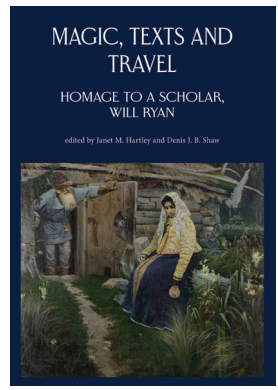
STUDY GROUP ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

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# Mythographies of the Demonic (Notes on Slavonic and Balkan Ethnohermeneutics)

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Mythographies of the demonic, as attested in Slavonic and Balkan vernacular traditions, contain narratives about the hermetic knowledge and proscribed lore of witchcraft, divination and healing practices. The focal point of analysis in the current discussion will be the portrayal of female representatives of the magical profession in folk oral heritage and iconography. My approach to the subject reflects the stellar contributions of Will Ryan to our understanding of magic and demonology, sorcery and witchcraft, healing and divination lore, as well as other kinds of esoteric knowledge within the Slavonic world, which has paved the way for others to follow.[1]

*Ethnographic and Folklore Sources*

The Bulgarian ethnographer Dimităr Marinov, one of the most industrious collectors of ethnographic data in the Balkans, thoroughly described the hierarchy of magical practitioners in the first volume of his monumental collection of folk beliefs entitled 'Living Antiquity'.[2] He considered it important to emphasize that the profession of 'magical practitioner' is conventionally designated by the term *veshtitsa* (вещица) 'witch, sorceress', which, strictly speaking, in vernacular tradition denotes exclusively the female representatives of this profession (that is, 'female magician').[3] Marinov duly noted that there exists a cluster of vernacular

[1] See W. F. Ryan, 'Magic and Divination: Old Russian Sources', in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca, NY, London, 1997, pp. 35–58; idem, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia*, University Park, PA, 1999; idem, 'Ancient Demons and Russian Fevers', in Charles Burnett and W. F. Ryan (eds), *Magic in the Classical Tradition*, Warburg Institute Colloquia 7, London, Turin, 2006, pp. 37–58.

[2] Cf. D. Marinov, *Zhiva starina*: *Etnografichesko (folklorno) izuchavanie na Vidinsko, Kulsko, Belogradchishko, Lomsko, Berkovsko, Oriakhovsko i Vratchansko* (*Kniga* 1: *Viarvaniiata ili sueveriiata na naroda*), Russe, 1891, pp. 45–46; see also the discussion in the seventh volume of Marinov's series *Zhiva starina,* entitled *Narodna viara i religiozni narodni obichai* (published as a monographic issue in the *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia i narodopis*, 28), Sofia, 1914, pp. 213–15.

[3] Consult lexicographic data presented by Aleksandr Diuvernua in his *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka po pamiatnikam narodnoi slovesnosti i proizvedeniiam noveishei pechati (1885–1888)*, (Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language from Monuments of Folk Verbal Art and Writings Published in the Periodical Literature in the period between

masculine forms, such as *veshternik* (*вещерник*) and *veshtugiurnik* (*вещугюрник*),[4] but at the same time confessed that he himself had

1885 and 1888), vol. 1, Moscow, 1889, p. 224; see also G. V. Angelov's ethnographic report, 'Tălkuvanie na prirodni poiavi: ot Bitolsko' ('From the vicinity of Bitolia: Interpretation of natural phenomena'), *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 12, 1895, pp. 123–30 (p. 127). For a concise survey of ethnographic, ethnolinguistic and folkloristic literature on the topic, see the discussion in Tihomir R. Đorđević, *Veštica i vila u našem narodnom verovanju i predanju*, Belgrade, 1953 (*Srpski etnografski zbornik*, knj. 66/*Recueil serbe d'ethnographie*, vol. 66; added title in French: *Sorcière et fée dans la croyance et la tradition populaires*); Svetlana Tolstaia, 'Magicheskie sposoby raspoznavaniia ved'my', *Studia Mythologiva Slavica* 1, 1998, pp. 141–52.

[4] The analysis of the cluster of Church Slavonic *nomina agentis* employed to designate 'magician'/'sorcerer'/'witch' (Gr. μάγος/μάγισσα) and 'diviner' (Gr. γνώστης/γνώστρια) brings noteworthy results. The survey of sources indicates that the masc. nouns employed most frequently in such cases are *vesht'ts* (вѣштьцъ), *veshtets* (вѣщѣцъ), *vedatel'* (вѣдатель), *vedetel'* (вѣдѣтель), *ved'ts'* (вѣдьць), *vedets'* (вѣдецъ), *vedun* (вѣдунъ), while their feminine counterparts are *veshtitsa* (вѣщица)/ *veshteritsa* (вѣштерица), *ved'ma* (вѣдьма) and so on. To the same semantic cluster belong the nouns *ved'* (вѣдь) (fem.), and *vedenie* (вѣдѣньѥ/вѣдѣнїе) (neut.), denoting 'knowledge' and 'science' (thus rendering Gr. γνῶσις, ἐπιστήμη, δόγμα, τρόπος). All these terms are cognates of the verb *vedeti/vedati* (вѣдѣти/вѣдати), which is a derivative from the Proto-Slavonic form *vede*, the meaning of which is 'to know', 'to understand', 'to be acquainted with'. See Izmail Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevne-russkogo iazyka po pis'mennym pamiatnikam*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, 1893, pp. 478–82, 502–03; Vladimir Georgiev, Iv. Gălăbov, Ĭordan Zaimov, Stefan Ilchev, *Bălgarski etimologichen rechnik*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1971, pp. 140–41; A. Bonchev, *Rechnik na tsărkovnoslavanskiia ezik*, vol. 1, Sofia, 2002, pp. 123, 125; Max Vasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1986, pp. 283, 309; Dora Ivanova-Mircheva (ed.), *Starobălgarski rechnik*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1999, pp. 319–21. In apocryphal tradition, the term *veshitsa* (вѣщица) can also serve as one of the names of the Devil himself, or as an appellation of a wicked child-snatching demon; see the discussion in Moses Gaster, 'Two Thousand Years of the Child-Stealing Witch', *Folklore,* 11, 1900, 2, pp. 129–62; Klimentina Ivanova, 'Za edin răkopis s palimpsest ot Bibliotekata na Ierusalimskata Patriarshiia', *Paleobulgarica*, 18, 1994, 2, pp. 3–31 (pp. 26–27); Vasia Velinova, 'An Itinerant Motif in the South Slavonic Literary Tradition: Amulets Bearing the Name of St Sisinnios', in Elka Bakalova, Margaret Dimitrova, M. A. Johnson (eds), *Medieval Bulgarian Art and Letters in a Byzantine Context*, Sofia, 2017, pp. 479–99 (pp. 494–95). See also the discussion in Ivan Duĭchev, 'Edin răkopisen svitък s apokrifni molitvi i zaklinaniia', *Starobălgarska literatura*: *Izsledvaniia i materiali*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1971, pp. 157–63; K. Popkonstantinov, V. Konstantinova, 'Apokrifna molitva ot X vek vărkhu olovna plastina', *Die Slawischen Sprachen*, 13, 1987, pp. 45–54; K. Popkonstantinov, 'Kirilitsa i glagolitsa sreshtu diavola, ili oshte edin oloven amulet ot X vek', *Palaeobulgarica,* 18, 2004, 4. pp. 69–75; K. Popkonstantinov, H. Miklas, 'Oloven amulet s glagolicheski tekst', in S. Bărlieva, L. Grasheva, E. Dogramadzhieva, R. Slavova, G. Filipova (eds), *Kirilo–Metodievski studii*, vol. 18, Sofia, 2009, pp. 385–98; M. Pantelić, "Hrvatskoglagoljski amulet tipa Sisin i Mihael', *Slovo*, 23, 1973, pp. 161–203; M. Detelić, 'Saint Sisinnius in the Twilight Zone of Oral Literature', *Studia Mythologica Slavica,* 4, 2001, pp. 225–40; F. Badalanova Geller, 'Between Demonology and Hagiology: Slavonic Rendering of Semitic Magical *Historiola* of the Child-Stealing Witch', in J. Cale Johnson (ed.), *In the Wake of the Compendia*: *Infrastructural Contexts and the Licensing of Empiricism in Ancient and Medieval Mesopotamia. Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Cultures*, Berlin and Boston, MA, 2015, pp. 177–206. For a

never encountered any male practitioners with these designations. All his interlocutors indicated that the sole representatives of the class of 'professional magicians' were women. The Bulgarian ethnographer further pointed out that the female magicians possess secret knowledge of plants and herbs, and can trigger various meteorological phenomena (for example, wind and rain); they also possess power over strategies of causing (or reversing) erotic attraction. Such women are considered to be acting with the assistance of the Devil, and it is believed that their power stems from the energy of 'the invisible spirits'. This is what Marinov reports on the matter:

> *Veshtitsa* is a woman who is very old; through secret properties of different herbs and plants, and with the assistance of the Devil and evil spirits, she attained supernatural power, talent [lit. gift], and properties [lit. nature]. All the invisible spirits are her permanent retainers and servants. She is constantly in their circle and from them she derives her power and capacity [lit. might] to perform wondrous acts. The *veshtitsa* dwells in a faraway wilderness of forests and mountains, in deep and impenetrable groves, next to a river, spring, or whirlpool. There she lives alone on her own, and she engages in collecting herbs and plants. She has the following supernatural powers: she can heal a man from whatever maladies; she can forecast a man's future; she can reveal a man's secret thoughts. All the elements are under her authority. She can create wind and rain; she can cause floods and deluges; she can transform a man into an animal, into a stone, or into a tree, and she can return one into his primordial form [lit. image]. She is able, if she wishes to do so, to make men happy or unhappy. She has the power to transform herself (*да се префтаря*) into different animals;[5] yet if she wishes, she can become invisible. Snakes are her servants and retainers and help her to collect herbs (*билькіи*), as well as healing and wondrous plants (*буреніе лѣковити и чародѣйни*). A snake's poison does not affect her. Folk concepts cannot define with certainty whether a *veshtitsa* dies like all other people, or what happens to her [if she does or does not]. The *veshtitsa* is an evil spirit and people not only loathe but also fear her. Even today, the epithet '*veshtitsa*' is given to women and maidens as a reproach. There is also a scolding epithet for a man, '*veshternik*' [вещерникъ] or '*veshtugiurnik*' [вещугюрнікъ], but a male '*veshtitsa*' I was unable to find.[6]

detailed survey of material on the topic see A. L. Toporkov et al., *Sisinieva legenda v fol'klornykh i rukopisnykh traditsiiakh Blizhnego Vostoka, Balkan i Vostochnoĭ Evropy*, Moscow, 2017.

[5] For similar data see Angelov, 'Tălkuvanie na prirodni poiavi', p. 127.

[6] Marinov, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 1, pp. 45–46.

In fact, local chroniclers kept the memories of various environmental misfortunes or weather-related calamities caused by their wrathful local *veshtitsa*. Thus, in 1884 the river Archar in north-western Bulgaria suddenly flooded some of the local settlements, without any previous heavy rainfall that might have triggered it; all of a sudden, the waters rose and engulfed dwellings, wiping away household utensils and agricultural implements; this sudden disaster lasted for one night and shattered the local community. And although it came out of the blue, it was not exactly a total surprise for the inhabitants of the devastated villages; it was believed that the flood was caused by the local *veshtitsa* who was angry with her neighbours. Marinov even quotes the testimony of one of the anonymous witnesses:

> Near Lake Rabisha, also known as the Milivsko Marsh, in the cave of Rabishka Magura, there was a *veshtitsa* dwelling there. This *veshtitsa* was occasionally leaving the cave, to go for a walk around the marsh; many villagers saw her there. As it happens, the *veshtitsa* decided to punish people for their sins. She made the lake dance and the flood struck. While the rampant waves were ravaging the place, tossing around haystacks and barrels, livestock and household utensils, people and their possessions, the *veshtitsa* herself, in the image of a duck, was floating on the surface of the waters. When one of the local villagers wanted to shoot her with his gun, his hand shrivelled before he managed to pull the trigger.[7]

Marinov further provides a list of such mighty women with magical powers inhabiting the region in which the disaster took place:

> In different villages many such *veshtitsa*-women are remembered; they are: Todora and Mitska from the village of Kriva Bara, Stoĭna from the village of Kovachitsa, Tsonka in the village of Komoshtitsa, Pena from the village of Tolovitsa, Duda from the village of Vălchedrăm, Kamena from the village of Vasilovtsi, and many others. There is a whole directory of names of now deceased *veshtitsa*-women who once lived there, performing miracles and causing misfortunes.[8]

According to Marinov and other ethnographers, at the end of the nineteenth century, among the Christian communities in Bulgaria, apart from the designation *veshtitsa*, another term was also in circulation, that of *magiosnitsa* (*магйосница*)/*magesnitsa* (магесница), meaning

[7] Ibid., p. 49.
[8] Ibid.

'witch', 'woman-magician'.[9] The latter class of magical practitioners, as identified by storytellers of folk demonologies, was second in the hierarchy of witchcraft specialists; nevertheless, the term was occasionally used as a synonym for *veshtitsa*. According to Marinov's description, the *magiosnitsa* was believed to be a woman who, like the *veshtitsa,* was in constant communication with evil spirits and possessed the power of herbs and plants. It was maintained that she also could perform miracles, but to a lesser degree than the *veshtitsa*:

> The *magiosnitsa* ('woman-magician') is someone who stays in touch with malevolent spirits; with the power of herbs and plants she can perform different miracles, but they are not as great and overwhelming as those of the *veshtitsa*. By the means of her witchcraft, the *magiosnitsa* can perform the following menacing and harmful acts against other people: she can put individuals to death or incapacitate them physically and mentally; she can paralyse and cripple them; she can thus destroy human wholesomeness. Through magic acts, the *magiosnitsa* can play a major role in a love relationship between a husband and wife, or lad and maiden. She can make a husband or lad go mad for a woman or maiden, or make one detest and repulse them. Even when a woman acts in a dishonourable way and her strict husband beats her on account of her misconduct, the witchery of the *magiosnitsa* pacifies him, and he becomes indifferent to the matter. […] Countless are her deeds.[10]

Marinov further testifies that the supreme forms of the most powerful and grievous witchcraft procedures are performed by virtuosi

[9] While it is true that Diuvernua lists in his *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka* the feminine nouns *magiosnitsa* (*магйосница*)/*magesnitsa* (магесница) along with their masculine counterparts *magiosnik* (*магйосник*)/*magesnik* (магесник), the lexicographic material presented by him to illustrate the semantic scope of these terms concerns only female practitioners; see idem, *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka*, vol. 1, pp. 1156. He finds it important to emphasize that the male magician may be called an *antikrist* (*антихрист*), that is, 'Antichrist'; see ibid., p. 32. See also Georgiev et al., *Bălgarski etimologichen rechnik*, vol. 3, Sofia, 2012, p. 605. A survey of ethnographic sources from the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century shows that data about *măzhe magesnitsi* (*мъже магесници*) male magicians is rather scarce. When mentioned, such individuals are portrayed as curious exceptions to the general rule. An intriguing account on the matter is presented by V. Angelov in his short essay about male practitioners who allegedly knew how 'to summon the devils'; see idem, 'Svikvane na diavolite', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 12, 1895, pp. 154–55. As a rule, ethnographers find it important to point out explicitly that male magical practitioners are extremely rare to come across; see, for instance, S. Zlatarov's contribution on magic spells and incantations 'Baianiia' (based on data registered in the vicinity of the city of Nevrokop, now Gotse Delchev, south-western Bulgaria) in the *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 12, 1895, pp. 150–51 (p. 150).

[10] Marinov, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 1, p. 50.

among female magical professionals who possess the secret knowledge of how to draw the moon down from the heavens:

> The most powerful strength and might of the *magiosnitsa* is her ability to force the moon to abandon its domain in the sky, and to come down to earth, descending into her mystical sieve. This 'bringing-down-the-Moon' procedure is surrounded with mystery, allowing folk belief to accumulate numerous anecdotes and vain speculation, to explain the lunar eclipse.[11]

These types of magic rites are performed in utmost secrecy, and if a random passer-by, or uninitiated bystander happened to witness the event, they would become mute, or paralysed.[12]

The annals of witchcraft in every village contain clusters of frightening rumours concerning such unfortunate affairs of tragic encounters with female magicians who were disturbed — deliberately or accidentally — by unwanted observers.

The witchcraft-celebrity Duda from the village of Vălchedrăm, for instance, was involved in one such mysterious incident; when she took down the moon and began interacting with it, a stranger coming from the mountains noticed the luminous shine emanating from her courtyard; what happened after that remained an utter mystery, since the curious beholder-trespasser was found the next morning numb and mute, trying in vain to communicate through the silent language of gestures. A couple of days later he died, the anonymous report concluded soberly.[13]

Clearly Marinov was intrigued by this kind of gossip surrounding the representatives of magical profession, and the hearsay scandalous stories about their power over heavenly luminaries. For more than two decades he continued to investigate the matter and in 1914 published an elaborate description of the hermetic ritual of 'bringing-down-the-Moon', which is considered to be one of the most fascinating pieces of scholarship concerning esoteric knowledge in general and witchcraft in the Balkans

[11] Ibid., p. 51; see also idem, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, p. 15, p. 34.

[12] Some extremely rare exceptions of lucky escapes were reported, however. If the accidental witnesses vowed before the witches to keep eternal silence about the event beheld, they were not harmed; see in this connection the account, 'How women bring down the moon' ('Kak svaliat zhenite mesetsa'), recorded by D. Vukadinov in the village of Gurmazovo (western Bulgaria) and included in his ethnographic sketch, 'Various beliefs and conceptions from the vicinity of Sofia' ('Ot Sofiĭsko: Razni viarvaniia i predstavi'), published in the *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 13, 1896, pp. 167–71 (pp. 167–68).

[13] Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 1, p. 52.

in particular. He duly listed the names of some of the interlocutors who provided the necessary information for his report: Stoiana Pavlova (from the village of Knezha, Oriakhovo district), Miariia Ĭovcheva (from the village of Smolianovtsi, Kutlovsko) and Dona Uzun-Nikolova (from the village of Shtipka); all of them are women.

According to their description, the 'bringing-down-the-Moon' ritual may be performed only when the moon is full. The witch undresses until completely naked, just like a new-born infant. Ideally, as the community elders claim, there must be two witches — a mother and daughter. Both of them should have given birth recently, and they both should be breast-feeding their children at the time when the ritual is to be performed.

Having taken off their robes, without any other garments on their bodies, they would mount a *krosno* (*кросно*) weaving beam and begin riding on it.[14] Then they would put special magic herbs in a white cauldron; next to the cauldron they would leave a sieve;[15] they would start chanting over the cauldron, then over the sieve, while sprinkling themselves with water; thus the moon becomes bewitched, and starts disappearing from the sky, while beginning to shine within the house in which the magic is being performed. The moon then descends from the sky and approaches the witches in the image of a cow,[16] which they milk; and since only the full moon can be milked, according to the general opinion shared by Marinov's interlocutors, the witches perform the ritual when the luminary is in its full phase. After they have finished extracting the milk from the udder of the moon, the witches let their celestial captive go and it, little by little, climbs again skyward and begins to shine, but it is now pale and its light is much diminished. As for the moon milk, it has great magical powers, and the most powerful witchcraft may be performed by those possessing it.[17]

While the act of nursing is one of the ultimate emblems of motherhood, the participation of the representatives of two consecutive generations of one household, each of whom is in her lactation period in the 'bringing-

[14] This detail is briefly mentioned also by Angelov, 'Tălkuvanie na prirodni poiavi', p. 124. The negative symbolism of this act is utterly transparent for the storytellers, since placing a *krosno* (*кросно*) weaving beam between someone's legs is strictly forbidden. It is believed that whoever breaks this taboo and 'mounts a *krosno* will be mounted by the devils in the Beyond' ('Кросно не бива да се іаа, оти коі іаа кросно, на онаі свет кье го іаат гьаволите'); see P. A. Chacharov's report 'Razni viarvaniia, prokobiavaniiia i dr. (Ot Shtip)' in the *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 10, 1894, pp. 121–25 (p. 123, note 32).

[15] For the use of a sieve in magical practices, see Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, p. 123.

[16] See Angelov, 'Tălkuvanie na prirodni poiavi', p. 124.

[17] Cf. Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, p. 183.

down-the-Moon' ceremony, reveals its symbolic dimensions. Encoded in the very poetics of the ritual is the simple principle of *sympathetic magic*: the lactating women — whose breasts are heavy with milk — are terrestrial hypostases of the cosmic cow-moon during its full phase, when its heavenly udder reaches its utmost richness. Moon and women are linked in one and the same web of matrilineal kinship.

At the same time it should be noted that the gender characteristics of the moon, as presented in vernacular Bulgarian tradition, are ambiguous. Indeed, the moon may be portrayed either as a male,[18] or a female celestial creature, but this blend of masculinity and femininity — deeply saturated in its verbal descriptions — does not seem to bother any of the storytellers relating stories about its magical milking. In fact, there exists a cluster of terms designating the 'moon'. The first one is the masculine noun *mesets* (*месец*)[19] that may denote — apart from the notion of the 'moon as a heavenly body' — two other different, but related concepts — 'menstruation' and 'month'. At the same time, the feminine noun *mesechina*/*meschina* (*месечина*/*месчина*),[20] is employed predominantly as a term for 'menstruation', but also as an astronym, together with the feminine noun *luna* (*луна*).[21] Surprisingly enough, the gender vagueness attested in moon-related terminology does not seem to have affected in any way the logic of the narratives describing the secret ritual of its milking.

The motif of witches who secretly 'bring-down-the-Moon' in order to acquire omnipotent control over the universe and mankind is also attested in a great number of folk narratives[22] and songs registered throughout the Balkan region by folklorists and ethnographers during the last century and a half. While the vernacular oral prose is engulfed by hearsay lore saturated by elaborate dark rumours concerning the secretive behaviour of the female magical practitioners and scary tales about their unfortunate victims (habitually arranged in a small circle during evening gatherings),[23] the songs about the moon's abduction are

[18] It is believed that the Moon is the younger brother of the Sun; see Marinov, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 7, p. 12.

[19] Cf. Georgiev et al., *Bălgarski etimologichen rechnik*, vol. 3, pp. 755–57.

[20] Ibid., pp. 757, 761.

[21] Ibid., pp. 509–10.

[22] See the discussion in Oksana Chokha, 'Novogrătski i bălgarski razkazi za mag'osnitsi, koito svaliat mesechinata', *Bălgarski folklor*, 3, 2017, pp. 287–99; Ljupco S. Risteski, 'The Orgiastic Elements in the Rituals Connected With the Cult of the Moon Among the Balkan Slavs', *Studia Mythologica Slavica*, 5, 2002, pp. 113–29 (pp. 115–19); Petia Hristova, 'How to Call Down the Moon or Cultural Continuity in Southeastern Europe', *Orpheus*: *Journal of Indo-European and Thracian Studies*, 7, 1997, pp. 101–10.

[23] Storytelling is performed exclusively in the winter-time, during nights (after sunset); see D. Marinov, 'Gradivo za veshtestvenata kultura na Zapadna Bălgariia',

rather laconic. According to them, the moon may be brought down to earth by wicked witches in a *podnitsa* (*подница*)/*chirepnia* (*чирепня*) earthen pot (which is normally used in the mundane process of baking bread, but may also be utilized as a lethal weapon by the malevolent dragons in their cosmic combat with the benevolent ones);[24] along with the moon, *veshtitsa* and *magiosnitsa* women can also fetch from the heavenly vault stars by means of a simple spoon.[25] Songs of this type are presented as the testimony of a young man who confesses to his beloved sweetheart that he had just witnessed how her mother was 'bringing-down-the-Moon' at night-time; as soon as he finishes his confession, the boy, as one would have expected, dies.

The demonological tales about the female witches milking the moon have also iconographic representations (discussed below). As a rule, these types of visual narratives are depicted either in the narthexes, or in the women's compartments of churches, which indicates that the main target of the anti-witchcraft polemics embedded in them are the female members of the congregation.[26]

The ethnographic data regarding the widespread performance of the 'bringing-down-the-Moon' ritual at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries may stimulate further research in at least two major directions.

The first concerns the possible exploration of the attestations of some comparable mythologemes (for example, the idolatrous use of heavenly bodies) that occur both in the text of *3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch*[27] 5: 7–9, and in vernacular Slavonic witchcraft narratives (for example, demonological folktales of cosmologically-oriented sorceries enabling witches to bring the moon down to earth to serve their will, and so on). It will be a challenging task to investigate whether these types of

*Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 18, 1901, p. 21.

[24] Ibid., p. 47; idem, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, pp. 27, 124–25.

[25] For the use of wooden spoons (made from an elm-tree, ash-tree, hornbeam) in magical practices, see Marinov, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 7, p. 125.

[26] Such scenes are depicted on the frescos of the Church of the Holy Prophet Elijah in the village of Buranovo, Dupnitsa region (painted in 1888), the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael in the village of Leshko, Blagoevgrad region (painted in 1889), to mention just a few among many such cases. See Liubomir Mikov, 'Luna/Krava, Lamia/Viatăr: metamorfoza i tăzhdestvo', in idem, *Izbrani studii*, vol. 3: *Bălgarska folklorna kulturai văzrozhdensko izkustvo*, Sofia, 2018, pp. 211–20 (pp. 211–14).

[27] The corpus of *3 Enoch* is a relatively late text (dated fifth–sixth century). See the general discussion in Philip Alexander, *'3 (Apocalypse of) Enoch',* in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments,* Garden City, New York, 1983, pp. 223–315 (pp. 223–53); Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, Tübingen, 2009, pp. 33, 315–30; A. Y. Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael: *3 Enoch* 5 (§§ 7–8) and Jewish Reception-History of *1 Enoch*', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 8, 2001, pp. 105–36.

parallel narratives, as related to magical aspects in the *3 Enoch* tradition on the one hand, and Slavonic (and Greek) folklore and iconography on the other, are coincidental, or reflect the criss-crossing of hybrid ideas circulating in clandestinely-related multicultural environments, transmitting traditions stemming from some multifaceted intellectual pedigree.

The second direction of research seems more promising; it concerns the centuries-long transmission of texts and traditions, the earliest attestations of which date back to the period of Classical antiquity. It has been long recognized by specialists in the field that 'drawing down the Moon from the sky' is a familiar trope; it may appear 'either as part of lists of magical acts or as a single act representative of the whole scope of magical possibilities, in sources throughout the ancient Greco-Roman world'.[28] The earliest witness, Aristophanes, referred to the magical ritual of drawing down the moon in his *Clouds* 746–757, and reported that it was performed by Thessalian witches.[29] The data provided by Marinov and his contemporaries shows that the tradition persisted into modern times.[30]

*Women as Timekeepers and Memory-Custodians*

Some ethnographic sources indicate that female magical practitioners were believed to have been responsible for inserting a cluster of heretical customs into the calendar of 'truly Christian' festivals of 'the New Canon', thus upholding the 'old rules' of 'the Old Canon'. For the origin of these festivals, Marinov quoted a legend which, according to him, was extremely popular among the village clergy; it was narrated by the Priest Tsvetko from the city of Lom:

> When the Council of Nicea took place in 318 [AD], and the Holy Fathers introduced a New Canon, the Old Canon became obsolete. In order to preserve it, three priests and three old women (*babi*) got together: Priest Tornio, Priest Milio, and Priest Kaltsunkio, together with the old woman (*baba*) Petka Gorogleda, the old woman (*baba*) Kandakira, and the old woman (*baba*) Drusna. They were from six villages and gathered together on the hill in the village of Burovan [in north-western

[28] See Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco–Roman World*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2019, pp. 1–2.

[29] See further the discussion in ibid., pp. 1–2, 19–34. See also the survey of related data in G. Mishev, *Antichni sledi v magicheski obredi ot Bălgarskite zemi*, Sofia, 2015, pp. 162–71.

[30] The same motif appears in Jewish folklore from Eastern Europe, as documented by B. Serwer-Bernstein, *Let's Steal the Moon: Jewish Tales, Ancient and Recent*, foreword by Dov Noy, New York, 1987, pp. 80–85.

Bulgaria]. They invited the villagers to come along, adults and children, in order to perform idol-worshipping. They slaughtered sheep and rams, ate and drank, and established the following festivals [var. holy days]. The first day of March (the '*Martin den*'),[31] and the first Saturday of March, (the '*Martina sǎbota*'), to be observed against hailstorms; the Monday of St Theodor's Week (the *Tudorov ponedelnik*), to be observed against flies; the Thursday of the same week (the *Tudorov chetvărtăk*), against crows and ravens; the Thursday of the week before Easter and the following ones (according to the new law) — against hailstorms;[32] the Tuesday of the week after Easter (according to the new law) — against drought; the feast day of Jeremiah — against snakes. Observed during the *Rusalska* Week[33] should be the following festivals: on Wednesday, against insanity; on Friday, against skin diseases; 15th, 16th, 17th of July, against fire; 27th October, against mice;[34] 11th, 12th, 13th of November, are festivals against wolves;[35] 21st November, a rather bad wolf-festival called *Klekutsan*. From 20th to 26th December, a festival that should be observed so that women give birth easily; the Day of St Andrew, to be observed against harm from bears;[36] 8th January — Midwives' Day (*Babinden*);[37] 1st, 2nd, 3rd February, festivals against wolves.[38]

[31] See Petko Găbiuv, 'Narodni kalendari ot Tărnovo', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 16–17, 1900, pp. 19–24 (p. 21); E. Sprostranov, 'Narodni kalendari ot Okhrid', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 16–17, 1900, pp. 24–40 (pp. 29–30).

[32] See Stefan D. Spasov, 'Tălkuvaniia na prirodni iavleniia, razni narodni viarvaniia i prokobiavaniia ot Sofiĭsko', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnin*a, 16–17, 1900, pp. 215–20 (p. 218, note 42).

[33] On folklore beliefs and customs associated with this period, see Liuben Karavelov, *Pamiatniki narodnogo byta bolgar*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1861, pp. 230–32; Sprostranov, 'Narodni kalendari ot Okhrid', pp. 24–40 (p. 32). See also the discussion in Ivan Shishmanov, 'Prinos kăm bălgarskata narodna etimologiia', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 9, 1893, pp. 443–646 (pp. 544–50), Mikhail Arnaudov, *Studii vărkhu bălgarskite obredi i legendi*, vol. 2, Sofia, 1972, pp. 149–61, 187–201; idem, *Ochertsi po bălgarskiia folklor*, vol. 2, Sofia, 1996, pp. 545–50; Ivanichka Georgieva, *Bălgarska narodna mitologiia*, 1993, Sofia, pp. 150–54, 157, 161–62, 180–84 (notes 38–80).

[34] See Spasov, 'Tălkuvaniia na prirodni iavleniia', p. 216 (note 9); Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, p. 82.

[35] The 'Festivals of the wolves' ('Vălchi praznitsi') are celebrated in the traditional Bulgarian folk calendar twice (in November and February); see Diuvernua, *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka*, vol. 1, pp. 254–55; Spasov, 'Tălkuvaniia na prirodni iavleniia', p. 216 (note 10); Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, pp. 77–80.

[36] Ibid., p. 80.

[37] See the data presented by Diuvernua, *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka*, vol. 1, pp. 44–45; see also St. D. Spasov, 'Obichai periodicheski ot selo Barievo, Sofiĭsko', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 16–17, 1900, p. 9; Petko Găbiuv, 'Narodni kalendari ot Tărnovo', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 16–17, 1900, pp. 19–24 (p. 20).

[38] See Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 1, pp. 54–55 (footnote a). In fact, the legend

In order to understand the subtext of the legend above, one ought to take into consideration the semantic coverage of the word 'baba'.[39] It has a rather rich range of meanings; it may denote (in a totally neutral manner) an 'old woman', but also a 'midwife' (that is, a female medical practitioner dealing with traditional obstetrics and gynaecology); the same term may likewise be used to designate 'a female healer' who is acquainted not only with matters concerning *materia medica* (herbs and plants, stones and minerals, animals' body parts, and so on), but also with the secret knowledge of curative spells and charms. Then again, the term 'baba' may be used to denote a female 'magician' and 'diviner', as well as 'witch'. Thus, according to the aforementioned legend recorded by Marinov, it was the three old women (*babi*) (that is, 'female agents' practicing magic, divination and healing), together with the three priests, that upheld 'the Old Canon' of religious festivals, thus committing themselves to the idol-worshiping and corrupting the 'true Christian conduct'. The subtle suggestion, encoded in the legend, is that the memory-keepers of 'the Old Canon' are, in fact, the female magical practitioners, who have not only inherited the primordial secrets, but continued to transmit them within the clandestine circle of the initiated; women are thus recognized as the ultimate vessels of esoteric knowledge.

*Iconography of the Demonic in Slavia Orthodoxa*

The survey of the iconographic heritage in the Balkans shows that magic activities and related healing practices are habitually linked with

narrated by the Priest Tsvetko Bukovets and recorded by Marinov presents a redrafted version of a fragment from an eighteenth-century tract, 'The Womenfolk Feasts, or Against Womenfolk Fables' (*Praznitsi babini ili o babikh basnekh*) composed by the Bulgarian monk Joseph the Bearded (Iosif Bradati). The text was published by V. N. Mochul'skii, *Slova i poucheniia, napravlennye protiv iazycheskikh verovanii i obriadov (k bytovoi istorii bolgar)*, Odessa, 1903, pp. 7–17; D. Petkanova-Toteva, *Narodnoto chetivo prez XVI–XVIII vek*, Sofia, 1990, pp. 335–42. See also the discussion in F. Badalanova, 'Folklorna replika kăm "Praznitsi babini li o babikh basnekh": Răkopisni kalendari na bălgarskite preselnitsi v Besarabiia i Tavriia', *Bălgarski folklor,* 16, 1990, 3, pp. 95–109 (pp. 98, 101–02); *eadem*, 'Clandestine Transparencies: Retrieving *The Book of Jubilees* in *Slavia Orthodoxa* (Iconographic, Apocryphal and Folklore Witnesses)', *Judaïsme ancien/Ancient Judaism*, 5, 2017, pp. 183–279 (pp. 233–34); A. Angusheva-Tikhanova, M. Dimitrova, 'Samokov i borbata na Tsurkvata sreshtu baeneto i gadaeneto', in R. Malchev et al. (eds), *Etnologiia na obshtuvaneto* (*Godishnik na Asotsiatsiia Ongăl*, vol. 12), Sofia, 2013, pp. 120–34 (pp. 122–23); D. Dimitrova–Marinova, 'Pouchenieto kăm zhenite i momite v răkopisnata traditsiia ot vtorata polovina na XVIII vek', *Starobălgarska literatura*, 33–34, 2005, pp. 380–93. Further on biography and writings of the Bulgarian monk Joseph the Bearded, see D. Marinov, 'Ieromonakh Iosif Bradati: Prinos kăm istoriiata na bălgarskata literatura', *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, vol. 18, 1901, pp. 99–131.

[39] See Diuvernua, *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka*, vol. 1, pp. 43–45.

demonic agency. As briefly mentioned above, these types of images are depicted either in the narthexes, or in the women's compartments of churches. In some cases they may be painted even on the panels of the iconostasis, next to the altar gates. These types of visual narratives transform the entire discourse of the orally-transmitted demonological tales on which they are based, and turn them into iconographic homilies charged with fierce anti-witchcraft polemics.

One such case is presented by a fresco in the open gallery of the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael near the village of Leshko, south-western Bulgaria, painted in 1889 by the icon-painter Mikhalko Golev (see Fig. 1). It is positioned at the very entrance of the open gallery, and thus is the scene first encountered by villagers when they visit the church to attend the Sunday services or to celebrate other Christian festivals. The image shows the full moon with its human (male) face over a vast figure of the Devil with an extended — long, red dagger-shaped — tongue between his massive white teeth; he is portrayed as a black, hairy, bearded hybrid creature with two horns, a tail, two dragon-like wings, four bird-like feet, and cow's udders, which the witch is milking. She is dressed in a traditional garb with covered head, in a typical milking posture. The eyes of the Devil appear to have been scratched out from the painted surface; local belief holds that a mixture containing this type of substance has curative properties and is recommended to be administered against eye disease. The inscription (positioned between the moon and the Devil) reads: 'And this is a *magesnitsa*-witch who lies to people, that she takes down the Moon to milk it, but milks [in fact] the Devil.'[40]

Next to the image with the witch milking the Devil, in the direction of the church gates, there is a sequence of frescoes depicting other types of sinful behaviour (including a scene presenting women putting make-up on their faces, with a condemnatory inscription above their heads: 'Those who put on [their faces] white and red [colouring matter] have the Devil holding the mirror before them.'[41]

Similar scenes are depicted in other churches (for example, in the open gallery of the Church of St Nicholas in the village of Cherven Breg, Dupnitsa county, south-western Bulgaria, painted in 1882), and usually they are surrounded by an abundance of scattered images of women embraced by winged demons, who are kissing them; all these mini-portraits are included in the bigger panoramic view of female

[40] 'А се магесница щото лаже людето ке свале месецо да го мазе въ место месецо дѧволо мазе.'

[41] 'Който се белатъ и царват дѧволо имъ даржи огледалото.'



Fig. 1. Witch milking the Moon.
Mural painting in the open gallery of the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael near the village of Leshko, south-western Bulgaria. The fresco was painted in 1889 by the icon-painter Mikhalko Golev.
Photo F. Badalanova Geller.

misconduct. Certainly, one of the most frequent scenes of 'women's sinning' deals with depictions of episodes related to healing rituals.

Among the earliest frescoes treating this theme is that painted on the southern wall of the open gallery of the Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos, Rila Monastery (Bulgaria) in 1847 by Dimităr Zograf (possibly with the assistance of his son Zafir) from Samokov (see Fig. 2).[42]

Situated behind the benches on which the pilgrims rest after their long journey to the monastery, before entering the church itself, the fresco shows a witch next to the open door of her house, who gives to a kneeling man — whose face betrays suffering and distress — a magic potion; he drinks from a vessel above which a red-winged devil with curled tail defecates; the devil's feet are positioned on the head of the witch. An inscription in black streams from the devil's mouth towards the young woman standing behind the sick man; the inscription reads: 'He will recover' — obviously an ironic hint that the entire affair is a doomed endeavour. On her shoulders kneels another red-winged devil with his hand around her head. Both the male patient and his female

[42] See Angusheva-Tikhanova, Dimitrova, 'Samokov i borbata', pp. 128–31.

companion are dressed in traditional garments. The witch is portrayed as an old woman; her advanced age is betrayed by the white string of hair coming from below her scarf. Like her patients, she is dressed in traditional clothing. Above her head, an inscription tells the viewer that she is a '*samovila*,[43] or *magician*'. A winged-horned devil with curved talons is suspended above her, with his left foot standing on her head and his right leg perched on the roof of her house, while holding hands with the defecating devil; another devil kneels on the shoulders of the woman accompanying the sick man.



Fig. 2. Visiting the healer.
Mural painting on the southern wall of the open gallery of the Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos, Rila Monastery (Bulgaria).
Photo F. Badalanova Geller.

Behind the kneeling patient and his female companion, a cart with two white oxen harnessed to it is depicted; above them a devil with red wings joyfully dances,[44] holding white handkerchiefs, as required

[43] The term *samovila* is conventionally used to denote a particular type of female demon; see Marinov, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 1, pp. 21–27. In some cases, however, the term *samovila* may be employed to denote 'female magician' and 'witch'; idem, *Zhiva starina*, vol. 7, p. 215.

[44] On 'dance' as a *sui generis* devilish act, see Boris Uspenskii, 'Mifologicheskii aspekt russkoi ekspressivnoi frazeologii', in idem, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 2, Moscow,

in a traditional folk dance. In the cart there is a group of people, also dressed in traditional garb. A man is shown in the driving seat, and behind him there is a sick young woman; a worried female relative, possibly her mother, embraces her around her shoulders. Two other devils are shown next to them in the cart. The first, whose wings are black-grey, has his right hand on the maiden's head, while his left hand rests on the shoulder of the accompanying female relative. In the background, behind the maiden and her female companion, the other devil ecstatically dances, with his red wings widely spread. One more demon, with black wings, pushes the wheels of the cart, rushing towards the house of the healer.

Walking after the cart is a young man, pointing towards the distressed family of the ailing maiden; behind him is a horse on which another sick patient rides. A long inscription is placed above the red-winged devil dancing behind the worried female relative and above the patient on the horse; it reads:

> The female magicians and *vrazhalitsi*[45] — witches are servants of the Devil; this is why the Devil rejoices a great deal, jumps and dances in front of those who visit them. As for the matter that is administered to drink or to eat, this is devilish faeces. Those who abandon God, the Law, and the Church, and go to visit *vrazhalitsi* witches, they are not servants of God but servants of the Devil.[46]

The inscription quoted above spells out unequivocally the message that the rituals of healing should be considered devilish deeds. This type of polemic generated a series of visual narratives concerned with the axiology of healing practices. Occasionally, the visit of a sick individual to the healer/magician/witch may be situated within the

1996, pp. 67–161 (pp. 73–75).

[45] Traditionally, the terms *vrazhalitsa* (вражалица), *vrazharka* (вражарка) and *vrachka* (врачка) are employed to denote a female 'diviner'; see Diuvernua, *Slovar' bolgarskogo iazyka*, vol. 1, pp. 274–75, and Marinov, *Zhiva starina,* vol. 7, p. 188. The masculine counterpart of the term, *vrazhalets* (вражалец), designates individuals who specialize in treasure-hunting; they are able to perform special divination rituals indicating the place where treasure is located; see ibid., p. 223. The masculine form of the term (sing.) *vrach*/(pl.) *vrachove* (*врач*/*врачове*), on the other hand, designates a physician-saint (for example, Saints Cosmas and Damian). See further Georgiev, et al., *Bălgarski etimologichen rechnik*, vol. 1, pp. 179–80, 183. In modern Russian, the lexeme *vrach* denotes 'doctor', 'physician'.

[46] The original Slavonic text reads: 'Магесницыте и вражалицыте са дѧволски слоуги, за това и дѧволъ-о многосе радоува, скача и играе, предъ онiѧ що ида$^{т}$ при ни$^{х}$, и това що запоѧва$^{т}$, и що захраноува$^{т}$, оно е дѧволски гноусотии кои остава$^{т}$ ба́, законъ-а, и церквата, и хода$^{т}$ при вражалицыте они не са бж́їи, но дѧволски слоуги.'

larger framework of the Last Judgement scenario. One such case is the fresco from the Preobrazhenski Monastery in north-eastern Bulgaria, showing the visit of a sick man to the (needless to say, female) witch-doctor; the substance which the healer is administering to the patient is, in fact, nothing other than the Devil's excrement. Depicted in the upper corner of the fresco, on the left-hand side of the composition (from the perspective of the observer), next to the fiery river (at the bottom of which sits the Inferno, personified by the Devil/Satan, holding Judas in his lap), is a scene on which it is shown how the *magesnitsi* ('magicians') are giving a potion to the sick man; he is drinking an allegedly 'healing' substance from a bowl which, in fact, contains the Devil's excrement (see Fig. 3).




Fig. 3. 'The Last Judgement'.
Mural painting on the eastern wall of the narthex of The Preobrazhenski Monastery near the city of Veliko Tărnovo, North-Eastern Bulgaria. The fresco was painted in the period between 1849–1851 by Zakhariĭ Zograf.
Photo F. Badalanova Geller.

Occasionally, the 'visit to the female healer' visual narrative can be found depicted even on the panel plinths of the iconostasis. One such case is the altarpiece in the Church of Gorna Ribnitsa, Bulgaria (painted in 1860), which consists of a series of images related to the demonic

nature of healing practices (see Fig. 4). Above the scene, an inscription reads: 'These are coming to *vrazhalitsa* so that she gives them a [magic] potion to drink.'[47] Astonishingly, the image of the female healer administering the Devil's excrement to the sick patient is placed below the icon of the Theotokos with the Infant, next to the altar gates.



Fig. 4. Visiting the healer.
Plinth panel from the iconostasis of the church in the village of Gorna Ribnitsa, south-western Bulgaria (1860).
Photo F. Badalanova Geller.

[47] 'Тіѧ що идат в на вражалица таи запоюва.'

Next to the plinth panel with the image of the visit to the healer there is another painting (see Fig. 5), showing a *vrazhalitsa*-witch fetching water from a supposedly healing spring; but, as the painting shows, the vessel containing the magic water is full of the Devil's excrement; the inscriptions states: 'This is a *vrazhalitsa*-witch who administers magic water.'[48]



Fig. 5. Witch fetching magic water.
Plinth panel from the iconostasis of the church in the village of Gorna Ribnitsa, south-western Bulgaria (1860).
Photo F. Badalanova Geller.

[48] 'Таѧ вражалица що дава вода магишничка.'

Without a single exception, as the visual narratives examined above indicate, the iconographic renditions of the 'visiting the healer' topic depict the medical practitioner as a woman, which is one of the idiosyncratic features of the Balkan demonological mythographies.

* * *

The current paper is concerned predominantly with the negative discourse in conceptualizing the image of female magical practitioners. At the same time it should be emphasized that vernacular lore distinguishes witchcraft from magic; these are two different — albeit occasionally overlapping — fields of traditional esoteric knowledge; or, to put it more precisely, while the witchcraft ceremonies belong to the field of magical practices, the magical practices may be totally free of witchcraft characteristics. To sum up, witchcraft is always magic, but magic is not always witchcraft. There is a profound epistemological difference between the two fields.

Following the same line of argument, one should point out that, although healers and diviners are no doubt representatives of magical professions, they are not necessarily outcasts from their communities (unlike witches). In fact, every single village in the Balkans used to have its indigenous physicians and apothecaries who were considered to be a community's ultimate trouble-shooters, to whom people used to turn on an everyday basis for help in various situations (involving all kinds of health problems, family troubles and accidental misfortunes). As a rule, they were charismatic individuals possessing specialized knowledge in the scope of ethnomedicine and ethnopharmacology, the professional secrets of which they have been transmitting from generation to generation, following the rule of either matrilineal or patrilineal kinship. Furthermore, they inhabit the liminal epistemological realm of matters of life and death, health and illness, happiness and misfortune criss-crossing their paths; thus they are between and betwixt purity and pollution, becoming epitomes of their eternal combat in the domain of both the macrocosm and the microcosm. This is why the very existence of healers, their reputation and their daily routine bear the scars from the victories they achieved, or from the defeats they suffer. When they manage to keep the cosmic equilibrium and the human wholesomeness, they are the heroes of the community, but when their actions threaten the balance in the macrocosm and the microcosm, they become its enemy. This is why, perhaps, the axiological borderline between phenomena which the community considers to be acts of benevolent or

malevolent magic is often blurred and ambiguous; hence the abundance of overlapping terminology for practitioners of witchcraft, and medical professionals. Still, a tentative hypothesis can be formulated. The terms that tend to be employed in designating harmful professionals are usually feminine nouns (for example *veshtitsa*, *vrazhalitsa, magiosnitsa, magesnitsa* and so on), although there are rare exceptions of masculine nouns (for example *veshternik*, *veshtugiurnik*) denoting male witches; in most cases, these are no more than artificial lexicological twins constructed as masculine counterparts of the feminine terms. There are also terms denoting healers who specialize in various ritual curative practices involving both the implementation of *materia medica* and the recitation of particular chants, invocations and prayers (the learning of which involves the performance of hermetic initiation rites transmitted from one generation to the other in the same household). These types of terms are attested in both feminine and masculine gender,[49] with no axiological bias. Finally, there are also terms, for example *basnatarka* (*баснатарка*)[50] denoting practitioners performing exclusively verbal magic, that have only feminine forms. These types of phenomena will be analysed elsewhere.

[49] One such case is represented by the fem. *baiachka* (*баячка*) and masc. *baiach* (*баяч*); see the discussion in Iveta Todorova–Pirgova, *Baianiia i magii*, Sofia, 2003, pp. 98–102.

[50] See Georgiev et al., *Bălgarski Etimologichen Rechnik*, vol. 1, p. 38.