological viewpoint, the study is on the border of ethnology, folkloristics and religion anthropology and it is based on fieldwork interviews, material from specialised publications and online sources (forums, blogs and the like). The book of proceedings is closed by the co-authored study of psychiatrists József Pál Vas and Noémi Császár – *Integrating Ancient and Modern Healing Concepts in Tandem Hypnotherapy* (494–507). It is a description of *Tandem Hypnotherapy* method, predominantly holistically oriented, which connects shamanic practice elements, Jungian archetypal therapy, hypnotherapy, hypnodrama, family therapy, perinatal and prenatal psychology.

Through the lens of the studies collected in the book of proceedings *The Magical and Sacred Medical World*, the magical emerges as part of living tradition, not only because of certain ancient practices' contemporaneity, but also because the magical and sacral stand for the agent which shapes and connects cultural strata, too, from elite to folkloristic, from official to everyday culture. Thus, the domain of magical healing also reflects the most broadly understood social sphere, social structures and relations, including power relations, which are inextricable from the particular social, cultural, political and economic context.

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